

JACINTO PÁEZ

UNIVERSIDAD DIEGO PORTALES, CHILE

E-MAIL: JACINTOPAEZ.88@GMAIL.COM

ORCID: 0000-0003-3623-5517

The Neo-Kantians and the Polemic on the History of Philosophy

1. Introduction

The nineteenth century has been widely acknowledged as the age of history. Through the label “historical century”, for instance, Friedrich Paulsen opposed his own epoch to the philosophical eighteenth century¹. Through this sharp separation, Paulsen stressed not only the sudden ascent of history to the dignity of science but also to the dislocation that history brought into philosophical endeavors. The novel science of history demanded a new set of tasks that philosophers should accomplish, such as the grounding of historical objectivity and the elucidation of its proper methodology. But in as much as this novelty gained an ever increasingly preponderance, an unavoidable question gained momentum: Should philosophy in the end be measured too by the standards of history? Or, using a term that has become

¹ Friedrich Paulsen, *Immanuel Kant. Sein Leben und seine Lehre* (Stuttgart: Fromman, 1899), 402.

popular, should philosophy be historicized? Under the light of this question the opposition acquired a different meaning. While the expression *saeculum philosophicum* synthesizes an epoch concerned towards atemporal rational truths, the expression *saeculum historicum* refers to a tendency towards the factual and ephemeral. And this tendency of course undercut philosophy's traditional assumptions and pretensions. Even the association of the quest for the eternal with a specific moment in human history, with a specific century, is not more than a veiled but unavoidable recognition of the fragility of philosophical thinking.

Naturally the treatment of this opposition between the philosophical and the historical, the eternal and the ephemeral, pervades the nineteenth century's discussions on the theory of knowledge and also the philosophy of history but, in no minor measure, it is present in the philosophical reflection on the problems and methods of the history of philosophy. In this later case, the opposition took the form of a contrast between the purely systematic reflection, essential to philosophy, and a scholarly practice that was progressively being oriented towards a historical treatment of philosophical subjects. Although the Neo-Kantians are generally regarded today as representing a model of philosophizing centered in the theory of knowledge and science, their representatives were also highly engaged with the methodological problems of the history of philosophy. It is precisely to this commitment that the follow paper is directed in an attempt to reconstruct one specific line of discussion proper to the Neo-Kantian stance regarding the history of philosophy and to evaluate the Neo-Kantian solution to the tension between systematic philosophy and the history of philosophy. For strategical reasons, I will focus here exclusively on the contributions advanced by two key figures of the Southwestern School of Neo-Kantianism: Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915) and Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936).

The structure of the paper is the following. First, I deal with some methodological issues regarding the treatment the object of study since it involves the intersection between two thematic fields of research: Neo-Kantian philosophy and the philosophy of the history of philosophy. After this, I present the historical situation in which the problem of the relationship between systematic philosophy and the history of philosophy was brought to form. My primary reference here is Johan Eduard Erdmann's *Grundriss der Geschichte*

der Philosophie from 1866. The next important source in the Neo-Kantian methodology of the history of philosophy is tackled through a reconstruction of Wilhelm Windelband's posture regarding Erdmann's problem. And in the third place, I refer to Heinrich Rickert's later treatment of the topic in his late article "Geschichte und System der Philosophie" from 1931. Through this three references I pretend to cover three different moments in the articulation of the Neo-Kantian viewpoint: the inception of the problem, the first clear attempt at solution, and a retrospective evaluative moment. Thus, the arch described follows, through an analyze of the sources, the evolution of the problematic from the early discussions on the possibility of a scientific history of philosophy to the judgment of its value. The conclusions attempt to establish the contribution of this discussion to the general treatment of the relationship between philosophy and history.

2. Preliminary methodological remark

The purpose of this observation is to offer some precisions regarding the object of study. First of all, it is necessary to explain the value of studying this precise Neo-Kantian controversy over the history of philosophy since there are several arguments claiming that a previous polemic, held approximately between 1790 and 1840, among the exponents of the Kantian, Hegelian, and Hermeneutical Schools, is a much better target for a philosophical study².

Most of these arguments are well explained in one of the reference books on the philosophy of the history of philosophy, namely, Lutz Geldsetzer's *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert*³. The first reason provided by Geldsetzer is that the figures involved in the first polemic were relevant exponents of the German Classical Philosophy, such as Reinhold,

² Tentatively, the chronological milestones for this early polemics are the publication of Fülleborn's journal "Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie" in 1791 and the publication of the first volumes of Hegel's Lectures by Karl Ludwig Michelet in 1833.

³ Lutz Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert. Zur Wissenschaftstheorie der Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung und -betrachtung* (Meisenheim: Hain, 1968).

Schelling and Hegel. This shows that the clarification of the constructive fundamentals and organizing principles of a philosophical history of philosophy were not only affairs of the historians of philosophy but also of the most prominent figures in German philosophical history. Due to this, and as a second reason, the degree of complexity from both problems and answers given during this time were apparently higher than during later years. The third reason is that Geldsetzer's research project was limited to the study of the nineteenth century. Even though authors like Erdmann and Windelband do belong to that century, the influence of their problems were only felt during the beginning of the twentieth century, resting therefore outside of Geldsetzer's area of analysis. Finally, the later polemic, the one in which the Neo-Kantians were involved, is a much more difficult object of study because its proper limits, and area of influence, are not so easily defined.

It would be easy to argue that these reasons, rather than philosophical, are concerned with strategical aspects of Geldsetzer's investigation. But in any case they prompt me to offer some clarifications regarding my own strategy and motives. In the first place, even though it is true that the texts belonging to the period 1790–1840 are rich in arguments and concepts, they lack the reference to a solid amount of concrete historiographical work. The distinctive model of the general history of philosophy was cemented during the middle of the nineteenth century, motivating, as I will explain in the following section, a philosophical interrogation not grounded solely on general reflections but on detailed and effective historiographical practices. There is a specific weight conferred to the demand of objectivity and to the reliance on sources that is characteristic of the histories of philosophy written since the middle of the century that reflects precisely this new situation. These features, alongside with the overall relevance of these historiographical productions lead scholars as far as to label the period comprised between 1830 and 1910 as the “classical epoch” of the history of philosophy⁴. This so called “classical epoch” coincides with the period of upsurge in Neo-Kantianism. Moreover, Wilhelm Windelband was one of the key figures in uniting Neo-Kantianism and the History of Philosophy. All in all,

⁴ Gerald Hartung and Valentin Pluder, “Introduction”, in: *From Hegel to Windelband: Historiography of Philosophy in the 19th Century* (Berlin–Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015).

the polemic spanning from mid nineteenth century up to the beginning of the twentieth has its own distinctive characteristics and, although extremely relevant, is less studied. While the focus on the Neo-Kantians, and specifically with those authors building a single tradition (like Windelband and Rickert), the paper achieves both a delimitation of the area of research and the presentation of one of the key participants in the philosophical discussion in question.

3. The statement of the problem in Johann Erdmann's *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*

The substantial difference between the discussion of our topic at the end of the eighteenth century and its posterior development after Hegel's death is connected with the general development of philosophy. Herbert Schändelbach and more recently Frederick Beiser have used the term "crisis of identity" to describe the situation of philosophy around 1850's. They report that philosophy lost its leading role in relationship to culture and sciences after the collapse of the idealistic systems. The all-embracing philosophy of the idealist period was forced to face the division of the whole realm of entities through a multiplicity of emerging particular sciences, while the neglecting of the dialectical method prompted the claim that the only available path for thinking were the successful research methods of concrete sciences.

As a result of this collapse, philosophy was stripped off its distinctive object and method of inquiry.

Facing this crisis, figures later grouped under the label of Neo-Kantianism turned towards an epistemological interpretation of philosophy, i.e. transforming philosophical reflection into a consideration of the principles and methods of concrete sciences. But, in parallel to this path, an emphasis on historiographical practices came also to be seen as a suitable reply to the crisis of philosophy. Men such as Johann Eduard Erdmann (1805–1892), Kuno Fischer (1824–1907), Friedrich Überweg (1826–1871) and Eduard Zeller (1814–1908) represented a new model of philosopher in the sense that historiographical research and the general consideration of the grounding of the

history of philosophy were main focuses of their philosophical activities⁵. As Charles Bambach explains, through this new orientation of philosophy “Speculative excess was held to a minimum, and the scientific quality of work was secured through an emphasis on technical training, historical erudition, and the sober regard for method”⁶. The speculative impetus was replaced in the work of these philosophers by the scientific demands, the ideal of scholarship, the technical procedures, and the task of grounding philosophy in historical knowledge. It is essentially by this last feature that this orientation represent one of the meanings of the “historicization” of philosophy that took place during the nineteenth century. And it is also rightful to say that great part of the activities done by philosophers today follow a tradition originated in this model of work.

The overall problem with this approach however is that historical criticism does not lead directly to innovative systematical thinking. It is not clear how pursuing a better knowledge of the history of philosophy would guide us to think original thoughts.

A clear formulation of this issue stemming from inside the community of historians of philosophy appears in the closing section of Erdmann’s *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* from 1866. There, Erdmann speaks of the undeniable fact that those who show an interest in philosophy are not per se in the longing for an autonomous philosophizing, but rather expecting to know how others have philosophized⁷. In the same way as it is false to believe that writing the biography of a great person would make you one, writing the history of philosophy, Erdmann argues, does not transform yourself into a philosopher. Likewise, the interest on the systematical work of contemporary authors – Erdmann refers here to Fischer and Zeller – does not equate the fame acquired by their massive histories of philosophy⁸. Two signs then

⁵ Some of them, such as Fischer and Zeller, were also part of the first Neo-Kantian generation of philosophers merging in their works the historiographical alternative with the epistemological one.

⁶ Charles Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 23.

⁷ Johann Eduard Erdmann, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie, zweiter Band, Philosophie der Neuzeit* (Berlin: Hertz, 1866), 797.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

proving that the incrementing role of the history of philosophy runs in parallel with the decline of philosophical thinking itself. Therefore, a model of philosophy that was originated as an answer to the crisis of philosophy apparently creates a new dialectic path, i.e. creating a new sense of philosophical weakness.

Just a few years later, Erdmann's famous compatriot, Friedrich Nietzsche, took up this criticism in his third *Untimely Meditation* arguing in the following terms: "the learned history of the past has never been the business of a true philosopher, neither in India nor Greece; and if a professor of philosophy involves himself in such work he must at best be content to have it said of him: he is a fine classical scholar, antiquary, linguist, historian – but never: he is a philosopher"⁹. Erdmann, as a representative of university philosophy, was neither as direct or negative as Nietzsche, but he leaves us, nevertheless, in despair regarding an explicit answer to such line of criticism. What we do find in Erdmann's conclusory remarks, although in an obscure fashion, is a hint of the solution that would be later present in Wilhelm Windelband's works. The source of hope for philosophy is present, Erdmann says, in the history of philosophy itself: "against the complaint, therefore, that there is no longer any philosophical speculation, but that it is only the study of the history of philosophy which is cultivated and that philosophers have turned into historians, we may put the certain fact that the historians of philosophy are themselves in the habit of engaging in philosophical speculation; and so perhaps here to, the same lance which gave the wound will heal it"¹⁰. The suggestion is that in the same way as science, arts, or religion had become previously objects of interest and origins of philosophy's vitality, a philosophical treatment of history could boost its rebirth. Yet again, the meaning of this historical philosophizing remains unclear.

What has been achieved with this reference is to place a determinate strategy in order to clarify the relationship between philosophy and its history, i.e. that the answer has to come from the history of philosophy. This arrival

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer als Erzieher", in: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie. Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen I–IV. Nachgelassene Schriften 1870–1873*. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 416–417.

¹⁰ Johann E. Erdmann, op. cit., 798 [for the English translation: Johann Eduard Erdmann, *A History of Philosophy*. Vol. III (New York: Macmillan, 1890), 330–331].

point also serves as the starting one for the treatment of Wilhelm Windelband, who tried to show that the history of philosophy was a constitutive part of the system of philosophy.

4. Windelband's *History of Philosophy*: evolution without parallelism

In view of our search for a possible answer to Erdmann's problem, one of Windelband's essays stands as the primary object of study, namely, Windelband's contribution to Kuno Fischer's *Festschrift* entitled "Geschichte der Philosophie"¹¹. Even though a complete reconstruction of Windelband's philosophy of the history of philosophy would imply to understand the interrelation between his systematic works and his methodology of the history of philosophy, this article contains Windelband's essential line of argumentation.

As in the case of Erdmann, Windelband starts by expressing his confidence in the history of philosophy. The central role that the history of philosophy acquired finds its origin in the inner tendencies of the idealistic movement symbolized by Hegel's conception of the discipline. This service made by Hegel, namely, the transformation of the history of philosophy into the conclusive moment of the system of philosophy, does not provide only a past reference in Windelband's text but is a sign of the inextricable intimacy between philosophy and its history. Windelband however criticizes, as has been regularly done since, the parallelism between the series of categories in Hegel's logic and the series of philosophical formations in the history of philosophy¹². And as a result of this critique, Windelband's problem in the essay becomes the following one: how to argue that the history of philosophy is a constitutive

¹¹ Wilhelm Windelband, "Geschichte der Philosophie", in: Wilhelm Windelband (ed.), *Die Philosophie im Beginn des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts. Festschrift für Kuno Fischer. Band II* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1905), 175–200.

¹² The reader can find a reconstruction of Hegel's general argument in Angelica Nuzzo's paper, "Hegel's Method for a History of Philosophy: The Berlin Introductions to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy (1819–1831)" and also a defense against Windelband's criticism in Christian Krijnen's "Hegels Parallelitätsthese von Logik und Geschichte".

part of the system of philosophy, but rejecting at the same time the methodological frame employed by Hegel in his argument. With the first part of the clause, Windelband wanted to capture the peculiarity of philosophy's relation to its past in contrast to other sciences. And with the second, he wanted to avoid a relapse into metaphysical thinking, which was frankly discredited at that time. Briefly put, Windelband argues for a philosophizing history of philosophy that does not consider the developmental character of philosophy as dialectical. As a faithful Kantian, Windelband's answer requires the equation of the philosophical method with critique. The task then is to explain how these two elements, the critique of reason and the concept of development, are combined into a single conception of philosophy.

In the first attempt to advance this possibility, Windelband refers to definition of philosophy from Fischer, to whom the article was dedicated. According to Windelband, "He [Kuno Fischer – J. P.] has defined Philosophy as the self-knowledge of the human spirit and he has also explained the progressive formative process, which belongs to the essence of philosophy's object, as the progressive process of knowledge, which is shown through philosophy's history"¹³. This definition clearly inserts the concept of reason inside a developmental frame, but the questions that are immediately raised are how are we going to understand reason and how are we going to understand the grounding procedure mentioned in the definition. For it is clear that in the case of Kant's critical philosophy the concept of reason cannot be identified nor grounded on the empirical existence of human beings; reason in this sense is an eternal structure. And it is also clear that we, as philosophizing beings that attempt to grasp this reason, find ourselves in time. This leads Windelband to the key distinction of his essay since, for him, we have to differentiate the grounding of rational principles from their discovery. The grounding cannot be done through the presupposition of empirical knowledge. The discovery, on the other hand, cannot be done without the reference to human's self-knowledge¹⁴. This last point allows him to connect the type

¹³ Wilhelm Windelband, *Die Philosophie im Beginn des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, 182 [my translation].

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 184.

of definition of philosophy taken up from Fischer with Windelband's own definition of philosophical as a critical science of absolute values.

In several systematically oriented essays, for instance "What is Philosophy?"¹⁵, Windelband offers this definition of philosophy as the critical science of generally valid values in order to identify the proper object and method of philosophy against the aforementioned identity crisis. The task of philosophy then is to identify and ground the set of normative principles that are operating as presuppositions of every cultural creation. While sciences are concerned with the determination of which judgments should be taken as truth, the scope of philosophy is to discover and ground the meaning of "truth". And, although Windelband claims that this grounding can be the object of a strict philosophical proof, a general strategy to connect this definition of philosophy with the one from Fischer emerges, since Windelband argues that the history of philosophy is relevant as the fundamental source for the aforementioned discovery of rational principles¹⁶. History is the medium required to articulate the universal and the empirical dimensions of reason, and therefore, belongs to the definition of philosophical criticism.

Windelband's argument still holds some interest. Windelband claims that the content of human reason cannot be grasped through the mediums of psychology or anthropology, the other candidates that he considers for this methodological role. It is true that these sciences deal with conditions of reasons development but only in a formal sense, for example, in the sense that having a brain is a condition for thinking. They cannot decide through their scientific methods and principles, generally based on natural necessity, which are the conditions to distinguished and articulate different aspects of reason's development. In another words, these sciences arrange their explanations as a structure of causes and events, while the expressions of reason in human

¹⁵ Wilhelm Windelband, "Was ist Philosophie? (Ueber Begriff und Geschichte der Philosophie)", published originally, in: *Präludien: Aufsätze und Reden zur Einleitung in die Philosophie* (Freiburg a. B.: Mohr), 1–53.

¹⁶ The direct treatment of the critical method is found Windelband's essay: "Kritische und genetische Methode". There Windelband develops the line of argumentation that we have presented through his claim that history has to serve as the proper methodological organon of philosophy. Notably he leaves undefined if he is referring to history in general or to the history of philosophy in particular, as my reconstruction suggests.

life, according to Windelband, appear as tasks, objectives and difficulties. The recognition of reasons contents thus involves a structure of finality, which suits better to the type of narratives presented in historical explanations. We should not understand however this stance as a commitment to a metaphysical explanation of history. On the contrary, it means that rationality does not appear in human life as something given and finished but as an ideal toward which we aspire. And this rationality also does not manifest itself only in philosophical matters, but in sciences, religion, arts, and politics. Therefore, the self-knowledge of humankind is not attained merely by an explanation of our capacity to think and its evolutive history, but through the reconstruction of the development of the principles and contents operating in our cultural formations. These formations are the working materials of the critical philosopher. And finally, this explains the emphasis on continuity and organicity present in Windelband's methodology of the history of philosophy.

In his *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* Windelband defines the history of philosophy "as the process in which European humanity has embodied in scientific conceptions its view of the world and its judgments of life"¹⁷. The most important components of this history are, according to Windelband, the problems and also the aforementioned conceptions of the world and life¹⁸. This identification is the basis for calling Windelband's history of philosophy a history of problems. In its more general sense the concept of problem does not take exclusively the form of an articulation between isolated recurring questions and the diverse attempts to answer them. Problem is understood as the general task of the recognition (or self knowledge) of the rationality underlying in cultural life, a rationality that manifests through the articula-

¹⁷ Translation taken from Wilhelm, Windelband, *A History of Philosophy. With Especial Reference to the Formation and Development of its Problems and Conceptions* (New York: The Macmillan Company: New York, 1914), 9.

¹⁸ Although Windelband develops a detailed argument regarding the philosophical necessity of the history of philosophy, he is less clear about the precise meaning of the key concept of "problem". The same opinion is held by T. Kubalica: "Windelband hat die Problemgeschichte der Philosophie erfolgsgekrönt entwickelt ohne eine eingehende, begrifflich klare Reflexion des Problembegriffs", Tomasz Kubalica, "Die Geschichte der Philosophie als Problemgeschichte", in: Peter König and Oliver Schlaudt (eds.), *Wilhelm Windelband. (1848–1915)* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2018), 193.

tion of different principles¹⁹. And there is a problem because we cannot have a complete characterization of what reason finally is. Self recognition is for Windelband an unending search, it is always an open problem. In a second sense, this quest for recognition ramifies and gets complexity. The history of philosophy becomes a field in which the logical necessity of problems, the historical context and the idiosyncratic factors introduced by every philosopher appear in an intricate way²⁰. From the interconnection between purely rational, cultural and personal motives given raise to specific problems and attempts at solution associated with the different ages of human history.

The whole line of argument developed by Windelband sounds strikingly Hegelian, but with one key discrepancy. For both philosophers, Hegel and Windelband, the history of philosophy is a part of the system of philosophy, but, while in the case of the former, the history of philosophy is the conclusive moment of the system, for Windelband, the history of philosophy represents the starting point. Thus, the meaning of a philosophical history of philosophy changes. During the polemic on the history of philosophy at the end of the eighteenth century, the formulation of a philosophical history of philosophy was achieved only under the presupposition of a determinate system of philosophy, the Kantian, the Hegelian, and so on. In Windelband's case, the philosophical status of the history of philosophy is determined by the exact opposite reason, namely, the absence of a presupposed systematic philosophy, which allows, paradoxically, to transform a historical endeavor into a philosophical one. The historian's labor becomes more subtle since she cannot limit to classify past philosophies according to a pre given schema but has to conceptualize them as possible guiding threads for our systematic endeavors.

Besides, in this same translocation from the end to the beginning of philosophizing we can consider a possible reply to Johann Erdmann's interrogation. The history of philosophy has a distinctive place in the arrangement of philosophical disciplines, and for this reason, historiographical practices

¹⁹ The values mentioned above. For a detailed explanation of this connection between values and problems, see Tomasz Kubalica, op. cit., 173.

²⁰ A brief explanation of these different factors operating in the history of philosophy is given in Wilhelm Windelband, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Mohr: Tübingen, 1903), 9.

are indeed a necessary component of philosophical thinking, but, since the knowledge of the historical development of rationality does not provide a grounding proof of reason's principles, the history of philosophy cannot be equated with the whole of philosophy. On the contrary, the history of philosophy has to be material and impulse for systematical thinking. That historical development is but one of the aspects, specifically, the immediate one, through which we grasp rationality. As a consequence, the "historicization" of philosophy is positively acknowledged but at the same time strictly limited.

Windelband's main idea is that the history of philosophy, as a part of the system of philosophy, has a methodological role. This is the ground for differentiating between the situation of philosophy and that of the sciences. Scientists, for example, use the results of their predecessors as a starting point but the history of science us such does not any role in the scientific methodology. But when our aim as philosophers is to acquire self-knowledge, to understand what humanity is, then we need to look at what humanity has done. It is in this particular sense that Windelband's history of problems can be articulated into one single story, namely, the history of the problem of humanity, which takes different problematic forms through the different epochs of philosophy. And it is in this peculiar sense that Windelband's method for the history of philosophy resembles Hegel's idea in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* more than any other member of the Hegelian corpus.

All in all, Windelband is a Neo-Kantian philosopher. He claims to defend the idea of a critical method in philosophy but he submits this very idea to a complete new interpretation, introducing in the core of his proposal a historical dimension that was absent in the original Kantian system. The result of this movement is the formulation of a new argumentation for the study of the history of philosophy and also a new methodology for this discipline.

5. Heinrich Rickert's *History of Systems*

The third component of my reconstruction is represented by Rickert's essay from 1931: "Geschichte und System der Philosophie"²¹. Rickert interrogates again, twenty six years after the essay from his teacher Windelband, what is the relationship between history and system arriving to new and striking results.

Against the generation of Erdmann, which attempts at harmonizing the historical and the systematical impulses, and against Windelband, who offers a the general lineaments for a Neo-Kantian methodology in the history of philosophy, Rickert considers that the relevance of the history of philosophy has become absolutely undeniable. Everyone that seems to be doing historical works claims to do it with systematical intent, and as a counterpart, says Rickert, those who deal with systematical problems are well aware of the necessity of providing, at least, some historical introductions²². For Rickert, we have moved on from the time for interrogations about the possibility of the history of philosophy to the time of a retrospective evaluation of what has been already achieved in the discipline. Thus, although the general questions seems to be the same, the starting point of these philosophers do not correspond to each other.

One remarkable feature of this long essay is Rickert's capacity of synthesizing, in its pages, his concepts of philosophy, history, and his theory of sciences. I focus in this opportunity just in what he has to say about the specificities of the history of philosophy in contrast to the history of other disciplines. On this topic, Rickert's essay introduces three novelties. First, the claim that the way in which contemporary thinking can appropriate philosophical theories is only through the recognition of their belonging to the past. Second, a new conception of the individual factor in the history of philosophy. Third, the replacement of Windelband's history of problems for a history of systems.

Regarding the first peculiarity of Rickert's exposition, the emphasis on the past, I consider that it represents the key aspect of Rickert's answer to the

²¹ Heinrich Rickert, "Geschichte und System der Philosophie", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 40: 7–46 and 403–448.

²² *Ibidem*, 8.

linking of history and system. In the case of most of the scientific disciplines, their historical antecedents are absorbed by the systematic work in such a way that those antecedents are completely turned into something present. According to Rickert's own example²³, the astronomer makes use of Kepler's findings without caring for the consideration of the totality of Kepler's intellectual world, nor the specificities of his own way of thinking. Kepler's thinking has an effect on astronomical thinking but this effect is achieved through abstracted propositions, detaching therefore every aspect that refers to a past time. What is still effective in Kepler's theory is then presented and what belongs to the past is lost. As a result, the relation between the sciences and their histories creates a schism between the historical and the systematical. The systematical is represented by those sets of knowledges that can be considered only by its actuality, without the reference to when or where they were discovered. When the researcher advances with a systematical interest, she does it disregarding any historical interest. On the contrary, the historical interest requires the problem of the presentification or systematization to be put into brackets.

Philosophy does not tolerate this scission: "by rule, the philosopher has the necessity of identifying explicitly what has been already worked out in previous times, in order to see, in this way, how the events studied by contemporary research stand in relationship with those belonging to the past"²⁴.

Rickert is claiming, through this differentiation between philosophy and the rest of sciences, that in the background we are operating with two different concepts of "system". While the concept of system from the particular sciences prompts a division between the systematical and the historical, the philosophical concept of system does not. In the case of the particular sciences, knowledge is arranged as a unified and organized set of propositions, and this process of arrangement is what constitutes a scientific system. But for Rickert, when we are dealing with philosophy, we are not facing an organizing procedure, but the alleged form of the world itself. Philosophers attempt at grasping the totality of the world and this world is considered to be an all encompassing system, from which every specific part dealt by

²³ Ibidem, 9.

²⁴ Ibidem, 10 [my translation].

sciences offices as a member²⁵. Thus, while specific scientific theories, as attempts at understanding only a limited part of the world, can be isolated, abstracted, interrelated, building major wholes; every attempt at providing a general understanding of the totality of the world has a unity that cannot allow such a fragmentation. We can build one single presentation of chemistry by joining together different chemical theories dealing with different objects or problems. But in as much as the systematical attempt of philosophizing aims at dealing with the totality of the world, we cannot sum them all into a single systematical exposition. Basically, Rickert's difference regarding these two meanings of system is a plea against philosophical eclecticism, one of the common dangers of the emphasis on the history of philosophy.

Alongside this aforementioned specificity, Rickert provides a different treatment of philosophical personality. In the treatment of the historical done by particular sciences, there is not only an ablation of the past character of propositions but also of the personal dimension of the researcher. And, as a reaction to the doxographic tradition of ancient historiography, this was also the general trend in the history of philosophy. Windelband assigned a peculiar role in the historical exposition to the individual dimension of the philosopher although this was less prominent than the logical factor and was also strongly associated to the reader's aesthetic needs. Thus, in Windelband's *Lehrbuch der Geschichte of Philosophie*, the personal factor of the philosopher occupied only a secondary role.

On the contrary, Rickert considers that in the same sense as philosophy deals with the totality of the world, the philosopher does not only engage in reflection with a singular parcel of her intellectual capacities but with the totality of its being. For Rickert, then, it is not possible to isolate the personality of the philosopher from the understanding of her philosophical creations²⁶. The whole being of the philosopher is put into play in the conceptualization of the world. In this precise point, Rickert's explanation of the connection between the historical and the systematical in philosophy turns complex and bold but completely coherent.

²⁵ Ibidem, 25.

²⁶ Ibidem, 36.

The first thing to notice is that this role of personality builds an argument as strong as the previous one for the essential reference of the system to history. If the philosopher is involved with her whole life in the philosophical activity, then it is not possible to isolate a philosophical system from the singularities of the philosopher's time and place. For this role of the individual, every philosophical system is also temporal. The second thing to notice is that this emphasis does not force us to a completely individualistic stance. According to Rickert, the philosopher's work consists in creating a bridge between the pre-scientific world, from which the philosopher starts, and the scientific world that the philosopher develops from the previous one. The philosopher cannot remain in the level of the individual world when philosophy has scientific pretensions²⁷. Every philosophical theory seeks the universal but we aspire to the universal from our particular point of reference, and can only recognize it therefore from a historically conditioned position. With the reference to the total being of the philosopher, Rickert does not want to make a claim for a primacy of the emotional in philosophical thinking but a claim for the historical placement of man in history. The logical conclusion of this argument, as well as the previously mentioned, is that the systematical in the field of philosophy cannot be detached from the historical. This is another way to argue for Hegel's famous dictum that philosophy is its own time grasped in thought without Windelband's recurs to a concept of reasons' self unfolding.

Finally, in view of the general outlook on the historical dimension of every philosophical system, Rickert denies the idea of his teacher Windelband of developing a history of problems and concepts. Tracing the history of a single problem through the history of philosophy or building the history of philosophy as a developmental attempts at grasping humanity should be taken as undercover attempts at isolating the historical and the systematical. The history of philosophy has to be presented as series of movements from a peculiar system to another one, building therefore a history of systems and not a history of problems²⁸. Although both proposal are akin to accepts that the task of philosophy has no end and therefore they are prompt to defend

²⁷ Ibidem, 41.

²⁸ Ibidem, 45.

the idea of the openness of the system of philosophy²⁹, they defend this idea in different ways. In the case of Windelband, the openness of the system is determined by the methodological role assigned to history, while in the case of Rickert, the openness is given by his distinction between the ideal pretension of totality and our concrete and limited effort to conceptualize this totality³⁰. The only way to critically appropriate the philosophical knowledge advanced by our predecessors is by fully acknowledging that these systems are part of a temporally situated and all encompassing attempt to grasp the world as totality: “When someone uses philosophical works from the past as basis for his systematical re-working, then, it is necessary for him to study these systems of philosophy, which have been produced in previous time, in their totality and in this way the path towards the history of philosophy is shown”³¹.

Windelband recognized the coexistence of three orders of factors operating in the history of philosophy: the logical-systematical, the social, and the personal. But, on the one hand, these factors in his reconstruction remain poles in constant tension, and, on the other, there is an accent put on the logical-systematical as an aim for our understanding. For Rickert, on the contrary, all these three factors are intermingled, explaining both the open and situated nature of philosophical systems. We can only achieved a truly systematical consideration by reference to the individual and the social dimensions of a philosophical system. In this sense, Rickert explanation clearly improves the argumentative attempt of his teacher.

²⁹ See Christian Krijnen *Philosophie als System* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2008), 258.

³⁰ As Krijnen explains the diverse systems of philosophy are but approximations to the one ideal system of philosophy. *Ibidem*, 261.

³¹ Heinrich Rickert, *op. cit.*, 405–406 [my translation].

6. Conclusions

I divide the conclusion of the present work considering what is offered in the evaluation of each different moment in the discussion presented and their teachings for contemporary philosophizing.

Regarding the reference to Johann Eduard Erdmann's book, the relevant point is the recognition of the origin of our contemporary treatment of historiographical practices and also the needs to consider the history of philosophy as a valid object for philosophical thinking.

The interest on Windelband's essay lays in the idealistic position that he uses to articulated the historical and the systematical. For Windelband there is a historical continuum in which reason manifests itself. Moreover, the task of philosophy is characterized as the task of understanding reason's operations through this temporal continuum. Therefore it plays a central role in his *History of Problems* in as much as it provides the historical nexus of the narrative. It also guarantees an endless task to philosophical criticism and to writing of the history of philosophy. Erdmann was strike but an unresolved tension between his practice as historian of philosophy and the acknowledgement that this practice did not lead directly to philosophical thinking. Windelband's solution consisted in arguing for an evaluative moment in the history of philosophy (and in this sense, it is a strategy that is still useful for the justification of the philosophical character of the history of philosophy) and arguing also for the consideration of history as a component of the method of philosophy. However, Windelband seems to fail at the moment of explaining the interconnections between the grounding and discovery of the structure of reason, something that reflects both in his methodology of philosophy and his methodology of the history of philosophy.

Heinrich Rickert wrote his essay several years after the publications of Erdmann and Windelband. Taking Windelband's line of argument as a starting point, he achieved an elaborate and novel articulation of the constitutive factors in the history of philosophy. Windelband configured his history of philosophy through the concept of problem. The history of philosophy is the history of the problem of humankind, instantiated always through different epochal questions. For Rickert, the question of the history of philosophy now

is how and why the different periods of time have performed different attempts to comprehend the world as a whole. In this sense, Rickert's position, although missing a concrete account of the array of systems³², allows to solve some issues stemming from Windelband and to offer an original explanation of the necessity of the history of philosophy.

Gunter Scholtz has said that "Historical philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century bids a final farewell to the idea of system"³³. Although true, this statement was re interpreted by the Neo-Kantians in the sense that what is abandoned is not the idea of system but the abstract separation of the historical and the systematical. Providing therefore, not only arguments for the philosophical nature of the history of philosophy but arguments for a new comprehension of the systematic of philosophy. In as much as today's discussions are still addressing the topic of the relationship between philosophy and the history of philosophy, the Neo-Kantian texts appear as unduly recognized but complex and relevant sources. The present paper has tried to provide an introductory path to these materials and argue for their contemporary relevance.

Bibliography

- Bambach Charles. 1995. *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Erdmann Johann Eduard. 1866. *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie, zweiter Band, Philosophie der Neuzeit*. Berlin: Hertz.
- Erdmann Johann Eduard. 1809. *A History of Philosophy*. Vol. III. New York: Macmillan.
- Geldsetzer Lutz. 1968. *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert. Zur Wissenschaftstheorie der Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung und -betrachtung*. Meisenheim: Hain.

³² Rickert did not write, after all, a concrete history of philosophy.

³³ Scholtz Gunter. 2015. "From Philosophical Historiography to Historical Philosophy", in: Hartung Gerald and Pluder Valentin (eds.), *From Hegel to Windelband: Historiography of Philosophy in the 19th Century* (Berlin-Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 39.

- Hartung Gerald and Pluder Valentin. 2015. *From Hegel to Windelband: Historiography of Philosophy in the 19th Century*. Berlin–Boston: Walter de Gruyter.
- Krijnen Christian. 2005. “Hegels Parallelitätsthese von Logik und Geschichte – kritische Bemerkungen zur Philosophiegeschichtsphilosophie Windelbands und Spickers”. In: *Geschichte, Entwicklung, Offenbarung: Gideon Spickers Geschichtsphilosophie*, ed. Harald Schwaetzer and David Schweizer, 145–162. Regensburg: Roderer.
- Krijnen Christian. 2008. *Philosophie als System*. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann.
- Kubalica Tomasz. 2018. “Die Geschichte der Philosophie als Problemgeschichte”. In: *Wilhelm Windelband. (1848–1915)*, ed. Peter König and Oliver Schlaudt, 169–196. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann.
- Nietzsche Friedrich. 1988. *Die Geburt der Tragödie. Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen I–IV. Nachgelassene Schriften 1870–1873*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Nuzzo Angelica. 2003. “Hegel’s Method for a History of Philosophy: The Berlin Introductions to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy (1819–1831)”. In: *Hegel’s History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. David Duquette, 19–34. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Paulsen Friedrich. 1899. *Immanuel Kant. Sein Leben und seine Lehre*. Stuttgart: Fromman.
- Scholtz Gunter. 2015. “From Philosophical Historiography to Historical Philosophy”. In: *From Hegel to Windelband: Historiography of Philosophy in the 19th Century*, ed. Gerald Hartung and Valentin Pluder, 25–43. Berlin–Boston: Walter de Gruyter.
- Rickert Heinrich. 1931. “Geschichte und System der Philosophie”. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 40: 7–46 and 403–448.
- Windelband Wilhelm. 1884. “Was ist Philosophie? (Ueber Begriff und Geschichte der Philosophie)”. In: *Präludien: Aufsätze und Reden zur Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 1–42. Freiburg a. B.: Mohr.
- Windelband Wilhelm. 1884. “Kritische und genetische Methode”, In: *Präludien: Aufsätze und Reden zur Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 247–279. Freiburg a. B.: Mohr.
- Windelband Wilhelm. 1884. “Ueber den teleologischen Criticismus. Zur Abwehr”. *Philosophische Monatshefte*, 20: 161–169.
- Windelband Wilhelm. 1903. *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie. Third Edition*. Mohr: Tübingen.
- Windelband Wilhelm. 1905. “Geschichte der Philosophie”. In: *Die Philosophie im Beginn des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts. Festschrift für Kuno Fischer*, ed. Wilhelm Windelband, 175–200. Band II. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.

Windelband Wilhelm. 1914. *A History of Philosophy. With Especial Reference to the Formation and Development of its Problems and Conceptions*. New York: The Macmillan Company.

Abstract

The nineteenth century has been regarded as the “classical epoch” of the history of philosophy. However, the Neo-Kantian discussion on the nature of this discipline and its relationship with systematical thinking has been poorly addressed in the literature concerning this topic. For this reason, this paper offers a brief outline of this discussion. It establishes three different moments in the Neo-Kantian discussion of the history of philosophy and shows how the understanding of the relation between system and history evolved from the mere formulation of the problem around the mid of the nineteenth century towards a complete articulated answer in the late works of Heinrich Rickert. Following this evolution, the paper attempts at explaining how the famous conception of a history of philosophical problems became a history of philosophical systems.

Keywords: system; History of Philosophy; Neo-Kantianism