

Knowledge and Reality

Form: in ihr ist Ferne, in ihr ist Dauer.
Gottfried Benn¹

Epistemology and ontology

Rickert's neo-Kantianism is not a servile following of the thoughts and theories of the master of Königsberg, but in one respect he definitely is Kant's successor.² Particularly in his thesis for the German doctorate (*Habilitation*), *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* ('The Object of Knowledge'), the first edition of which was published in 1892, he followed Kant's positing of the epistemological primacy over against ontology. In this respect Rickert differed from Eduard Hartmann who, in opposition to the Kantian thesis that the thing-in-itself – reality, or being prior to experience – cannot be known, defended the ontological primacy, as had been customary in most traditional (medieval and Classic) philosophies. In their view being is the origin, cause, and context of knowing. Philosophy is therefore first and foremost ontology, and beyond that metaphysics, and not logic and epistemology. Rickert rejects this idea. To him and his fellow neo-Kantians of the South-West German School, epistemology precedes ontology, not the other way about. After all, the concept itself suggests this epistemological precedence: *onto-logy!*

This has led to the standard criticism that neo-Kantianism suffers from a general neglect of ontology and an overemphasis of epistemology. At the end of his career Rickert counters this critique. As we shall see shortly, he then re-defines the concept of Being which he initially had separated from the non-sensual reality of values and meanings. He admits that the final concept of systematic philosophy which is, as we shall see, *reality-in-toto* (*das Weltall*), is, of course, an ontological concept. In this sense, systematic philosophy is indeed first and foremost ontology and may even end up in metaphysics. However, since philosophy aims at an *understanding* of the world, the balance between being and knowing leans towards the latter. But philosophy can, of course, never be defined as 'just' epistemology, nor can it be defined as being 'just' ontology. In fact, knowledge is expressed in language, i.e. in sentences, in judgments. The basic logical structure of these sentences is always a connection by the copula 'is' of a subject and a predicate. Beyond its mere copula-function being is contained by the predicate. The logic of the predicate is the essence

¹ 'Form: in it is distance, in it is permanence.' Gottfried Benn, 'Zukunft und Gegenwart' ('Future and Presence'), in: *Doppelleben*, ('Double Life'), 1944, (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), p. 468.

² Cf. Heinrich Rickert, *Kant als Philosoph der modernen Kultur. Ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch*, ('Kant as Philosopher of Modern Culture. An Essay in the History of Philosophy'), (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1924). He admits in the Preface to be 'ein Kantianer', but not in a scholastic sense. The greatness of Kant is, according to him, that he did not create a System which one must either accept or reject in its totality. It is rather the Kantian 'critique' as a philosophical attitude and method which inspires one to engage in philosophy.

of ontology.³ Thus, logic and epistemology cannot be separated strictly from ontology and vice versa. Rickert argues ‘that true enough the sentence: “there is no problem of knowledge without a problem of being” is correct, but precisely as correct, however, is simultaneously, at least in the case of general ontology, the *reversal* of this sentence: “there is no problem of being without a problem of knowledge.”’⁴ Yet, since philosophy’s aim is the conceptual understanding of reality, epistemology must occupy an autonomous position in philosophy and cannot be viewed as a derivative of ontology.

Rickert argues that the close bond between epistemology and logic on the one hand and ontology on the other constituted the heart of Plato’s theory of the metaphysical *Ideas*. In order to be true, knowledge ought to be ‘general’, i.e. ought to transcend the particularity of the individual observations of the senses. For this epistemological and logical reason he distinguished ontologically two realms, the ‘aistheton’ and the ‘noeton’, i.e. the relative ‘phaenomena’ and the absolute ‘noumena’. The latter constitute a world of non-empirical concepts, the *Ideas*. They transcend the sheer ‘appearance’ of the senses which are unable to produce any true and generally valid knowledge. (Needless to add that this is quite different from Kant’s definition of the ‘noumenon’.) The metaphysical *Ideas* constitute a transcendent reality which must be understood and functions as the aboriginal picture of reality and as the model for all general concepts of reality. It is the world of absolute Being which is the source and origin of everything-that-is: *ontos on*.

This exhibits a second presupposition of the Platonic epistemology and ontology, namely the notion that true knowledge is a representation, a picture of reality. It is in fact the origin of the *Abbildlogik*, the representational logic, that was elaborated in the medieval, scholastic doctrine of the *adequatio rei et intellectus*, also adopted by early-modern philosophers, like Hume, and then vehemently rejected by Kant. However, this presupposition too demonstrates that in the Platonic philosophy the ontological concept of ‘true Being’ depends on the epistemological concept of ‘true knowledge’. The question which metaphysics must answer is, what in sentences about reality does constitute a ‘true’ predicate and what must be defined as sheer ‘appearance’. Before one answers the question one must know what true knowledge is.

In early-modern philosophy the search was for an ontology without metaphysics. According to Rickert, Hume was in this respect the most important eye-opener. He is usually discussed as a theoretician of knowledge, but he was, Rickert emphasizes, at the same time an ontologist who searched for an understanding of the ‘being of the world’ in its totality. Although he maintained the Platonic representational logic, he developed in fact a radically opposed theory. If Plato created a metaphysical ontology, Hume was the originator of an anti-metaphysical, sensualistic ontology. He defined being as a combination of sense-impressions and its copies, i.e. the ‘ideas’. Everything outside these impressions and ideas is, in his view, fictitious. Here again we encounter the close bond between ontology and epistemology or logic: ‘Ontology is the result of logic.’⁵

Rickert, as we shall see later, is a great admirer of Hume, but certainly not an uncritical one. In particular the notion that concepts, ‘ideas’, were the representations or pictures of the sensual impressions, could not meet with his approval. Hume, he points out, forged and applied concepts all the time which were not all representations of impressions. His theory of causality, for example, presupposed a conception or an ‘idea’ of causality which is far removed from sensual observations. Causality emerges, Hume claimed, from habits and thus effectuates itself. Hume’s ontology and

³ Heinrich Rickert, *Die Logik des Prädikats und das Problem der Ontologie*, (‘The Logic of the Predicate and the Problem of Ontology’), (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1930), *passim*. For the *copula*-function, cf. *ibid.*, p. 60f.

⁴ ‘dass zwar der Satz: “es gibt keine Erkenntnisfrage ohne Seinsfrage” richtig ist, genau ebenso richtig jedoch zugleich, wenigstens für die allgemeine Ontologie, die *Umkehrung* dieses Satzes: “es gibt keine Seinsfrage ohne Erkenntnisfrage.”’ *Ibid.*, p. 172. When Rickert uses the concept ‘logic’ he does not refer to ‘formal logic’, as in Aristotelian logic, but much broader to a form of epistemology. The proper object of logic is, according to Rickert, the truth of thought and knowledge, and beyond that the essence of truth. How do we arrive at, and what is actually, a true sentence about reality which then yields true knowledge? Logic is always epistemology, epistemology is not necessarily always logic. Epistemology studies and analyzes the processes of knowledge production, the formation of concepts in the first place.

⁵ ‘Aus der Logik ergibt sich die Ontologie.’ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

epistemology, Rickert concludes, got stuck in the logical fallacies of 'sensualism', i.e. the belief that knowledge emerges from sense impressions which are then, as it were inductively, represented by concepts, or 'ideas'. Kant, as is well known, turned this around, when he claimed that we do indeed experience reality intuitively, but these in themselves chaotic and irrational intuitions and impressions of the senses are structured into perception (*Anschauung*) by the forms time and space, and then put into a rational order by the a priori categories of the *Verstand*. But this, Rickert emphasizes, is not a one-sided epistemological and logical approach but aims in the end at an understanding of reality, the world, 'being'.⁶

Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant were the founders of a great philosophical tradition which focused on the question what precisely human knowledge is, and how its reasoning behaves. It was, in a sense, a reprise of the epistemological and logical ideas of Plato and Aristotle, but at the same time these early-modern philosophers tried to avoid Platonism and Aristotelianism as the metaphysical systems of thought so dear to medieval philosophers and theologians. After all scientists and mathematicians like Copernicus, Kepler, Galilei and their culmination in Newton and Boyle had altered the medieval worldview radically, causing a paradigmatic change in philosophy – in epistemology in particular. What precisely is human thinking and what is the relationship between our concepts and theories with the objective world of things and events? How can we arrive at an empirically tested knowledge of the objects outside our minds? We do experience them through our senses, so the question arises if we can know them prior to this experience – as they are, so to say, in and of themselves. Kant tried to make us believe that his transcendentalism – knowledge through the a priori categories imposed on the experiences of reality – constituted a Copernican change in philosophy, and posited an epistemological primacy over traditional ontology. But he was less original in this than he himself wanted to believe. He had predecessors, particularly in France, England, Scotland and Ireland.

Descartes set the epistemological tone in post-medieval philosophy by his call for systematic doubt. Actually, there is, according to him, but one certainty in life and that is *cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am'). This was a revolutionary turn around from 'being' (ontology) to 'thinking' (epistemology): 'my essence consists in this alone, that I am a thinking thing, or a substance whose whole essence or nature consists of thinking.'⁷ Obviously, however, he was still unable to free himself from the dominant ontological thinking of his days, inherited from Classic and medieval philosophies, completely. After all, he saw man as a 'thinking thing' tied to a body in a rather contradictory manner: 'And although perhaps (or rather I shall shortly say, certainly,) I have a body to which I am very closely united, nevertheless, because, on the one hand, I have a clear and distinct idea of myself in so far as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and because, on the other hand I have a distinct idea of the body in so far as it is only an extended thing but which does not think, it is certain that I, that is to say my mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely and truly distinct from my body, and may exist without it.'⁸ This is a crucial point in Descartes' argument: 'my mind by which I am what I am' – independently, that is, of the body.

In fact, this argument in the Sixth Meditation reads like a foreshadowing of the Kantian transcendental *a priori*. Descartes continues to discuss 'the faculties of imagination and perceiving' which he views as 'faculties of thought'. Such faculties cannot be conceived without some sort of attachment to the body as an 'extended thing'. But the conceptions (ideas) of these faculties do not just emerge in my mind passively. There must be in me 'an active faculty capable of forming and

⁶ For Rickert's critique of Hume, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 183-185.

⁷ René Descartes, 'Sixth Meditation', in: Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, translated by F. E. Sutcliff, 1968, (London: Penguin Classics, 1974), p. 156.

⁸ Descartes, *idem*.

producing those ideas.’⁹ This saddles Descartes with a formidable problem because, he continues, this active faculty is obviously not part of me as a thinking thing since these ideas often emerge in my mind without any contribution to them on my part. Indeed they frequently do so against my will. This active faculty must be a substance different from me. Descartes then jumps to the metaphysical conclusion that ‘it is God himself, or some other creature more noble than body, in which body itself is contained eminently.’¹⁰ Needless to add that neither Kant, nor Rickert or Husserl would accept this epistemological *deus ex machina*. In neo-Kantian transcendental philosophy and in Husserl’s phenomenology this active faculty consists of the completely unextended, formal ‘transcendental Ego’. Prior to Kant, Rickert and Husserl the early-modern philosophers would more often have recourse to the epistemological *deus ex machina*.

Locke confronted a basic problematic issue in Descartes’s epistemology and ontology. If the ‘unextended thinking thing’ (*res cogitans*) is separated from the ‘extended things’ (*res extensae*) the fundamental epistemological question emerges how it could be possible at all that the subjective mind acquires knowledge about the objective world. Ontologically Locke stuck to the so-called corpuscular theory which in effect was a resumption of the Classic atomism of Democritus and Epicurus, felt to be adequate again in the context of the recently emerged natural sciences as introduced by Newton and Boyle.¹¹ The basic idea of the corpuscular theory was that the world consisted of atoms or miniscule particles moving in an infinite empty space, where they coalesce incessantly. Locke then saw causality as a perpetual coalescence of these atoms, or particles, an ongoing process which he called ‘impulse’. He then believed in conformity with the corpuscular philosophy that knowledge is the result of the impulse of the invisible atoms on the human senses. These movements are led through the nerves to the brain and cause the emergence of sensations – which he also called *ideas*. As to God, Locke posited him as the prime mover who initially set the whole mechanism of the world and its incessant impulses in working, and then left it alone.

Locke then introduced the distinction between two kinds of qualities of the objects of knowledge: primary and secondary qualities. The primary qualities of things or objects are extension, figure, motion, rest, solidity or impenetrability and number. They are the intrinsic qualities of matter or substance which exist without any interference of the senses. Matter would thus continue to exist even if there were no human beings to experience it through their senses. (It reminds one of Kant’s thing-in-itself.) In fact, he called matter ‘unthinking’ and even ‘stupid’. Color, heat, cold, sound, smell, on the contrary, are secondary qualities. They are not true qualities of objects or material bodies, but subjective sensations called forth by the objects or bodies. They are, unlike the primary qualities, highly variable and fluctuating. As Warnock summarizes it elegantly, ‘we can find no one such quality to be assigned as *the* quality of the object. Things look different colors in different lights and from different points of view, they taste different to different percipients, water feels warm or cold depending on the temperature of the hands with which we feel it; and so on. But there is no reason to suppose that the object itself varies in this extreme fashion; the ideas we have vary, as our own physical state of the conditions of observation vary, but the object itself does not vary in this way.’¹² (This, of course, reminds one of Kant’s distinction of the *noumenon* vis-à-vis the *phaenomenon*.)

It is at this point that Berkeley opened his attack on Locke whom he, apart from his epistemology, admired greatly. Berkeley was an empirist in the sense that knowledge about the world was only possible through the senses. It is through our senses that we forge our ideas about the world. Now if matter or substance due to its primary qualities, in and of itself, cannot be experienced, it cannot be understood. After all, matter without color, smell, taste, heat or cold cannot be perceived, experienced and observed, and thus may as well not exist. It is impossible to form ideas about this ‘senseless’ material world, it cannot be object of the human mind, it cannot be known. ‘Matter’ is just an empty word. Moreover, Locke’s epistemology is quite mistaken in another respect, because why would the primary qualities, such as extension, motion, solidity, etc., not be located in the mind like the

⁹ Descartes, *ibid.*, p. 157. The concept of ‘ideas’ is used by most philosophers discussed in this section but that is done with many different meanings. This is not the place to discuss this concept in the broader context of early modern philosophy. It would deserve a special monograph though.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹¹ Cf. J. O. Urmson, *Berkeley*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), chapter one. I used the Dutch translation by A. van Kersbergen: J. O. Urmson, *Berkeley*, (Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, 2003, 2nd ed.), pp. 7-23. See also G. J. Warnock, *Berkeley*, 1953, (London: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 91-109. Locke developed his ontology and epistemology in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1689.

¹² Warnock, *o.c.*, p. 93.

secondary qualities, such as color, heat and cold? Are not, for instance, extension and color inseparably united? Any object which is extended and solid must have some color?¹³

Berkeley then elaborated this criticism in the direction of a surprising brand of Idealism. Locke, he argued, maintained the existence of external objects beyond the ideas we actually perceive and carry about in our minds. However, due to the primary qualities these objects cannot be experienced and observed. In other words, matter is in Locke's terminology 'something we know not what' which nevertheless 'supports' the alleged qualities. Now, according to the fashionable 'representation theory' the ideas were, according to Locke, pictures of the objects they represent but these objects could not to be observed and experienced. So how do we know then that the ideas are in fact pictures of the material objects? Moreover, what is the use of ideas which would duplicate objects which are completely unobservable counterparts to boot? Warnock again formulates Berkeley's criticism succinctly as follows: 'What could be the point of supposing a second set of things behind the scenes, things that we never perceive? We could not possibly know that there were any such things, and it could make no difference at all to us if there were not.'¹⁴ Berkeley drew the conclusion that the whole notion of matter or substance is superfluous. He coined a brief and famous, if not notorious formula: '*esse is percipi*', being is just perceiving and being perceived. Objects do exist only when they are being perceived by us. That, of course, is quite problematic! Does the table I am presently working on no longer exist, when it is no longer being perceived by me because I have left the room? Berkeley calls upon the *deus ex machina* of pre-modern philosophy, in order to avoid the absurdity of a denial: yes, it would still be perceived by the Eternal Mind, called God. To the majority of readers this answer would not be less absurd.¹⁵

Without a recourse to the *deus ex machina* of medieval philosophy and theology, Hume continued the epistemological line of thinking of Descartes and Locke. Yet, he went beyond them and served as an influential source of inspiration for Kant and his transcendental epistemology. The only thing we can be certain of, Hume argued, is the fact that we are thinking. Perceptions of the mind are the prime elements of human thought. Hume discerned two different types of such perceptions. The first and most important ones are the often lively impressions when we hear, or see, or feel, or hate, or desire. There are secondly the less powerful and lively, more abstract thoughts or ideas which are representations or copies of these impressions. The human mind is able to combine the impressions into sometimes fantastic images as long as the components of these images are based upon impressions. Thus, we can imagine a golden mountain because we know from experience what gold is and what mountains are, although a golden mountain does, of course, not exist empirically and objectively.¹⁶ Is there then, according to Hume, such an objective reality of things and objects independently of the human mind?

Hume argues that it is the natural attitude of man to assume that the images of the senses reflect external objects: 'This very table, which we see white, and which we feel hard, is believed to exist, independent of our perception, and to be something external to our mind, which perceives it. Our presence bestows not being on it: our absence does not annihilate it. It preserves its existence uniform and entire, independent of the situation of intelligent beings, who perceive or contemplate it.'¹⁷ It would be nice, Hume admits, to be able to believe in the existence of independent objects – a belief which is widely spread and popular. Yet, this is, he admits, not possible. He deplores, as Ayer claims, the consequential skepticism but does not know how to avoid it.¹⁸ His position is a bit wavering: 'It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them: how shall this question be determined? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent. The mind has never anything present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects. The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning.'¹⁹ He then illustrates this point by his famous and best known analysis of the phenomenon of cause and effect.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 99. Berkeley developed his epistemology in his *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 1710.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101. See also p. 108.

¹⁵ See the Dutch edition of J. O. Urmson, *o.c.*, pp. 66-69.

¹⁶ Cf. David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1772, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 3rd ed.), Section II, 'On the Origin of Ideas', pp. 17-23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 151f.

¹⁸ A. J. Ayer, *Hume*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). I used the Dutch translation by W. Visser (Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, 1999), p. 57.

¹⁹ Hume, *o.c.*, p. 153.

The steady succession of cause and effect – is, of course, not caused by God, or any other metaphysical force, but by the association of ideas in our mind. If a billiard ball bounces against another still billiard ball, we see the movement of the first ball, then the collision, and then the movement of the other ball which did not move before. That is all. The effect of the collision of the two balls cannot be found in the supposed cause, because the effect differs totally from the cause: ‘Motion in the second billiard-ball is a quite distinct event from motion in the first; nor is there anything in the one to suggest the smallest hint of the other.’²⁰ Due to experiences and past observations we have been able to ascertain certain regularities and then to develop certain ‘laws’ which should explain the process of cause and effect. However, we shall never know what precisely last causes are and what precisely causality is. In this sense, Hume’s epistemology ends in skepticism.²¹

Kant, as we know, elaborated on this idea by claiming that we are indeed not able to know what objective reality in itself, i.e. prior to our observations and sense perceptions, actually is. The *Ding-an-sich* does, of course, exist. It is in fact the ontological rock bed of Kant’s epistemology. The question, however, is whether this thing-in-itself can be known, can be reached adequately by our mind. Kant then introduced his well-known distinction of the *noumenon* and the *phaenomenon*. The former remains closed for human knowledge, but it appears to us, it is experienced by us through our senses. In that respect it is a phenomenon also. The mind then molds these sense perceptions by means of *a priori*, i.e. non-empirical (transcendental) forms and categories, the forms of perception (*Anschauung*), time and space to begin with. We structure our sense perceptions in the sequence of past-present-future, and in terms of here-and-there. We next structure them through the *a priori* (mainly Aristotelian) categories of *Verstand*, like quality, quantity, relation (including causality), modality. Kant himself called this a Copernican change in philosophy: from the primacy of ontology to that of epistemology, and within the latter from a passive, receptive cognition to an active and constructive cognition through the molding of sense perceptions by *a priori* (transcendental) forms and categories.

Between Idealism and Empirism

In a rare reflection upon his own development as a philosopher Rickert writes in 1924 that it was reading David Hume as a young man which inspired him to become a philosopher.²² As so many young men and women in the final days of the nineteenth century he is enticed, he admits, by Hume’s ‘empirism’ which claims that our ideas and thoughts are caused by impressions which must be ascertained as facts. What is not an impression or a copy of an impression is a fiction. Rickert believes that this naïve empirism is essentially what contemporary phenomenology (Edmund Husserl) is in essence still all about, since it claims that knowledge is in the end the result of what is ‘viewed’ immediately and intuitively – *Wesensschau*. This is not altogether wrong but too one-sided. Kant, Rickert continues, can help us to overcome such naïve impressionism and intuitionism. Sheer impressions of reality, intuitively viewed, observed and absorbed can, according to Kant, never yield reliable and valid knowledge. Such knowledge emerges only, when the content of the impressions and

²⁰ Hume, *o.c.*, para 25, p. 29.

²¹ This is, of course, not the place to give an extensive survey of the evolution of epistemology in Western philosophy. I have only focused on some highlights which as it were foreshadowed Kant and neo-Kantianism which is, of course, the main frame of reference of Rickert’s epistemology. For a detailed historical survey see Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit* (‘The Problem of Knowledge in the Philosophy and Science of Modernity’), 1906, four volumes, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999-2000).

²² He would have agreed with A. J. Ayer who began his book on Hume with the statement that for him Hume had been the greatest philosopher England had ever known. Ayer, *o.c.*, Dutch edition, p. 9.

sensations is in a sense molded by logical, rational *forms*, called concepts (*Begriffe*) or categories, such as causality, quality, quantity, etc. Kant, in other words, did not dismiss Hume's impressionism but corrected it by the consequent linking of the impressions and sensations (content) with the abstract concepts or categories (forms).

It is more than linking, we may add. The passive impressionism of Hume is transformed by Kant into an active 'constructionism', because by our concepts or categories we in a sense construct reality. This dualism was aptly formulated by Kant in these often quoted words: without conceptual forms perceptions (*Anschauungen*) are 'blind', while concepts or categories without perceptions remain 'empty'. If we follow this basic epistemological idea of Kant consistently, and that is what Rickert sets out to do, we will avoid the 'empirism' of Hume and the 'rationalism' of, for example, Hegel or the Marburg School of Neo-Kantianism (particularly Paul Natorp). Avoiding both pitfalls, yet acknowledging their partial validity, he forged an epistemology which once was called *transcendental empirism* – a label Rickert did accept with a few reservations.²³

However, Rickert is not an orthodox neo-Kantian philosopher. In many respects he follows his own idiosyncratic path. But from one point of view he is definitely a follower of the great philosopher of Königsberg: he sees and treats not ontology but *epistemology* as the first and basic discipline of philosophy. What is knowledge, and how is it possible that we have valid knowledge of the transcendent world outside our consciousness? Naturally, epistemology - the systematic investigation of knowledge, in particular of the conditions of its truth or falsehood - is closely related to logic and scientific methodology. His epistemological investigations are in effect logical investigations, comparable to Frege's or Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*.²⁴

But there is still one point we must discuss first. Rickert refuses to reduce epistemology to psychology, as happened repeatedly in his day. 'My book wants to present only a theory of knowledge, and not psychology or metaphysics', he wrote in the Preface of the second edition of *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* ('The Object of Knowledge').²⁵ He is, to give just one example, a great admirer of Franz Brentano (1838-1917), and actually uses, without giving him credit by mentioning his name, his idea of the intentionality of consciousness. I.e. consciousness is always consciousness *of something, of things, events, other human beings, even of our own consciousness*.²⁶

²³ Heinrich Rickert, *Das Eine, die Einheit und die Eins. Bemerkungen zur Logik des Zahlbegriffs* ('The One [as opposed to the Other], the Unity, and the First [as in number 1]'), (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1924), pp. 84-86.

²⁴ A detailed and systematic analysis of Husserl's logical investigations was given by Herman Philipse, *De fundering van de logica in Husserls 'Logische Untersuchungen'*, ('The Foundation of Logic in Husserl's Logical Investigations'), PhD dissertation Leiden University 1983, (Leiden: Labor Vincit, 1983). For Frege see his 'Logische Untersuchungen', 1918, 1923, in: Gottlob Frege, *Kleine Schriften* (Small Papers), 1967, (Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1990), pp. 242-394.

²⁵ 'meine Schrift will nur Erkenntnistheorie, und nicht Psychologie oder Metaphysik geben.' Heinrich Rickert, *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*, 1892, (Tübingen: Siebeck-Mohr, 1921, 4th and 5th ed.), p. VII. His fight against any introduction of psychology in epistemology and logic is very similar to Frege's rejection of attempts to found logic and arithmetic on psychology. See e.g. Frege's very critical appraisal of Husserl's book on the philosophy of arithmetic: 'Rezension von: E.G.Husserl, Philosophie der Arithmetik. I.' (1891), ('Review of E.G. Husserl, Philosophy of Arithmetic, vol. I'), 1894, in: Gottlob Frege, *o. c.*, pp. 179-192. Frege speaks of 'the devastations which the infringement of psychology caused in logic' and called it 'a widely spread philosophical disease.' *Ibid.*, p. 192.

²⁶ For a concise and adequate survey of Brentano's philosophy in general and his concept of intentionality in particular which, incidentally, also influenced Husserl's phenomenology, see Wolfgang Stegmüller, *Hauptströmungen der Gegenwartsphilosophie. Eine kritische Einführung*,

But he takes Brentano to task severely for his alleged *psychologism*. If one deals with concepts like 'mind' and 'consciousness' all the time, as epistemologists of the idealist tradition, including Rickert himself, do, one will easily take refuge in psychology and psychological conceptualizations. Kant's transcendentalism seems to open indeed the gates for psychological notions and concepts, although Kant himself was critical of any 'psychologicalization' of his epistemology. Rickert, as we saw before, claims repeatedly that there is a distinct difference between philosophy as a general discipline which tries to grasp reality-*in-toto* and the various specialized sciences which approach and investigate reality in the compartmentalized terms of their specific world of objective facts and their specific methodological focus. Psychology is such a specialized scientific discipline and is as such unable to function as a foundation of general philosophy and general epistemology. As a specialized and exact scientific discipline, psychology has in his view nothing to offer to general philosophy and general epistemology, and the other way around. In fact, all attempts at introducing psychology into epistemology and logic result eventually in a rather murky, metaphysical psychologism which does harm to both psychology as a specialized science and philosophy as a general science. Philosophy, he emphasizes time and again, is a science which tries to acquire knowledge of total reality, unlike the specialized sciences, including psychology, which focus their scientific attention on specific parts of reality.

Basic terminology

In his book on epistemology Rickert complains at regular intervals about a linguistic problem that plagues him permanently but cannot be solved by him in a satisfactory manner. With this book he tries to introduce the reader into his brand of *Transzendentalphilosophie* (transcendental philosophy) and wants to stay as close as possible to everyday life language in order to remain understandable for students and lay philosophers. Yet, he permanently feels that this language is not able to express precisely and exactly what he wants to say and convey. Actually, everyday language is not just inadequate but, which is, of course, much worse, rather misleading too. Since, for instance, 'consciousness' and 'mind' play a leading role in epistemology, one is easily seduced to attribute scores of psychological features to it, and thus gradually relapse in psychologism. Rickert complains, as we saw previously in the introduction, about the fact that 'normal', everyday-life language does not offer words and concepts that are in accordance with the theoretical, epistemological standpoint of transcendentalism. 'Maybe', Rickert surmises, 'eventually a special terminology will be forged for the theory of knowledge.'²⁷ In the mean time, he realizes, he must do with multi-interpretable concepts and expressions. I do not know, if he had any knowledge of Frege's attempt to come up indeed with a formalized language of logic which he called *Begriffsschrift*.²⁸) He would have concluded in all probability that such a formalized language does not really solve the problem, because it cannot be

(‘Main Currents of Contemporary Philosophy. A Critical Introduction’), (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1960), pp. 2-48.

²⁷ 'Vielleicht bildet sich einmal für die Erkenntnistheorie eine besondere Terminologie.' Rickert, *o.c.*, p. 100f. Also: 'Language has not construed words for the epistemological point of view, and it was not able to do so.' ('Die Sprache hat für den erkenntnistheoretischen Standpunkt keine Worte gebildet, und sie konnte es nicht.') *Ibid.* p. 100.

²⁸ Gottlob Frege, *Begriffsschrift, eine der arithmetischen nachgebildete Formelsprache des reinen Denkens* ('Conceptual Script, a Formal, Arithmetically Modelled Language of Pure Thinking'), 1879, Ignacio Angelelli (ed.), (Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1998).

used in the kind of introductory text that he wants to present to his readers. Since he lacks a concise, formalized, yet commonly understandable language for his epistemology, he is forced to explain things *in extenso* and to engage in lengthy explanations.

Before we follow Rickert in his guided tour through the often complex, labyrinthine world of his transcendentalist theory of knowledge, we must focus first on Rickert's basic epistemological terminology which he fails to do in advance, probably because it belongs to the common philosophical knowledge of his days. If one is not acquainted with the world of German *Idealism* it may take some time to grasp Rickert's basic epistemological concepts and theorems. To start with, there is the crucial adjective 'theoretical'. Whenever it is used by Rickert, it means specifically 'logical', i.e. 'strictly rational', 'formal', in opposition to 'direct' and 'concrete'. But it also means 'non-practical' and 'normatively neutral' or 'free of value-judgments'. Actually, 'theoretical' means 'scientific' and is juxtaposed to 'a-theoretical' which refers to the arts, music, religion, ethics. It takes a while for the reader who is not trained in the neo-Kantian and idealistic ways of thinking and arguing to grasp the rather heavy heuristic load of this seemingly simple word 'theoretical'.

The greatest obstacle for someone not trained in Kantian philosophy may be presented by the concepts of *immanence*, *transcendence* and *transcendental* as in Kant's and Rickert's *Transzendentalphilosophie*.

Transcendence, derived from the Latin noun *transcendens*, meaning 'exceeding', refers to what goes beyond a certain area or order, what exists independently of it, or is not explained by it. Epistemologically, transcendence then refers to objects which go beyond the experience and knowledge of them, and exist independently of them. Ontologically, transcendence refers to what transcends a presupposed order, such as organic vis-à-vis inorganic matter, the present vis-à-vis the past or future, the spiritual vis-à-vis the physical. Transcendent is in this sense also everything which goes beyond the world-*in-toto*, or exceeds all finite beings. Theologically, this conception of transcendence, is then, of course, applied to God who is believed not to be dependent at all of his creation. Yet, in Christian theology it is believed that God's transcendence does not exclude his immanence, since his creation depends on him and reveals his power. In this sense God is immanent to the world-*in-toto*. His immanence is radicalized in pantheism which holds that all of reality, the world-*in-toto* is in fact divine.

Immanence, derived from the Latin *in* and *manere*, meaning 'remaining within something or someone', refers philosophically to the fact that a certain sphere or order cannot be transcended, that a certain development or process can occur without any outside influence. For instance, a critique of theories, doctrines, or theses is epistemologically immanent, if it originates from its very own premises.

Transcendental referred originally to *transcendere*, meaning 'to exceed', 'to go beyond'. It stems from medieval philosophy, where it refers to concepts such as 'being', 'good', 'beautiful' etc. which apply to everything that is and therefore transcends the categorical classification of things and their specific characteristics. It acquired a specific meaning in Kant's philosophy, i.e. in his (and Rickert's) *Transzendentalphilosophie* the adjective transcendental relates to the a priori preconditions of knowledge, not to its objects. Kant's basic transcendental question was, how a priori and synthetic knowledge is at all possible. (Knowledge-a-priori is independent of experiences, knowledge-a-posteriori is derived from experiences. Synthetic knowledge is knowledge which adds something to a concept which was previously not inherent to it, yet is applicable to reality and in that sense objectively valid.) But not just the reflection about our a priori epistemic preconditions, but also these preconditions themselves are called transcendental. For instance, there are epistemic conditions in the knowing subject prior to any experience or any real knowledge. When they enable objectively valid knowledge, Kant calls them transcendental. He mentions in this respect the transcendental imaginative power (*transzendente Einbildungskraft*), the a priori forms of *Anschauung*, time and space, the categories of *Verstand*, such as quantity, quality, causality, and the ideas of *Vernunft*, God, freedom

and the immortality of the soul. Finally, the knowing subject itself, the transcendental consciousness, is viewed as the final cause of all knowledge.²⁹

Rickert is largely in agreement with these conceptual distinctions but still adds his own peculiar interpretations to them. In his *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* he hardly defines them, since he obviously trusted that his readers were sufficiently acquainted with them.³⁰ This is regretful since he deviates from Kant's conceptions in some respects. Transcendence is, according to him, the act of leaving the abodes of subjective consciousness and 'transcendent reality' is then everything beyond this subjective consciousness. We then think immediately of the 'real world' of 'objective' things and events, like Descartes's *res extensae* vis-à-vis the *res cogitans*. But that is not what is meant by transcendence and transcendent. Faithful to Kant's epistemology Rickert emphasizes that the 'objective reality' of things and events (Kant's *Ding-an-sich*) cannot be cognitively grasped. It is experienced by our sense-organs, and all we really can get to know are these phenomenal experiences. (Kant's distinction between the *noumenon* and the *phaenomenon*). We are conscious of these experiences (even our self-experiences, i.e. self-consciousness), and as such the latter are transcendent vis-à-vis our consciousness. We shall see later that Rickert also defines the non-empirical, un-real values as being transcendent vis-à-vis our consciousness.

Rickert is particularly interested in consciousness as a transcendental condition of objectively valid knowledge of and about the world. As we shall see presently in more detail, he focuses on the transcendental immanence of the 'pure Ego' which he labelled 'absolute consciousness' (*Bewusstsein überhaupt*, or *Bewusstheit* rather). It is the abstract instance that thinks, feels, observes, and that is conscious of its consciousness. It is bodiless, space- and timeless, and thus a pure form - in short, transcendental.³¹

Immanence then is the 'subjective' reality of mind and consciousness - two of such misleading concepts which we must use in default of adequate epistemological words. Mind, the cognitive *Geist*, is manageable theoretically, but consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) is, Rickert acknowledges, an awkward concept. Yet, it suffices here to realize that one can grasp it intuitively by realizing that we humans do not only experience fellow men, animals, things, and events, but are also able to reflect upon them in our mind and next reflect upon our experiences of them. In fact, consciousness is first and foremost self-consciousness. I know that I know, I experience that I experience, I am aware that I am aware. The I is immanent, but so are its feelings, impressions, ideas, observations. All this is lumped together in the concept of 'immanence' which stands vis-à-vis 'transcendence'. But, as we shall see,

²⁹ This necessarily brief discussion of the Kantian notions of immanence, transcendence and transcendental philosophy depended heavily on Kant's expositions in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and his *Prolegomena*, but was also influenced by secondary literature. Particularly helpful have been H. J. de Vleeschauwer, *Immanuel Kant*, (Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1931), pp. 112-123, 224-254; Otfried Höffe, *Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Die Grundlegung der modernen Philosophie*, 2003, (München: C.H. Beck, 2004), pp. 53-68, 331-334; Roger Scruton, *Kant*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), chapter 3: 'The transcendental deduction'. I used the Dutch translation by T. Bos: Roger Scruton, *Kant*, (Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, 2004, 4th ed.), pp. 34-55; and the concise yet informative exposition of A. E. Loen, *Inleiding tot de Wijsbegeerte*, ('Introduction to Philosophy'), (The Hague: Boekencentrum, 1955, 3rd ed.): 'Kant', pp. 116-124.

³⁰ Cf. Rickert, *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*, o.c., passim, in particular pp. 20-27; 61-117.

³¹ This goes back to Kant's *transzendental, reine Apperzeption* (transcendental, pure apperception) which is the instance that enables us to think at all. See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, para 16, 1781, (Wiesbaden: Insel Verlag, 1956), p. 136.

loyal to the *Idealist* tradition he bridged the Cartesian gap between them by arguing that transcendent reality is in epistemology only viewed as reality because we, conscious human beings, adorn it with *the idea of reality* which is an empty, epistemological *form* put to use by our mind in its judging capacity. That needs, of course, a further explanation which will be given presently.

It is also useful to reflect preliminarily on Rickert's concept of *Gegenstand* which is hard to translate. In the expression *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* the translation could be 'object of knowledge'. Rickert realizes fully that the *Idealist* tradition is in danger of a radical subjectivism in which subjective consciousness, as it were, colonizes the objective world of things. He rejects that position and emphasizes, as we shall see, the simple fact that in the case of knowledge there ought to be a reality to be known which somehow is in contrast to the knowing subject. The German word *Gegen-stand* means literally 'something that stands over against something else': *objectum*. Naturally *das Ding-an-sich*, Kant's reality in and of itself, does exist. It is the substance of all knowledge, it is the chaotic and complex stuff of which knowledge is 'made'. Yet, the object of knowledge is not, as one tends to believe at first sight, the world of things-in-themselves because epistemologically a *Ding-an-sich* acquires the status of reality only after it has been experienced (as *phaenomenon*) and after the human mind has invested it with the *form of reality* in the act of judging. In this respect the object of knowledge is partly, i.e. as far as the form is concerned, the product of the subjective mind. Later we shall see that to Rickert the proper *Gegenstand*, or object of knowledge is not 'empirical reality', as the empirists want us to believe, but in the final analysis the transcendent (i.e. not subjectively conscious), non-empirical values. (It is for this reason also that his epistemology must end up in a philosophy of values. That is the subject of the fourth chapter.)

This distinction of 'objective' content and 'subjective' form is essential to Rickert's epistemology, in particular since he wants to avoid what he calls the absurdity of *solipsism* which is the point of view in which all knowledge is reduced to the subjective construction of reality. 'The solipsist', he sneers, 'goes to bed at ten o'clock in the evening and wakes up again at six in the morning without having dreamed. The real existence of the world was thus interrupted for eight hours. The solipsist was born in the year such and such at this and this definite time of the day. This means that this moment was the beginning of the real world. And from then on the world continues to exist with daily interruptions of so and so many hours while being asleep, until his death, and then there is no real world anymore. What was there before the year of his birth? And what will there be after his death? He can come up with only one answer: nothing that would really exist. This result is after all a bit dubious.'³² In a sense, subjectivist solipsism is the exact opposite of naïve *realism*, or *empirism*. Rickert tries to avoid both erroneous positions - erroneous, that is, in the context of epistemology. As to the distinct, specialized, empirical sciences, he argues, there is nothing wrong with such empirism.

Rickert puts so much emphasis upon the *Gegenstand* dimension of knowledge, because it represents the standard or measuring rod (*Massstab*) of its objectivity and

³² 'Der Solipsist legt sich abends um 10 Uhr schlafen und wacht um 6 Uhr wieder auf, ohne geträumt zu haben; dann ist das reale Sein der Welt für acht Stunden unterbrochen gewesen. Der Solipsist ist im Jahre so und so viel um die und die Zeit geboren. Daraus folgt, dass dieser Zeitpunkt der Anfang der wirklichen Welt war. Von da an dauert die Welt mit täglichen Unterbrechungen von so und so vielen Stunden, während er schläft, bis zu seinem Tode, und dann gibts keine reale Welt mehr. Was war vor dem Jahre seiner Geburt, und was wird nach seinem Tode sein? Er kann darauf nur eine Antwort geben: Nichts, was real existiert. Dies Resultat ist doch etwas bedenklich.' Rickert, *o.c.*, p. 76f.

truth. Without a proper and objective *Gegenstand* knowledge would float around without sense or meaning, just as, by the way, the *Gegenstand* in its turn needs the conscious form of reality in order to be molded into 'reality'. But again, within the context of Rickert's epistemology *Gegenstand*, object of knowledge, does not belong to the naively experienced world of inorganic and organic 'things'. He calls it a minor Copernican revolution, when he argues that the true object of knowledge which functions as measuring rod for its objectivity and truth, is the world of values, not that of 'things'. This needs some explanation which must be summarized in advance.

Rickert views knowledge primarily in terms of *judgments (Urteile)*. Knowing is judging in positive or negative terms - quite digitally by means of 'yes' or 'no'. The criteria needed for such judgments are the *values* which in a sense steer and mold them. He distinguished two main groups of values: (1) the theoretical values (truth/falsehood, reality/unreality) on which he mainly focuses in his epistemology, and (2) the a-theoretical values, such as erotic (lust/pain), aesthetic (beauty/ugliness), legal (justice/injustice) and ethical (good/evil) values. Epistemology should avoid the second group of values and their inherent normative value-judgments. Epistemologically, only the first group of values and their logical, non-normative value-judgments are relevant. In the final analysis, Rickert claims, these values contain the (transcendental) *Gegenstand* of knowledge, and where knowledge is concerned the values of truth or falsehood function as the final measuring rod or *Massstab* of knowledge's validity. Again, all this will be further discussed in this chapter, yet had to be mentioned in advance in order to grasp the main gist of Rickert's often very complex and abstract thoughts and concepts.

The subjective (immanent) and the objective (transcendent) path

In his monumental and at times quite baroque epistemological treatise Rickert tries to determine what knowledge of the world is and what precisely the object of this knowledge (*Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*), as its criterion of objectivity and truth, is. It is a basic fact of epistemology that one can and should distinguish conceptually between a knowing subject and a known object. In the reality of everyday life both are intertwined, as is illustrated by the close connections of the subject and the predicate in the language we speak and write. But if one wants to grasp what knowledge is all about, one must start with conceptual distinctions, and the one between subject and object is the first and most basic one. One can begin one's epistemological investigations by focusing upon the object and then try to determine what epistemologically speaking the nature and functions of the object of knowledge are, and then what the position of the knowing subject is. It is the transcendent path. But one can also start from the other end, i.e. the knowing subject, trying to determine what its place and functions are in the process of knowing, and then what the nature of its object is. It is the subjective, or immanent path.³³

Rickert starts with the latter, the immanent path, since it is the easiest way, because, he asserts, after all, we are knowing subjects. Speaking about the role and functions of the subject can easily be understood empathically and intuitively. The subjective path along which Rickert leads his readers, covers more than half of the book. Surprisingly though, at the end of this path he draws the conclusion that it is a dead end road. That, of course, is quite a disappointment to the reader who up till then has followed his complex arguments with a considerable investment of time and

³³ Rickert, *o.c.*, pp. 2-6: 'Zwei Wege der Erkenntnis' ('Two Roads of Knowledge').

mental energies. Although one should, of course, be careful with any imputation of motive, I cannot help thinking that he thoroughly enjoys the trick. Rickert takes the reader by the hand, shows him around in a kind of epistemological wonderland which the reader slowly begins to understand, and then tells him abruptly that this is not the way to do it. He then starts all over again but this time it is the objective, transcendent path.

The subjective path he calls *Immanenzphilosophie*, it is the philosophy and epistemology which was so eminently introduced by David Hume, when he defined knowledge as the interplay between *impressions* which stem from the senses and the sensorial experiences and the *ideas* which impose their formal order (notions of causality, quality, quantity, space, time) on them. Most neo-Kantians, Arnold Gehlen has argued³⁴, followed this path which starts with the impressions of reality (*Wahrnehmungen*), and are next confronted by the ideas (*Vorstellungen*). The disadvantage and the epistemological fault of this road is the subjectivist, if not solipsistic deconstruction of objective reality. Even the formal, a priori, transcendental categories of Kant fell prey to subjectivism, often in the disguise of psychologism. Rickert would probably agree with this interpretation.

His *Transzendentalphilosophie* rejects this subjective path of *Immanenzphilosophie*. It begins by defining knowledge in terms of judgments (*Urteile*). In immanent philosophy reigns still what Rickert dubbed the *Abbildungslogik*, the representational logic, that is the logic of depicting reality. In this approach, knowledge is true, if it represents an exact picture of reality. The direct impressions (*Wahrnehmungen*) are allegedly true to the transcendent reality outside consciousness, while within consciousness the ideas (*Vorstellungen*) cover again in their turn the impressions. Knowledge thus is, so to say, a double picture: of reality-outside and of the impressions and ideas within consciousness.³⁵ Like Berkeley Rickert rejects this naïve, representational logic. Unlike Berkeley, however, he replaces it by a logic in which knowledge is defined in terms of judgments guided by values (i.e. in the case of knowledge: truth/falsehood, and reality/unreality). Such judgments, as we shall see later in more detail, do not depict reality but put it in a value perspective, and thus reconstruct it. It is not *Abbildungslogik* but on the contrary *Umbildungslogik*, i.e. logic that deconstruct and reconstruct.

What then is transcendental about Rickert's *Transzendentalphilosophie*? The answer is - still rudely and thus inadequately formulated - that the object of knowledge (*Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*) which is the standard or measuring rod of knowledge's objectivity and truth, is neither the thing-in-itself, the objective reality as such, nor the sense impressions within consciousness to which the concepts relate, but the non-empirical world of values as 'empty', a priori forms.³⁶

Before we follow Rickert on his journey through transcendental epistemology which starts, as announced, with the subjective, immanent path, we must first discuss Rickert's treatment of an ages-old epistemological dilemma.

³⁴ See Arnold Gehlen, 'Heinrich Rickert und die Transzendentalphilosophie' ('Rickert and Transcendental Philosophy'), 1933, in: Arnold Gehlen, *Philosophische Schriften I, 1925-1933*, ('Philosophical Papers'), (Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978), pp. 403-413.

³⁵ Cf. Rickert, *o.c.*, pp. 104-117.

³⁶ This will be dealt with in more detail in chapter four, where Rickert's philosophy of values will be discussed.

Knowledge and the subject-object dilemma

When talking about knowledge we usually distinguish a knowing subject vis-à-vis an object which is known or needs to be known. The latter is a *Gegen-stand*, an *ob-jectum*, that is something that stands over against the knowing subject as something independent in the sense that the act of knowing ought to conform to it, if it wants to realize its aims. The object of knowledge, in other words, is the criterion of the truth or falsehood of knowledge.³⁷ The epistemologically naïve person is inclined to come up with the following explanation of what knowledge is all about: there is this objective reality outside our consciousness (i.e. so-called ‘empirical reality’) about which I have due to the senses (seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, touching) certain impressions; these impressions then constitute correct or true knowledge, when they manage to cover, represent, or depict reality.

This kind of ‘logic’ (*Abbildungslogik*) is rather problematic. Reality as it is in itself, i.e. outside our consciousness and its categories, is very complex, chaotic and thus not rational. (Later Rickert introduces the concept of ‘heterogeneous continuum’ for this ‘irrational’ reality.³⁸) What is the use of a picture of it in our consciousness? It would just be a duplication of the complexity and irrationality of reality, and thus not yield any knowledge or understanding. Obviously, in epistemological terms knowledge is not just a direct, unmediated imagining of an objective, independent reality outside my consciousness. Knowledge is rather the result of concepts which impose a conceptual order on reality. It is put into a rational perspective by the a priori categories space and time, it is structured by the notion of causality, in fact it is ‘subjected’ to start with by the concept of reality. What we therefore need, is another conception of the knowing subject and then also another conception of the epistemological object, the *Gegenstand* of knowledge which is to function as the criterion of its objectivity and truth.

There is, it cannot be repeated often enough, no room for subjectivism in Rickert's epistemology. He rejects, as we saw, solipsism as an absurdity, but also the various brands of spiritualism which have in common that they deny the existence of an objective reality outside human consciousness. In fact, in spiritualism reality is viewed as and reduced to a ‘world of consciousness’ (*Bewusstseinswelt*), as an illusion or a veil or similar metaphysical notions. Maybe, such spiritualism may lead to an enticing worldview, as was, for example, offered, allegedly inspired by Buddhism, by Schopenhauer. However, it does most certainly not yield sound epistemology. Epistemologically as absurd is the skeptical point of view which throws doubt on the possibility of any kind of knowledge. Solipsism, spiritualism, skepticism - Rickert rejects them radically as epistemological absurdities.³⁹

This is not to say, Rickert hastens to add, that we should not engage in any doubt as to the objective reality of ‘things’. Since Descartes' rule *de omnibus dubitandum est* (everything ought to be doubted) philosophers have engaged in such exercises of epistemological doubt. Descartes' doubt, however, was inspired by a false preposition. He believed that the sciences of his days were still philosophically unreliable and stood in need of a solid foundation in man's rationality. So far so good, but he identified consciousness, psyche and logical thought which causes all sorts of

³⁷ Rickert, *o. c.*, p. 1.

³⁸ Rickert fails to distinguish between ‘non-rational’ and ‘irrational’. A stone as such is ‘non-rational’, but a person who in an attack of fury throws a stone at someone else acts ‘irrationally’. I prefer to call the Kantian thing-in-itself ‘non-rational’, and not, as Rickert does, ‘irrational’. However, this is not the place to discuss this distinction in more detail. I follow Rickert's use of the adjective ‘irrational’.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7f.

confusions. Moreover, it is epistemologically incorrect to proclaim philosophical doubt as a remedy for the scientific weaknesses of the day. This is, to begin with, not a systematic but a historical and thus contingent and unsystematic instigation of doubt. It is, however, equally incorrect to believe that epistemological doubt about everything would be of any influence in the specialized sciences. 'It is hard to envisage', Rickert remarks, 'how through it (epistemological doubt, AZ) the views of special sciences, say about the surface of Mars or the functions of the cerebral cortex, ever could be corrected or corroborated.'⁴⁰ Specialized sciences are always in search of substantial truths, whereas epistemology leaves them for what they are, and subjects all knowledge to formal questions: 'It asks: what does it mean that objects are "real"? Thus, it investigates something which is of no consequence to the content of knowledge.'⁴¹ Here we encounter again Rickert's distinction between the content and the form of knowledge, and the epistemological and logical primacy of the form.

One should not take for granted that there is an objective reality outside consciousness. The question is not, if such a reality really does exist, because the answer is obviously affirmative. The question rather is, if, and if so, how this reality can be known, and how it can convey objectivity to the knowledge of it. Once more, this kind of epistemological doubt is irrelevant to the naïve man of practical life, and it is also of no concern to the man of science in his laboratory or library. It is, however, the prime question for any serious philosophical theory of knowledge.⁴² The main issue here is what precisely should be understood by the concept of 'object of knowledge' (*Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*)? Rickert distinguishes three of them.

There is, first of all, the notion of the object of knowledge as a *spatial world-outside* (*räumliche Aussenwelt*). This world is viewed as a reality which stands opposite the I as the unity of body and 'soul' or 'psyche'. The I, in other words, as a psycho-physical subject vis-à-vis an objective reality of things. 'The world-outside is', Rickert adds, 'always there where I am not, and the boundary between myself and it is located on the surface of my skin.'⁴³ It is a spatial reality, it fills space except for the place which I, as a bodily I, occupy. Rickert will dismiss, as we shall see presently, this spatial world outside our bodies as a valid *Gegenstand*, as a valid object of knowledge, much to the obvious chagrin of naïve realists and materialists who tend to proclaim this spatial and material world as the ultimate reality of knowledge. That is, according to Rickert, a legitimate, empirist position to be taken by the naïve man of the practical, everyday life world, and by the man of specialized science. It is, however, a false position, if one wants to grasp philosophically, what the essential nature of knowledge actually is.⁴⁴

But there is a second notion of the object of knowledge, called the *transcendent object* (*das transzendente Objekt*). It is the world as it exists outside my consciousness, including my own body, objectified into a soulless thing. It is, in other

⁴⁰ 'Es ist nicht einzusehen, wie hierdurch spezialwissenschaftliche Ansichten, etwa über die Oberfläche des Mars oder die Funktionen der Grosshirnrinde, jemals korrigiert oder bestätigt werden könnten.' Rickert, *o.c.*, p. 10.

⁴¹ 'Sie fragt: was heisst es, dass Objekte "real" sind? Sie untersucht also etwas, das den Inhalt der Erkenntnis nicht berührt.' *Idem*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴³ 'Die Aussenwelt ist also immer dort, wo ich nicht bin, und die Grenze zwischen mir und ihr liegt an der Oberfläche meiner Haut.' *Ibid.* p. 14.

⁴⁴ Husserl's concepts 'the natural attitude' or 'the natural thinking' is similar. Cf. for example Husserl, *o. c.*, p. 19. Husserl includes, however, 'pure grammar' and 'pure logic' in the sphere of 'natural thinking' which is, of course, quite problematic, as the adjective 'pure' (*rein*) refers also in Husserl's logic to the sphere of the transcendental.

words, the total physical world, including my body and my fellow men. That is, the transcendent object is all of reality, except my I as consciousness and psyche. 'As not belonging to this object remains only my psychical I with its ideas, impressions, feelings, expressions of the will, etc.'⁴⁵ There is no spatial boundary between myself and this transcendent object, because my body, conceptually stripped of its consciousness and psyche, is part of this object. This does, of course, not just pertain to my individual I and consciousness, but holds true of all consciousness and each manifestation of the I in man. In other words, the transcendent object is reality outside my consciousness, including my own body as it exists independent of my awareness of it - my body, so to say, as a thing or object, just as it lies unconsciously on the operating table of a surgeon. Naturally, the transcendent object is not just juxtaposed to my consciousness, but stands over against the total world of consciousness (*die gesamte Bewusstseinswelt*), which is the immanent world (*die immanente Welt*).

The third object of knowledge is the *immanent object* (*das immanente Object*). Up till now we have spoken about the subject in terms of the I with its ideas, impressions, feelings and expressions of the will. That means, within the subject we juxtaposed consciousness and the content of consciousness. We thus distinguish within the subject between this content - the ideas, impressions, feelings and expressions of the will, etc. - and confront it as an object by the subject that issues the ideas, impressions, feelings, expressions of the will, etc. This subject – an a priori, transcendental subject – is without content, is as it were empty. It is pure consciousness, a pure Ego.⁴⁶ Rickert called it 'absolute consciousness' (*Bewusstsein überhaupt*).

Thus, Rickert distinguishes three objects of knowledge and juxtaposes them to three parallel subjects:

Objects:	Subjects:
1. the spatial world	1. the I as body and psyche/soul
2. the transcendent object	2. consciousness and its content
3. the immanent object	3. pure consciousness without content (transcendental, pure Ego)

Which object should then be subjected to epistemological doubt? Let us begin with the third object, the immanent object. There can be no doubt whatsoever that I feel my feelings, experience my impressions, think my thoughts or want my expressed will. The two - pure Ego and content of consciousness - form an inseparable correlation. There is no way to separate the two conceptually. This is the standpoint of immanence which, amazingly, Rickert also called 'positivism'.⁴⁷ The first object, the world of spatial things, can likewise not really be doubted. Its existence is, after all, not less certain than that of my own body. Would this certainty stop, Rickert's asks rhetorically, on the spot where my hand lies, would doubt begin at the tabletop on which my hand rests? The spatial world-outside is as certain as the fact that my body and the supposedly enclosed soul are real. 'Whoever sees the reality of the spatial world-outside or the "things outside us" as a philosophical problem,' Rickert puts it as

⁴⁵ 'Als nicht zum Objekt gehörig bleibt dann nur übrig mein seelisches Ich mit seinen Vorstellungen, Wahrnehmungen, Willensäußerungen usw.' Rickert, *o.c.*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17. Rickert's use of the word positivism is not very clear, nor very consistent but that is in the totality of his thinking a minor point.

a philosophy teacher addressing sophomores in college, 'has not yet understood what the theory of knowledge is all about.'⁴⁸

However, truly problematic in terms of the theory of knowledge is the second, transcendent object which lies beyond, or vis-à-vis my consciousness and its content of impressions, ideas, feelings and expressed will. How is it possible that the world of immanence (the I with its ideas, impressions, feelings and expressions of the will) reaches at the transcendent world of my own unconscious body, the bodies of others, the physical world, etc.? After all, the basic problem of epistemology is this one: knowledge needs an objective reality as *Massstab*, as criterion of objectivity and truth, which one could that be? It is certainly not Locke's matter with its primary qualities, or the world of objects and things of naïve realism.

Naïve realism which is, Rickert repeats time and again, legitimate in the case of the specialized, empirical sciences, is quite popular in philosophy because it is so easy to understand. However, it is epistemologically objectionable. Locke's distinction of the primary (quantitative) and secondary (qualitative) qualities of the transcendent reality, for example, can be helpful or even indispensable to the natural sciences, but it is irrelevant to epistemology, for the simple reason that the allegedly objective primary qualities (extension, movement, position, etc.) are epistemologically as much conceptual as the qualitative secondary qualities (color, temperature, tone, etc.) are. Rickert comes close to Berkeley's position, when he argues that in terms of epistemology both the quantitative and the qualitative qualities of the 'objective' world (Locke's 'matter') belong to the immanent world of consciousness, since they are the result of concept formation. If one defines reality with its primary qualities as an autonomous world vis-à-vis the immanent world of consciousness, and in addition as the source and cause of this immanent world of consciousness – e.g. physiology as the cause of thought and thinking – one engages not only in concept formation, but also in a kind of metaphysical realism. It is in fact a hypostatization or 'ontologization' of concepts which are by definition immanent and conscious.

Epistemological Idealism is, Rickert observes, often defined and even ridiculed as 'dream idealism' (*Traumidealismus*). This would be correct, if epistemological idealism denied the existence of things and objects outside our bodies, if it claimed that we are made to believe through the arousal of our nerves and brains that there still exist other bodies in addition to our psychophysical I's, whereas in reality they do not exist. This is a meaningless point of view, a piece of spiritualistic metaphysics, Rickert concludes. The world of 'objective' things cannot be subjected to any doubt, but epistemologically we must maintain the fact that we bestow this indubitable reality with concepts the moment we try to get to know and understand it. 'Reality' is, as we will see shortly, probably the most elementary concept. But quality, quantity, objectivity, subjectivity, etc. are other concepts which are not components of the 'Ding-an-sich' but belong to the immanent world of consciousness.⁴⁹

Thus, Rickert defines the epistemological dilemma of subject vis-à-vis object in terms of 'immanence' vis-à-vis 'transcendence' – i.e. the I with its ideas, impressions, feelings and expressions of the will vis-à-vis the world of bodies and things, including my own body. How can this epistemological gap be bridged? We shall eventually see that he adds the values to this world of transcendence, and even defines them as the ultimate *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* and criterion of objectivity!

⁴⁸ 'Wer die Realität der räumlichen Aussenwelt oder der "Dinge ausser uns" für ein philosophisches Problem hält, hat noch nichts von Erkenntnistheorie verstanden.' *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁹ See *Ibid.*, 64-70. Also Heinrich Rickert, *Psychophysische Causalität und psychophysischer Parallelismus*, (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1900).

The standpoint of immanence

Let us return once more to the third type of epistemological objects: the immanent objects. They consist of conscious contents (ideas, impressions, expressions of the will, etc.). They are, of course, immediately given and directly experienced realities. These contents of consciousness - the ideas, impressions, etc. - emerge from reality through the senses, since they obviously do not fall out of the skies. (Rickert is, of course, not in need of Berkeley's *deus ex machina*.) Yet, they are immanent, i.e. 'within' consciousness, and in that sense 'ideal', not 'real'. This would mean that the ideas, feelings, impressions, etc. produced by direct experiences constitute the unquestionable object (*Gegenstand*) of knowledge, and not a transcendent reality, like Locke's 'matter', which is independent of human consciousness. Thus, from the standpoint of immanence reality would consist of the contents of consciousness. It is an immediately experienced reality consisting of observations (*Wahrnehmungen*), emotions, willful expressions, and imaginations (*Vorstellungen*). This position could, therefore, also be called *Vorstellungsidealismus*, i.e. imaginary idealism. Nothing can guarantee us that these immanent realities are still something else or more than such contents of consciousness. This then is the *thesis of immanence*, according to which 'everything that exists for me, must obey to the most general condition of being a *fact of consciousness*'.⁵⁰ What then is, according to the immanence thesis, the knowing subject vis-à-vis the known (immanent) object? The concept of consciousness has come up time and again. What is consciousness (*Bewusstsein*), or the conscious (*das Bewusste*)?

There is, to begin with, an instance which feels the experiences, thinks the ideas, undergoes the impressions, wants the expressions of the will: 'the I which is, as the saying goes, conscious of itself and his ideas.'⁵¹ It is consciousness (subject) which contains contents of consciousness (immanent objects). The latter constitute *das Bewusste*, the conscious, i.e. everything that is immediately given and experienced, embodied in impressions and ideas. This is, of course, easily associated with 'knowing': the conscious (*das Bewusste*) as the known (*das Gewusste*). If I am conscious of something, I obviously know it. But Rickert issues a warning here. Knowledge is unlike consciousness the result of *logical* and *rational*, i.e. *theoretical* thinking. However, obviously we can be aware of something without any logical and rational conclusions. This is the case with the irrational in us, as well as in the world of everyday life which we are conscious of without penetrating it rationally and logically. Moreover, there are contents of consciousness - impressions, ideas, feelings, etc. - of which we are rationally and logically ignorant. Knowing, knowledge, the known - they constitute *theoretical behavior* in which logical rationality plays a dominant role. This differs, for instance, from aesthetic behavior which is often devoid of knowledge and rather illogical and irrational. A good example is to be seen in listening to music: the contents of music enters our consciousness and is thus *bewusst*, but for musical enjoyment there is no need for (musicological) knowledge of the score. It is therefore not *gewusst* by the ordinary listener.⁵² This is also illustrated by our memories. Remembering things from the past is a conscious activity, but it is usually not a theoretical behavior, as it is in the case of history as a scientific discipline. In fact, memories are often very illogical, irrational, emotional.

⁵⁰ 'der Satz der Immanenz (...), wonach alles, was für mich da ist, unter der allgemeinsten Bedingung steht, *Tatsache des Bewusstseins* zu sein.' *Ibid.*, p. 27. (Italics by Rickert)

⁵¹ '...das Ich das sich, wie man sagt, seiner selbst und zugleich seiner Vorstellungen bewusst ist.' *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵² *Idem.*

Three sorts of conscious objects ought to be distinguished: (a) logically permeated, rational objects; (b) real or possibly ideal objects which are logically impenetrable, yet known and recognized; (c) objects in consciousness which are neither logically permeated, nor acknowledged or known. These three types of conscious objects correlate with *three types of conscious subjects* which Rickert discusses in reversed order: (c) the most comprehensive subject (*das umfassendste Subjekt*), or consciousness which has conscious content without knowing anything theoretically about it; (b) the theoretical or knowing subject which knows its objects even though they are irrational; (a) the knowing subject which knows its objects as being rational (logical) as in the case of mathematics or formal logic. Later, when we follow the objective path, we shall see that the last type (a) predominates in transcendental philosophy. In the standpoint of immanence, it is the first type (c) which plays the leading role.⁵³

Rickert issues another warning still. In the tradition of transcendental philosophy one should not equate consciousness with spatial realities, to which ordinary language often invites, or rather seduces us. The expression 'within consciousness' is often equated with 'in our head'. Yet, this is not very helpful since in the theory of knowledge consciousness is not an entity in space and time. It is to be conceived of as a 'brainless' subject (*hirnloses Subjekt*). Naturally, thinking, knowing, being aware and being conscious need physical brains, but rational and empirical knowledge of the (nature and functions of the) brains is irrelevant to transcendental epistemology. Brains are the proper objects of investigation and analysis within the specialized science of neurology. This, we may add, is also the case with cognitive psychology. But neurology and psychology have nothing of theoretical interest to offer to epistemology, just as epistemology could not contribute a thing to the neurologist's or the psychologist's empirical knowledge. Moreover, epistemology's doubt with regard to transcendent reality is irrelevant to neurology and psychology. They had better stick to their naively realistic belief in the objectivity of their fields of research.

Finally, one should not equate consciousness and subject, because, as we saw before, consciousness can be divided in a subjective part (that what thinks, feels, expresses, etc.) and an objective part (impressions, ideas, feelings, expressions, etc.). In other words, there is consciousness which is not a subject but an (immanent) object. In addition, although this is hard to imagine, one must, as in a hypothesis, keep open the possibility of an unconscious subject which is correlated with the unconscious and irrational transcendent reality. An example, I may add, could be the complete emptiness of the mind in mysticism. This is admittedly hard to fathom, because we are only able to imagine conscious objects (impressions, ideas, etc.). Yet, an unconscious and thus irrational subject can be 'constructed' logically and hypothetically as the subjective, opposite pole of transcendent, objective reality. It sounds a bit over-ingenious and quibbling, Rickert admits, but we must conclude that if there is consciousness which is not a subject, there can be subjects which are not conscious.⁵⁴

The subject as empty form

Our journey through the world of immanence should next explore what then in terms of epistemology subjects actually are and do. We have seen that the standpoint

⁵³ *Idem.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

of immanence juxtaposes within consciousness a subject that imagines, feels, thinks, expresses and objects which are the impressions, ideas, imaginations, feelings, expressions of will, etc. Its point of departure, in other words, is that everything we acknowledge and know, including our own bodies, is an immanent object and as such dependent upon our consciousness.⁵⁵ Now, that is at first sight quite odd because, if this were true, the immanent were dependent upon the immanent. Should there not be a transcendent compared to which immanent (as well as transcendent) objects are related? Would this subject be something absolute? The I as subject should remain part of consciousness (unless one takes refuge in metaphysics), yet should it also be transcendent? Let us leave the question for the moment and focus on the nature and functions of the subject..

Here we run into a formidable problem. We can speak of and about the immanent objects (impressions, ideas, feelings, etc.), but how is it possible to speak about the subject of consciousness, the I that experiences, thinks, feels, expresses? Here we enter rather thin air. Particularly men of science who are used to dealing with a solidly empirical, objective reality to be investigated by a solidly empirical researcher, will suffocate in it. What is worse, Rickert adds still, the moment one enters into the a priori 'reality' of the transcendental subject, ordinary language with its empirical concepts – 'reality', 'objects', 'subjects', 'things', etc. – deserts us. We must resort to metaphors and parables. Maybe, all this cannot be said, is *vielleicht unsagbar*⁵⁶, because the moment I speak *about* the I it is reduced to an object. Yet, even in everyday life we want to speak about ourselves and then not as objects but as subjects. In terms of grammar, the nominative must become an accusative, yet remain a nominative!⁵⁷

Rickert tries to solve this problem as follows. To begin with, he calls to mind the memories we have. I can remember myself as a child. But in this act of remembering I duplicate myself into the I-then which is an object to the I-now which is a subject. Moreover, I know myself, I know of myself, I know that I am. Again, I am a knowing subject and at the same time a known object. Naturally, the knowing I is not the same as the known I.⁵⁸ 'The yesterday known and the today knowing I are not identical, but only *one part* of the I is the known of yesterday, and the *other part* is the knowing I of today. (...) We may conclude then that the *complete* I can never be knowing and known at the same time.'⁵⁹

Now, how do we arrive at a subject which is not an object? Rickert employs a method which he uses quite often: thinking away components of a phenomenon, conceptually stripping it successively of its constitutive elements or dimensions. The concept of consciousness, he argues, is often used thoughtlessly, as if it were a coherent thing. This is wrong, it is a complex and always changing world which we

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34. George Herbert Mead who distinguished within the Self an 'I' and a 'me' argued in a similar manner, albeit within the context of empirical social psychology: 'The "I" does not get into the limelight. ... I talk to myself, and I remember what I said and perhaps the emotional content that went with it. The "I" of this moment is present in the "me" of the next moment. There again I cannot turn around quick enough to catch myself. I become a "me" in so far as I remember what I said.' Mead, *o. c.*, p. 174.

⁵⁸ Rickert, *o.c.*, p. 38. Once again, this is similar to Mead's distinction between the 'I' and the 'me'.

⁵⁹ 'Das gestrige gewusste und das heutige wissende Ich sind nicht identisch, sondern nur der *eine Teil* des Ich ist das gewusste gestrige, der *andere Teil* ist das wissende heutige Ich. (...) So kommen wir zu dem Ergebnis: das *ganze* Ich kann nie wissendes und zugleich gewusstes sein.' (Italics by Rickert) *Ibid.*, p. 39.

reduce for clarity's sake to two main components: the immanent subject and the immanent object. Now, in order to arrive at a proper understanding of what the I is as nominative, i.e. as pure subject, we should mentally strip consciousness of all its objective elements and dimensions, i.e. of its predicative contents. What remains is the subject for itself (*das Subjekt für sich*) which cannot be reduced into an object. This contentless, formal, pure subject which is hard to imagine and impossible to define with the help of ordinary language, is the counterpart of the immanent objects and the transcendent objects.⁶⁰

We saw earlier that Rickert distinguishes three types of subjects which are correlated to three types of objects. Let us retake once more the first, psycho-physical subject, i.e. the I as my body plus a psyche/soul. Now, Rickert proposes, let us de-objectify and think away one hand first, the second hand next, the legs, the torso, and finally even the head with its brains. What is left in this physical reduction in the form of a *thought* experiment is the psychic sphere as a border concept (*Grenzbegriff*). It is the concept of a bodyless and brainless subject. Its counterpart is the massive, transcendent objectivity consisting of things and objects, including my own body. The psycho-physical subject has become less and less physical and more and more psychical until it has reached the ultimate concept of the psychical I vis-à-vis a massive objective reality, including my own body. Rickert continues this de-objectifying, 'de-ontologizing' process, stripping the psychical subject too of all possible characteristics and objective elements/dimensions. In fact, as long as we think of the psychical subject as some sort of substance or entity in our consciousness (vis-à-vis the immanent and transcendent objects) it is still invested with objectivity and reality. If we think all that away, we arrive at a final border concept: the *subject as an empty form*. Rickert calls it the epistemological subject (*das erkenntnistheoretische Subjekt*).

At the end of the de-objectifying, object stripping process we are thus left with a concept of the subject as *a contentless empty form*. Without this *subject form* or *formal subject*, Rickert claims, we would be unable to even think about subjects!⁶¹ He uses still another concept for this subject form or formal subject: *Bewusstsein überhaupt*, which can be translated as *absolute consciousness*. Or better still, since *Bewusstsein* still carries the concept of being (*Sein*), *Bewusstheit* – the absolute conscious status. It will play a crucial role in the second part of our journey, the objective path, but Rickert introduces it here in order to complete the picture of the subject-component of the subject-object relationship in knowledge. This idea of a formal subject - subject conceived as a contentless, empty form - may be odd at first sight but is on second thought quite understandable. After all, we all know from experience what we mean when we say 'subject', just as we understand immediately what the word 'form' means since all reality consists of content and form. Now then, the concept 'subject form' is that which cannot be objectified, which cannot be thought as an object, and is yet understandable as long as we do not relate it to real things but to a conceptually isolated, formal dimension only. 'With each real subject we also

⁶⁰ *Idem*. Rickert elaborates here on Kant's concept of the 'transzendente Apperzeption'. Similarities and differences of this pure I and the 'transzendentales Ego' of Husserl cannot be discussed here. It would take us too far away from the main path alongside which Rickert leads us now. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42

think of this form of subject, that is, if we think at all of a subject distinguishable from an object. All it needs is to think of the form itself, while we disregard all content.⁶²

It stands to reason that even the idea of an I ought to be eliminated from the subject form. The contentless absolute consciousness can never be *my* consciousness since that would re-introduce notions of substance and content again. 'Everything individual in the I, or everything that made me into this unique and special, real person, is objectifiable. It must therefore as object be juxtaposed to the formal, unreal, epistemological subject which is the end of the series of subjects.'⁶³ Absolute consciousness is formal and timeless, comparable to mathematics and the rules of formal logic. But we should at all times keep in mind what Rickert says about its main function: it is because of the subject form that we are able at all to think, speak and write about subjects. That is precisely why it is called the epistemological subject! In fact, Rickert adds, we should refrain from speaking about a subject which experiences impressions and thinks ideas, since such a subject is still not an empty form. We are confronted here with 'a nameless, general, impersonal consciousness.'⁶⁴ It is indeed an absolute consciousness (*Bewusstsein überhaupt*), *Bewusstheit* which is impossible to translate but means something like the 'state of being conscious'.⁶⁵ But again, it is actually not wise to speak in ontological terms about this absolute consciousness. Actually, Rickert thinks and writes about it in functionalist terms. We cannot determine what it *is*, but only what it *does*.

All this leads to an epistemological question which is, incidentally, not asked within the standpoint of immanence, but very crucial to Rickert's brand of transcendentalism: is there outside the immanently conscious objects (the impressions, ideas, feelings, expressions of will etc.) which depend on the formal, epistemological subject still another reality which is transcendent and consists of 'things in themselves' which do not carry the character of consciousness, or are unable to ever become immanently real objects?⁶⁶ In the second half of our journey we shall discover that this other (transcendent) reality to which the absolute consciousness as formal subject is correlated, does exist indeed. It is a realm of values which are unreal - they don't 'have' being - but they are valid or invalid. Not being (*Sein*) but validity

⁶² 'Bei jedem realen Subjekt denken wir diese Form des Subjekts mit, falls wir überhaupt ein Subjekt im Unterschied vom Objekt denken, und es kommt nur darauf an, die Form für sich zu denken, indem wir von allem Inhalt abstrahieren.' *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶³ 'Alles Individuelle am Ich oder alles, was mich zu dieser einmaligen, besonderen realen Person macht, ist objektivierbar. Es muss daher als Objekt dem formalen irrealen erkenntnistheoretischen Subjekt gegenüber gestellt werden, das am Ende der Reihe von Subjekten steht.' *Ibid.*, p. 43f.

⁶⁴ 'ein namenloses, allgemeines, unpersönliches Bewusstsein'. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁶⁵ Not surprisingly Rickert and his assistants had quite a few Buddhist students from Japan. See Glockner, *op. cit.*, 229-234. There is, of course, a kind of selective affinity between the mystical elements of buddhism and (neo)Kantian transcendentalism. Rickert even taught in private an extremely rich 'samurai', named Kuki. With him he read Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason'. There were two advantages for the philosopher: first, he enjoyed to once again subject Kant to a close reading; second, he could improve his private finances which had suffered great losses during the inflation years of the 1920's. Kuki claimed himself that his name meant 'Neunteufel' (Nine Devils), and in the family circle of Rickert he was always called 'Baron Neunteufel'. Mrs. Rickert Verburg gave me a witty poem written by Rickert for a festive occasion in the family, in which he praised his Japanese student, in particular because of his financial succor. See also Glockner, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

⁶⁶ Rickert phrases this question, which I paraphrased, as follows: 'gibt es ausser dem formalen erkenntnistheoretischen Subjektzugehörigen oder von ihm abhängigen, immanenten, bewussten Objekten noch transzendenten Objekte als Realitäten? Oder: gibt es ausser den vorgestellten Dingen, die Inhalte eines Bewusstseins überhaupt sind, noch "Dinge an sich", die als transzendent reale Dinge nie den Charakter der Bewusstheit tragen oder nie immanent reale Objekte werden können?' *Ibid.* .p. 46f.

(*Geltung*) is what makes values 'real'. The formal subject bestows reality on them. But that is all for later. At this moment we are still moving forward on the first path exploring the immanent standpoint.

Transcendence in the immanent standpoint

We must now return once more to the concept of transcendence, since we are able to describe and analyze it more precisely after we have received a better understanding of the concepts of immanence, immanent objects, and formal subject as absolute consciousness. Rickert begins with a typically Idealistic statement that must be offensive to all empirist realists. In terms of the theory of knowledge, i.e. epistemologically (and thus not ontologically or metaphysically), transcendent 'reality' cannot occupy the space in which we live and in which the natural sciences conceptually locate their moving (evolving, functioning, changing) objects.⁶⁷ The reason is that, if it comes to knowledge, this space is filled with immanent realities. All of the so-called 'objective' facts within spatial reality, including those of the natural sciences, are in epistemological terms 'contents of consciousness': observations (*Wahrnehmungen*), theories (*Vorstellungen*), and yes often also expressions of the will. Again, as Kant emphasized, the thing-in-itself does exist. It would be absurd to deny this ontological fact. But the point is epistemological: the thing-in-itself as it exists outside consciousness cannot be known, yet it is to be noted that 'thing-in-itself' is a concept all the same! Indeed, it is to be conceived as the irrational substance of our sensual experiences and observations which are to be rationalized by formal concepts – the notion of space to begin with. It belongs to our consciousness. The same holds true for time: past, present and future are immanent facts of consciousness (*Bewusstseinstatsachen*), and thus is everything that somehow exists temporally, immanently real. But here again language plays nasty tricks on us. The word 'transcendent world' and a sentence like 'the world of the senses is immanent' sound spatial. 'In' and 'outside' consciousness, as we have characterized immanence and transcendence, are very misleading expressions. As was said before, Rickert actually longed for a formal language stripped of the empirical connotations of ordinary or scientific language – a language which could avoid such hypostatizations. He settled for ordinary language and the necessity to express his ideas with lengthy explanations.⁶⁸

In any case, at the start of a theory of knowledge one can only say about transcendence that it represents that which is not immediately given and experienced. It is a reality in and of itself which is beyond (or better: prior to) experiences and initially (logically) independent of the absolute consciousness. It has been said that

⁶⁷ This reference to the evolving, functioning and changing objects of the empirical sciences reminds one of Ernst Cassirer, *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff. Untersuchungen über die Grundfragen der Erkenntniskritik*, ('Concept of Substance and Concept of Function. Investigations about the Fundamental Problems of the Critique of Knowledge'), 1910, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2000. Collected Works, vol. 6). Rickert's conception of the transcendent objects is predominantly substantive (almost 'corpuscular'), but comes often also close to Cassirer's more modern functionalism. However, since his epistemological focus is primarily on what goes on in the observing, thinking and judging subject the difference between a substantive and a functional view of 'objective' reality is not very relevant. Moreover, Rickert would probably argue that Cassirer's discussion pertains to the specialized, empirical sciences, not to his own brand of transcendental epistemology. Rickert, incidentally, did exchange a few brief letters with Cassirer but did not incorporate his extensive writings in his own publications, neither did Cassirer in his.

⁶⁸ Rickert, *o.c.*, p. 54f.

transcendence, viewed as independence of consciousness, cannot exist since transcendence transforms into immanent consciousness the moment one starts thinking about it with the help of the concept transcendence. This Rickert says, is as incorrect as the statement about the subject changing into an object the moment one starts thinking and talking about it. The basic fault of this kind of criticism is that one defines thinking as imagining (*vorstellen*) and a concept as a kind of imagination (*eine Art Vorstellung*). But what we have here is *judging* (*urteilen*). The judgment 'the transcendent is *not* a content of consciousness' is valid and not at all a contradiction.⁶⁹ (We will later return to Rickert's theory of judgments.)

The concept of 'transcendent object' is problematic, since this object is apparently independent of a subject which is not possible, since in our thinking subject and predicative object always presuppose each other. Yet, we saw before that we could and conceptually should as in a theoretical hypothesis coin the concept 'unconscious subject'. In that case we can also speak of a correlated 'unconscious - i.e. transcendent - object.' It is admittedly very thin conceptual air, but Rickert believes that in the conceptual world which is, to phrase it in modern terms, a virtual world, such constructions are possible, admissible and even unavoidable. He then comes to the following concluding, negative definition of the concept of transcendence. It is something of which it is denied that its 'destiny' would be to become a content of consciousness, or to be imagined by consciousness.⁷⁰ Kant used, of course, a less cumbersome description of the transcendent world: *das Ding-an-sich*, the thing in and of itself, without the interference of subjective consciousness. But, as we have just seen, Rickert would comment that the concept of '*Ding*' already contains as concept or as name the interference of subjective consciousness.

One of the major problems of the epistemological concept of transcendence is the naive realism by which we usually think and reflect about it. For example, there is a tenacious tendency to interpret the relationship between subject and object in physiological terms. The idea behind it is that physiology could function as a reliable, scientifically under girded foundation for epistemology. Rickert rejects that conclusion relentlessly. 'There is really nothing more simple', he argues, 'than the following chain of thought: here is a table; its color, solidity, temperature etc., which is all subjective, content of consciousness, pure experience, immanent. That can surely not be doubted. But all this is, at the same time, just the effect of the table, as it exists really, independent of any experience of the subject. Without transcendent table there would be no immanent table. As a result one may not cast doubt on the one or the other.'⁷¹ The typically realistic idea behind this chain of thought is, of course, that reality outside consciousness is the main cause, the *causa efficiens*, of the impressions and sensations of it in the human mind. So far so good, but what sort of cause is the realist thinking of? Certainly not the epistemological subject of the absolute consciousness (*Bewusstsein überhaupt*), but the psycho-physical object - the body invested with psyche or consciousness. In fact, the realist arguing in physiological terms views the subject-object relationship in terms of physiological processes between bodies. That is certainly correct within the context of the natural-scientific,

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁷¹ "Es gibt wirklich nichts Einfacheres als diese Gedankengang: hier ist ein Tisch; seine Farbe, seine Härte, seine Temperatur usw., das alles ist subjektiv, Bewusstseinsinhalt, bloße Empfindung, immanent. Daran dürfen wir gewiss nicht zweifeln. Aber das alles ist zugleich nur Wirkung des Tisches, wie er an sich, unabhängig von jeder Empfindung des Subjekts real besteht. Ohne transzendenten Tisch gäbe es auch keinen immanenten Tisch. Folglich darf man den einen so wenig wie den anderen in Frage stellen." *Ibid.* p. 64.

specialized discipline of physiology, but it does in no way whatsoever bear on the epistemological problem of immanence and transcendence in knowledge.

Let us recall once more the three types of subject correlated with the three types of object, as has been explained before. It was the third type of subject - the epistemological one as a contentless form⁷² - which was correlated to a very problematic transcendence. Transcendence is a problem, not physiologically, but epistemologically, because it is permeated by immanence due to the concepts which are imposed on it. Even the realities of the natural sciences, e.g. physiology, are not real in and of themselves but real due to the concepts which the knowing subject employs and applies in order to understand them. Color, temperature, solidity, and yes the overarching concept of reality - they are not intrinsic components of the table but conceptually imposed upon it by us who are epistemological subjects. Rickert speaks of 'the immanence of all spatial beings.'⁷³ Through our words, concepts, in short language, we spread, as it were, a blanket of consciousness and thus of immanence over reality. But it is in addition not the reality of neutral things and objects, Rickert argues, but the 'unreal reality' of values which through judgments constitutes the object (*Gegenstand*) that correlates with the epistemological subject and provides it with validity and objectivity. This at first sight strange point will return presently.

But we must repeat what was said before: Rickert rejects any sort of spiritualism or solipsism which somehow denies the existence of transcendent reality. A thing does, of course, not disappear, he mocks, when I close my eyes and have no experience of it. Reality did exist before I was born and will continue to exist after my death. My parents were not called into existence by me and my consciousness. This is ontologically obvious and indubitable. But transcendental realism, which is Rickert's position elaborated in the second part of his *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*, does not argue ontologically, let alone metaphysically, but epistemologically and logically. From this point of view, transcendent objects, including those of the natural sciences, are permeated with (conceptual and linguistic) immanence, unlike the 'unreal reality' of mathematics, formal rules of logic, and values.

We can now leave the path towards the standpoint of immanence which ended up in an insoluble problem: the allegedly transcendent object of knowledge appeared to be also immanent which is problematic, because it cannot serve as the much needed objective criterion (*Massstab*) for the knowing subject. Indeed, the standpoint of immanence must eventually evaporate into solipsism, or deteriorate into psychologism and metaphysics. It is a dead end road. Rickert then invites us to follow him on the second path which will lead us to *the standpoint of transcendence*, that is to an epistemology which avoids the pitfall of (naïve) realism, because it stays in the tradition of (Kantian) *Idealism*, yet remains loyal to *realism* as well. It is in search of a transcendent reality as objective criterion, outside subjective consciousness, yet also outside the objective world of things and events of everyday life experience and of the specialized sciences. This objective criterion, we shall see, lies, according to Rickert, in the 'unreal reality' of the *values* which constitute a 'realm' that is not founded upon being but upon validity: values 'are' not (*Sein*) but they are valid (*Gelten*). The

⁷² 'Das Bewusstsein als Subjekt ist keine transzendente Seele; es ist überhaupt keine Realität.' ('Consciousness as subject is not a transcendent soul; it is no reality at all.' *Ibid.*, p. 73.)

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 63. The thesis that there is a logical difference between the natural sciences on the one hand and (transcendental) epistemology on the other, and that there is no conflict between the two, is essential in Rickert's thinking. We will discuss it again in the chapter on the natural and cultural sciences. It returns several times in Rickert's *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*, but is elaborated specifically in the section 'Das Transzendente als Ursache' ('Transcendence as Cause'), *o. c.*, pp. 62-73.

entrance to this realm is the *judgment (das Urteil)*. Let us follow Rickert on this path which will lead us eventually to his comprehensive, systemic philosophy of values - the subject of the next chapter.

Reality as an empty form

It must be asked again: what is the object of our knowledge (*Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*)? As we have seen so far, it is not the transcendence of the realists, nor the immanence of the subjectivist idealists. Actually, it is no reality in the common sense of the word whatsoever. In addition, in knowledge the object is always correlated to a subject. So the question emerges next: what is the knowing subject? We begin with the subject and move from there to the object.

We must return once more to the theory which states that knowledge consists of impressions and observations (*Vorstellungen*) which are immanent contents of consciousness and as such represent, or rather depict, real objects. It is the tenacious representational logic (*Abbildungslogik*) according to which knowledge consists of the ascertainment of a concurrence of a picture and an original. However, there is a major problem here: (transcendent) reality and thus its (immanent) representations or pictures present a chaotic, immense, constantly changing and moving pluriformity. It is, as Rickert calls it, a *heterogeneous continuum*, because it does in itself not possess any homogeneity, nor any fixed and fixing borders.⁷⁴ This well-nigh oceanic, and in itself irrational heterogeneous continuum cannot possibly be portrayed naturalistically by our limited consciousness. Knowledge consists of an ordering of this chaotic material through concepts and is, therefore, a conceptual transformation (*Umbildung*) of the (immanent) imaginations and impressions.⁷⁵ We run now into two basic epistemological questions: first, which (immanent) instance performs the conceptual transformation of the heterogeneous continuum; second, what is the (transcendent) origin of the (immanent) imaginations and impressions? We begin with the second question which is, as Rickert phrases it, 'the epistemological problem of reality'⁷⁶

What do we focus on, when we ascertain (which is, of course, a judgment!) that something is *real*? The question - and this is crucial in Rickert's epistemology - relates to *form*, not to content! Take for example the statement 'this sheet of paper is real'. The word 'real' is an empty form. 'Real' is not 'paperish' or so. It is a form which we put on substance - in this case a sheet of paper. Or, in a typically neo-Kantian expression, we bring the sheet of paper under the concept of reality. Or, to use another metaphor, the concept of reality functions as an empty shell. In fact, Rickert argues, we must distinguish between *the real* as the content filled object or, for that matter, as the material of scientific research, and *reality* as the conceptual form according to which the content is molded, i.e. transformed from chaotic material into conceptually ordered and thus understandable reality. He uses the often quoted example given by Kant who once said that hundred *real Taler* do not contain one bit more than hundred *possible Taler*. That is, the *content* of the concept of 'hundred real *Taler*' differs from

⁷⁴ See for an explanation of the 'heterogeneous continuum': Chapter One, 1(c).

⁷⁵ Mach's thesis of conceptual parsimony, *Denkökonomie*, comes to mind here. Rickert, however, does not refer to him. He was in general rather parsimonious in referring to other philosophers, except when he was criticized by them. Cf. Ernst Mach, 'Die ökonomische Natur der physikalischen Forschung', lecture at Vienna University, May 25, 1882, published in a volume of lectures: Ernst Mach, *Populärwissenschaftliche Vorlesungen*, (Leipzig, 1896). I made use of a Dutch translation in a volume of essays: Ernst Mach, *Natuurkunde, wetenschap en filosofie*, ('Physics, science and philosophy'), transl. by W. de Ruiter, (Amsterdam: Boom Meppel, 1980), pp. 72-94.

⁷⁶ 'das erkenntnistheoretische Problem der Wirklichkeit', Rickert, *o.c.*, pp. 120-123.

that of 'hundred possible *Taler*' only by the addition of the conceptual *form* of reality. That must be seen as sheer form, because it does not change anything in the content. Thus, the knowledge or judgment that something is real poses the problem of reality as form.⁷⁷ We experience (transcendent) reality in daily life immediately, while the sensations, images, pictures of it in our consciousness (i.e. the immanent objects) are chaotic, formless, indeed in need of conceptual forms such as 'reality', 'quality', 'quantity', etc., if we want to acquire structured knowledge about it: 'this sheet of paper is real, white, and light-weight.'

The words 'real', 'white', 'light-weight' but also 'this', which we, as it were, impose on the content (the sheet of paper) are *general*, abstract, timeless and spaceless, whereas the experienced content (this particular sheet of paper as an immanent object) in contrast is *individual*, i.e. concrete, time and space bound. Those words can be applied to other objects than this particular piece of paper, to a butterfly for instance. But in the case of our example we focus our attention on this concrete and specific sheet of paper, not on a butterfly, or for that matter on a chair, a dog, or another 'piece of reality'. All this means epistemologically that we cannot think and speak about (immanent) contents - about 'reality' - without mentioning the forms in which we mold them conceptually. Content without form is inexpressible (*unsagbar*). It is indeed because of form that we enter the theory of knowledge. 'All problems of the theory of knowledge are for that reason', Rickert concludes, 'problems of form, and everywhere the question arises: to which should the *form* of the content of knowledge *orient* itself so that the knowledge becomes true, i.e. becomes true knowledge?'⁷⁸ That is, in epistemology we are concerned not just with the object of knowledge (*Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*) but with the object of the form of knowledge (*Gegenstand der Erkenntnisform*).⁷⁹

This must be applied also to statements of fact and that has far reaching consequences for the empirical sciences, as they claim correctly to be sciences of facts. Facts too constitute a form which is conceptually imposed on the contents the sciences investigate. It is in Rickert's terminology the empty form of pure actuality or 'facticity' (*reine Gegebenheit oder Tatsächlichkeit*). Pure and empty - that means, general, ahistorical, non-experiential, devoid of conscious content. 'Facticity' is added to (immanent) contents as a form without which these contents would remain sheer chaos, epistemological wilderness. Yet, 'facticity' itself is not inherent to the contents. It is a priori and added to it by the previously discussed pure Ego, or absolute consciousness. We must return to the latter presently, but should first draw an important conclusion which pertains to our later discussion of the natural and cultural sciences (ChapterFive): if scientific work wants to maintain its sense and usefulness, it must presuppose that its material is molded by the conceptual form of reality, i.e. is actual and factual. But that leads to the epistemological question, what actually the object of knowledge is that claims: 'this or that content is real'. Or, in other words, what is the ground of its truth? This ground cannot be found, as the standpoint of immanence falsely claims, in the (immanent) impressions and ideas because they are

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁷⁸ 'Darum sind *alle* Probleme der Erkenntnistheorie Formprobleme, und überall entsteht die Frage: wonach soll die *Form* des Erkenntnisinhaltes sich *richten*, damit die Erkenntnis wahr, d.h. Erkenntnis wird?' *Ibid.*, p. 127. This is an intriguing formulation of the question. I believe it should be read as follows: 'to which *form* should the (immanent) content of knowledge be oriented in order to ascertain truth, i.e. true knowledge.'

⁷⁹ *Idem.*

the raw material which is to be molded by the form 'reality' or 'facticity', or if you wish 'truth'.⁸⁰

Rickert finally reaches the destination of his epistemological journey, when he decides to further investigate the *knowledge act*, that is the act of attributing conceptual forms (real, actual, factual, true, etc.) to immanent contents (experiences, impressions, ideas, etc.). If we conclude that something is real or a fact, we express a *judgment (Urteil)*. Till now our search for the epistemological object of knowledge has been negative. We have investigated various roads which were unsatisfying, although in many respects enlightening and at some points not totally incorrect. But Rickert invites us now to look at the problem of knowledge and its criterion of truth and objectivity in a positive manner: *knowing is an act, namely judging*: 'Each knowledge starts with judging, progresses to judgments and can only end in judgments. Therefore, as "actual" knowledge it consists only of acts of judgment.'⁸¹

The epistemological act

If we define knowing in terms of the act of judging, we choose for *the primacy of the practical reason above the theoretical reason*. Or, phrased differently, we define the theoretical reason which generates words and concepts in terms of the practical reason which generates acts. But here another change is involved still. From the standpoint of immanence knowledge is an affair of consciousness. Reduced to its essence, knowledge is from this standpoint, as we have seen, an immanent imagining (*Vorstellen*) of the equally immanent impressions (*Wahrnehmungen*). Now we must go beyond that position and define knowledge in terms of an *act of judgment* by which a form, e.g. 'reality' or 'truth', is imposed on experiences and impressions. Knowledge is then transformed from something conscious (*Bewusstes*) to something known (*Gewusstes*). What then is the object (*Gegenstand*), i.e. the objective criterion (*Massstab*) which is independent of the judging subject and therefore transcendent? Also, what then is the judging subject which imposes its judgments on the immanent impressions and experiences? We are back at the initial question of the subject-object relationship of knowledge, but this time knowledge is defined in terms of an act, not an inner-consciousness affair - the act of judging.

In epistemology we are, of course, not interested in the question what precisely, say psychologically, the act of judging *is*, but we want to know, what judging *does* and *means* to knowledge. The concept 'act of judging' is not an ontological question, is not concerned with *Dasein*, but a purely epistemological one, concerned with significance (*Bedeutung*) and sense (*Sinn*). It is, Rickert adds, a concept of performance (*Leistungsbegriff*), or, as we would say today, it is a concept of *function*.⁸² This is, according to Rickert, a simple but little acknowledged distinction. After all, we can look at objects in terms of what they in themselves really are. We then confine ourselves to the description and analysis of their *Dasein*, there sheer being there, without asking questions like "what is their sense and meaning?", or "what are their functions?" In the sciences such a description and analysis is quite

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁸¹ 'Jede Erkenntnis beginnt mit Urteilen, schreitet in Urteilen fort und kann nur in Urteilen enden. Sie besteht also als "aktuelle" Erkenntnis allein aus Urteilsakten.' *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁸² Once again, this resembles the main argument of Ernst Cassirer, *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff. Untersuchungen über die Grundfragen der Erkenntniskritik, o.c.* The difference between Rickert and Cassirer is the fact that the former argues in terms of systematic transcendentalism, while the latter argues in terms of the specialized discipline of the history of philosophy.

normal. Rickert calls it *Daseinswissenschaft* which focuses its attention on reality as being-without-sense (*sinnfreies Dasein*). But we can also approach objects by asking what they mean and do to other objects beyond their sheer, meaningless and senseless being. In that case, the objects interest us because in their performance they point beyond their own being towards other objects for which they apparently carry sense (*Sinn*) and significance (*Bedeutung*). This is no longer meaningless and senseless being, but reality filled with meaningful, sensible performance (*sinnvolle Leistung*).⁸³

What then is the act of judging? What is, in Rickert's wording, its meaning structure (*Sinnstruktur*)? The answer is simple: judging is giving a positive or a negative answer to a question. Judging is, to phrase it in contemporary words, digital because it is saying yes (*bejahen*) or it is saying no (*verneinen*) to a question – it is plus or minus, one or zero. This is comparable to the act of wanting (*wollen*) which is also bifurcated: we desire something or we despise it. In moral and in cognitive judgments we approve (*billigen*) or disapprove (*missbilligen*). Such an act of judging is, of course, not an uninvolved observing of reality. On the contrary, in judgments we take positions vis-à-vis one or more *values*! That is, we value things, rate them, estimate them - positively (approving) or negatively (disapproving). True or false judgments are always evaluating acts.⁸⁴

Thus, knowledge is not a neutral, value-free, and passive observation, but it is an act of judging in terms of an approval or a disapproval, based upon positive or negative values. But we should keep in mind that this brand of epistemology is *Idealistic* by nature. We make observations and receive impressions (*Wahrnehmungen*). These immanent objects, however, are in and of themselves rather chaotic contents which must be molded and ordered by *forms* in order to become coherent, solid and reliable knowledge. Well then, in the case of judgments these forms are the approvals or disapprovals of the act of judging which in their turn again are related to positive or negative values.

Meanwhile, Rickert emphasizes the fact that we are dealing here with knowledge, and thus with a purely *theoretical* approving and disapproving related to the theoretical values of truth/falsehood, or reality/unreality. If I say 'this is a sheet of paper', I do not express a purely neutral 'fact', but issue (usually without being aware of it) a judgment in which I impose forms like 'facticity' and 'reality' on my impression of the sheet of paper. But these impositions are values because the question to be answered after the statement was made, is something like this: "is it *true*? Is this object *really* a piece of paper?" The question is to be approved or disapproved. Now, Rickert acknowledges that all this is rather strange at first sight. It is strange, because in everyday life we usually rate and evaluate in terms of *non-theoretical* values, such as the hedonistic values (pleasure/displeasure, lust/pain), aesthetic values (beautiful/ugly), or ethical values (good/evil).⁸⁵ In epistemology, however, these non-theoretical values should be distinguished from the cognitive, theoretical act of judging. Only truth/falsehood and reality/unreality are admissible in our theoretical judgments about reality - or, more precisely, about the immanent objects, i.e. our impressions and experiences of reality. Thus the meaning of

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 140f. Gottlob Frege's important distinction of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* will be discussed in Chapter Four. Rickert does not distinguish as sharply between 'sense' and 'significance', as Frege does.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 165. This is similar to Brentano's epistemology in which the positive or negative judgment (*Urteil*) plays a crucial role. The difference again is that Brentano sees the act of judging as a psychological act which Rickert rejects as a psychologistic fallacy. For Brentano see Stegmüller, *o. c.*, p. 2-17.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 170. We will return to this in more detail in the next chapter.

sentences like: this smell is pleasant, or: this picture is beautiful, or: this will is morally good, remain outside consideration.¹⁸⁶ These sentences, Rickert adds, are strictly speaking also truth claiming judgments, but fall outside the realm of epistemology because they refer predominantly to hedonistic, aesthetic and ethical values and ratings. If the question of their truth is raised, it is very hard to decide whether hedonistic, aesthetic and ethic evaluations are correct or incorrect, true or false. In epistemology which searches theoretically for objectivity and truth, we should abstain from them.

We must now direct our attention to the knowing subject. It is, so much is clear by now, the approving or disapproving, evaluating and rating subject. However, it should not be confused with the individual, historical knowing person of flesh and blood. Rickert disagrees with Wilhelm Dilthey on this point. In his philosophy Dilthey warned not to isolate a knowing subject from the total human being of flesh and blood. He stood, as we saw before, in the tradition of *Lebensphilosophie* and rejected any attempt, such as Rickert's, to isolate the knowing function from the rest of the human being. This may be the correct thing to do, Rickert counters, in psychology or in history as scientific disciplines, but it is inadmissible in epistemology which works with a theoretical concept of knowledge and searches for the objectivity of the cognitive performance of judging. Epistemology is not to be confused with philosophical anthropology. Its mission is much more modest. 'After all, we only want to understand the essence of theoretical thinking and its capacity to arrive at objectivity.'¹⁸⁷ The theory of knowledge is only concerned with the theoretical behavior of the subject, and is in that sense 'a theory of theory'.¹⁸⁸ But it must be repeated once more, the subject acquires reliable knowledge only by issuing judgments. That is, knowing is not only theoretical but above all practical as well: it approves or disapproves and thereby relates objects to positive or negative values.

The categorical imperative of judgments

At this point of our journey which nears its end, another dimension must still be added to the act of judging in terms of positive or negative values. Rickert calls it the judgment's necessity (*die Urteilsnotwendigkeit*), or its commanding dimension expressed in verbs like 'to have to', or 'ought to' which contrasts with 'being' - in German: *das Sollen* as opposed to the 'facticity' of *das Sein*.¹⁸⁹ It is obvious that the theoretical and non-theoretical values to which the judgments relate, cannot be characterized by the concept of being. Values do not 'exist' in terms of sheer being, as things, human beings, animals, and also events and happenings exist. Values cannot be experienced by the senses. That is, values 'are' not, but are *valid* or not valid. Not being, or existence but validity is their 'essence', although one should actually not talk about them in such essentialist terms. In any case, in and of themselves values are not real. They acquire reality ('being') by attaching them to real beings through their judgments. We want these judgments about reality to be 'true' in the sense of 'valid'. If that is accomplished, we may even experience a hedonistic sense of certainty. (The famous German 'Aha-Erlebnis' comes to mind here.) But, Rickert hastens to add, this

¹⁸⁶ 'Der Sinn von Sätzen wie z.B.: dieser Geruch ist angenehm, oder: dieses Bild ist schön, oder: dieser Wille ist sittlich, bleibt deshalb hier völlig ausser Betracht.' *Ibid.*, p. 169f.

¹⁸⁷ 'Wir wollen ja lediglich das Wesen des theoretischen Denkens und seine Fähigkeit zur Objektivität verstehen.' *Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹⁸⁸ 'eine *Theorie der Theorie*'. (Italics by Rickert). *Idem*.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 171-180.

is a psychological category which should be left out of the exclusively theoretical, scientific orientation of his epistemology. It certainly cannot function as the theoretical foundation of the judgment's necessity we are discussing here.

Rickert did (and probably would) not phrase it this way, but I am inclined to call this necessity of judgment an *epistemological categorical imperative* which is again to be seen and interpreted as an empty and timeless form attached to equally timeless, ahistorical values as forms (true-false, real-unreal). Unlike the hedonistic values (pleasure and pain) which are historical, time bound and individually real, the theoretical values (true-false, real-unreal) are *logical* values and thus, like the rules of mathematics, ahistorical, timeless and formal. More relevant still, these theoretical values are independent of our individual contents of consciousness, i.e. our impressions, imaginations, feelings, expressions of the will. The latter are not general or universal but individual and time bound, since they have a beginning at our birth and find their end in our death. Theoretical values, on the contrary, are and remain valid independent of our birth and death. They are universal and general like the rules of mathematics. Because of the universal and general nature of the theoretical, logical values we cannot judge, i.e. approve or disapprove, vicariously but are bound by a 'power' which we are obliged to acknowledge and obey. To give a simple example, when I hear tones and am asked, if I hear anything, I *must*, I *have to* admit that I hear tones: 'Yes, I hear music.' Without this necessity, this *Sollen*, I would remain stuck in uncertainty, and either not judge at all, or decide to abstain from any judgment. This certainty gives my yes-judgment the character of unconditional necessity. It is a 'thought necessity' and 'judgment necessity' (*Denknotwendigkeit* and *Urteilsnotwendigkeit*)⁹⁰, that is, a categorical imperative. Naturally, this pertains equally to statements of fact. They acknowledge the necessity that one has to judge this and this way and not differently. It is the necessity of the *Sollen* which is not a causal-psychic coercion but a logical ground: it is a logical *Sollen*, not a causal *Müssen*.⁹¹

Rickert then draws a spectacular conclusion which he himself labeled as 'our "Copernican" standpoint'⁹²: the assignment of reality and truth to the impressions and observations (*Wahrnehmungen* and *Vorstellungen*), and *not* these impressions and observations themselves, decides what is real and true, or unreal and false. Such an assigning *Urteil* can only be accomplished by the interference of logical values (true/false, real/unreal), and by valuing, rating judgments in the form of admitting (*bejahen*) or denying (*verneinen*). These values are, in the theoretical sphere of epistemology, not specific, historical and individual, but timeless, general and universal. They are above all couched in the necessity of the verb 'ought to' (*Sollen*). In the final analysis then - and this concludes Rickert's epistemological search for the *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*, i.e. for the object of knowledge that functions as the criterion (*Massstab*) of truth and objectivity - the object of knowledge and criterion of its objectivity and truth is not the thing-in-itself as the naïve realists believe, nor the impressions and observations as the immanent idealists claim. The object of theoretical knowledge consists of the theoretical values (truth/falsehood, reality/unreality) which are ontologically 'unreal' yet valid or invalid, plus their

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 177

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 179, footnote 1. It is for a non-native user of the German language hard to distinguish *Müssen* from *Sollen*. Maybe the following simple example may help somewhat: all human beings must (*Müssen*) eventually die; a prisoner condemned to death has to (*Sollen*) die on a set date. *Müssen* (have to) is naturally causal, *Sollen* (ought to) on the other hand is morally, or legally causal.

⁹² 'unser "kopernikanischer" Standpunkt', *ibid.*, p. 182.

inherent necessity, their intrinsic *Sollen*. The searched for *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* is thus the combination of values and necessity of judgment - *Werte* plus *Sollen*. They are, of course, not immanent, intrinsic components of consciousness, but as transcendent as the objects and facts of the empirical, everyday experiences and of the specialized sciences!

Rickert called this epistemological position *transcendental Idealism*. It remains loyal to the German *Idealistic* tradition, since the knowing and judging subject focuses on the immanent contents of consciousness consisting of the impressions and observations of a transcendent reality.⁹³ Yet, it is at the same time also *transcendental* in that the final *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* is found in the 'unreal' (but not metaphysical) reality of values with their compelling and obliging *Sollen* character as essential components of man's judging acts (*Urteile*). To sum up, epistemological object (*Gegenstand*) and objective criterion (*Massstab*) consist of the logical values (true-false, real-unreal) couched in an epistemological categorical imperative and expressed in practical judgments. This peculiar *Gegenstand*, Rickert adds, is as objective and as transcendent as the empirical objects of the specialized sciences which believe and trust in their given nature and objectivity. Their philosophically naïve empirism is, given the logical and methodological framework of the specialized sciences, understandable and legitimate. It is, however, within philosophy as a general science that such a naïve epistemological empirism is fallacious and objectionable.

Conclusion

With this conclusion we have reached the final destination of our epistemological search for the object and the subject of theoretical knowledge. We are, as Rickert observes correctly, in everyday life and in the different scientific disciplines as well, thoroughly embedded in empirism. We do not cast doubt on the objectivity of facts, organic beings and inorganic things. Yet, if we do not discard epistemology as a valid philosophical enterprise, one may wonder with Kant and the neo-Kantians, as to how valid or true knowledge of the surrounding reality and of our own bodies and minds as parts of this reality, can come about at all. It is a basic and directly understandable fact that we perceive this reality through our senses. We hear, taste, see, feel reality (organic and inorganic 'things', and historical events) incessantly, and it is quite obvious that these sensations and perceptions are the raw material of what we usually call 'knowledge'. It is then quite convincing also that there must be an 'instance' which organizes this raw material into a structured and systematic material, using categories like 'time', 'space', 'quality', 'quantity' and 'causality' as organizing instruments. This 'instance' is not the 'I', or the 'mind' or the 'psyche' of empirical psychology, because they are still predicative objects of the knowing subject, which is itself obviously not part of this reality. It is not real or empirical, but a priori and transcendental.

When we are prepared to engage in epistemology, Rickert asks us to shed our everyday life, often naïve realism or empirism. Scientists, who want to reflect upon

⁹³ In the next chapter we shall see that Rickert has called his position also *transcendental empirism*. After all, he never denied the existence of an objective, transcendent reality (Kant's thing-in-itself) which is the proper object of the empirical, specialized sciences and the very source of human experiences and sensations. This is indeed an empirist dimension of his epistemology, but the Kantian idea that the proper object of knowledge is not the thing-in-itself that cannot be known but the immanent 'deposit' of the experiences and sensations in consciousness is its Idealist dimension.

epistemological issues, are also invited to bracket their legitimate belief in the objectivity of the facts which are being investigated within the boundaries of their specific disciplines. That reminds one, of course, of Husserl's *epochè*. In fact, Husserl is next to Rickert one of the few philosophers who elaborated on Kant's transcendentalism. There are, however, basic differences between Rickert's neo-Kantianism and Husserl's phenomenology. In particular Husserl's *Wesensschau* as the phenomenological technique that allegedly could bridge immanence and transcendence is alien to Rickert's epistemology and philosophy of values.⁹⁴ Reduced to its essence Rickert's epistemology claims that in knowledge the subject consists of a formal, empty, absolute consciousness (*Bewusstsein überhaupt, Bewusstheit*), which is a transcendental and pure (non-empirical) Ego, juxtaposed to objects which consist of theoretical (logical) values as empty, timeless and abstract forms. They assist the necessity to judge (*Urteilsnotwendigkeit*), which is also an empty form. In logically necessary, binary judgments (true/false, real/unreal) theoretical knowledge is supposed to occur or happen.

Meanwhile, this phrasing is, in terms of Rickert's transcendentalism, all wrong because verbs like 'to consist of', 'to juxtapose', 'to assist', 'to occur', or 'to happen' suggest transcendence and content, not immanence and forms. However, the problem is that there are no appropriate words available. There is no useful transcendental language and script like that of mathematics by which all of this can be explained. So Rickert roams around linguistically in the abstract abodes of transcendentalism hoping to make himself clear. He leads us into domains of thought - a sort of chimerical, surrealist world of empty forms - in which indeed normal language can no longer function. Much of what he thinks and wants to say is, as he says himself regularly, *unsagbar*, i.e. inexpressible. Indeed, words do not only objectify things but provide them also with substance. Rickert believes that the concepts of his transcendental philosophy ought to remain *empty forms* which allegedly mold chaotic and irrational contents (the transcendent and immanent realities) into a rationally understandable cosmos. But in the end, we are left with conceptual emptiness only, for which there is no appropriate language. Maybe Rickert should have taken to heart Ludwig Wittgenstein's advise to remain silent, when things cannot be said. But he goes on talking and often gets lost in an abstract thicket of empty concepts and meaningless words. Reading the last pages of his book, where he roams around in a conceptual haze, one is reminded of the mystics who define their God in terms of Emptiness and consequently withdraw into silence - *muein*, the Greek verb for being silent, which is the virtue of the mystics.⁹⁵ Rickert's epistemological

⁹⁴ This is not the place to enter into a detailed, comparative analysis of the similarities and differences of Rickert's and Husserl's transcendental epistemologies. That would be an interesting exercise though.

⁹⁵ As I related earlier, several Japanese philosophy students came to Heidelberg in the 1920's in order to learn the intricacies of neo-Kantian transcendentalism. This is not amazing, since in the Zen-Buddhist and Shintoist traditions emptiness and empty forms play a predominant role. Once, during a stay in Japan as a visiting professor, I participated in a tea ceremony held in one of the many Japanese temples. Afterwards I asked the Japanese colleague who accompanied me, what the meaning of the ceremony actually was. He smiled and said that this was a typically Western question: the ceremony had to have a meaningful content. He explained to me that it has no meaning, no substance, no content. It is an empty form which puts one at rest, which in a way empties the mind and the soul. It does so by simple forms such as the very sparse furniture (just a wooden table and a few *tatamis*), the simple shape of the bowl from which one drinks the tea (with the imperative that the bowl is to be held by both stretched hands), and also the gestures of the hostess who pours the tea and of the guests who drink it. Rickert, who incidentally was an avid tea drinker, would certainly have sympathized with this Japanese ceremony and its inherent formalism. But then, he would also realize that this formalism was primarily

God – his *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* – is a trinity (subject, object and value-related judgment) which is as empty as the Christian trinity of the mystics. Yet, he decides not to withdraw into mystical or Wittgensteinian silence.

A distinct departure from Rickert's neo-Kantian transcendentalism is presented by two philosophical currents which take their departure from *language*, but elaborate on that in different ways. There is the Anglo-Saxon linguistic philosophy which was once labeled the 'linguistic turn', initiated by Ludwig Wittgenstein.⁹⁶ There is next the French school of thinking about language in which particularly Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida played leading roles.⁹⁷ The notion of deconstruction comes, of course, to mind here. Rickert would in all probability have sympathized with it, but next ask the question what then after this deconstruction reliable, valid, if not true knowledge, is all about. This is not the place to enter into a comparative analysis. It suffices to remark that the phenomenon of language which has plagued Rickert so much because of its alleged insufficiency to verbally 'catch' the abstract unrealities of transcendentalism, became the central philosophical issue, drawing philosophy away from transcendental epistemology.

As to the Anglo-Saxon 'linguistic turn' and the French 'deconstructionists' Rickert would in all probability remark that in the end both of them reduced epistemology to the empirical (mainly sociological, psychological and historical) study of language. That may, he would argue, easily result in unconscious forms of psychologistic, sociologistic and historicist metaphysics. A telling example is John R. Searle's *The Construction of Social Reality* which comes close to Kant's epistemology, but deviates from its transcendentalism because of his stern defence of (typically Anglo-Saxon) realism. His focus on institutions and institutional facts results in fact in an ontology which in the end is more part of the sociology of knowledge than transcendental-philosophical epistemology.⁹⁸

The French philosophers in particular easily end up in grave logical anomalies. Foucault and Derrida, for instance, may 'deconstruct' the subject and the author of written or spoken texts, claiming the primacy of the discourse and the 'intertextuality' of the printed or spoken texts. But then there remains still the simple fact that it is Foucault and Derrida who as authors and subjects invented, expressed and published the very notions of 'discourse' and 'intertextuality', and impose these categories as forms on the sense impressions of their readers and audiences. 'No one else did', I am confident, Rickert would remark wryly. Next the question suggests itself, how the subject in them went about, what, in other words, the nature is of the epistemological process at work in them. Rickert's subject – and both Foucault and Derrida would probably sympathize with him on this point – is not the empirical author of the texts, but – and this they would find hard to fathom – the transcendental pure Ego as the sheer possibility of subjectivity and of knowledge.

aesthetic and maybe even hedonistic, but not theoretical and epistemological. It may bring about a kind of mystical, phenomenological *Wesensschau*, but it will not render any rational, value related, theoretically sound knowledge of reality.

⁹⁶ Richard M. Rorty (ed.), *The Linguistic Turn. Essays in Philosophical Method*, 1967, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992). The 'classic', although disputed text is Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 1936, (New York: Dover Publications, n.d.).

⁹⁷ E. Berns, S. IJsseling, P. Moyaert (eds.), *Denken in Parijs. Taal en Lacan, Foucault, Althusser, Derrida*, ('Thinking in Paris. Language and Lacan, Foucault, Althusser, Derrida'), (Alphen a.d. Rijn, Brussel: Samson Uitgeverij, 1981), p. 23.

⁹⁸ John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, (New York: The Free Press, 1995; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1995). We return to Searle's constructionism within an institutional context in the Conclusion.

Finally, there is a structural weakness in Rickert's epistemology which renders it to my mind illogical. Right at the beginning of his epistemological journey he claims that the object of knowledge (*Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*) is also its criterion (*Massstab*) of objectivity, truth, or reality. But object and criterion are theoretically and logically two different things. An object is, in the final analysis, a passive thing, an unstructured content, an *ob-jectum*, which in Rickert's own theory must have been shaped, structured or molded by conceptual forms in order to be an object at all. Criterion, on the other hand, is an instrument for action, i.e. for judgment - a sort of measuring rod which is used by the subject, when it makes judgments. Now, at the end of his epistemological chain of arguments, Rickert introduces necessity (*Sollen*) as the essence of judgments, and judgments as the essence of knowledge. He next argues that the necessity of judgment is the main criterion for its theoretical truth or falsehood. So far so good, but he then proclaims this criterion (*Massstab*) as the object (*Gegenstand*) of knowledge. Well, it may be a criterion but it is very hard to fathom how necessity (*Sollen*) as a characteristic of the evaluating judgment could be an object (*Gegenstand*) of knowledge. If object and criterion are mixed up theoretically, one ends up in theoretical confusions which no language could ever put into words, let alone clear them up.

In the concluding pages of his epistemological treatise he engages in finely tuned analyses of the values which in fact are a prelude to his general and systemic philosophy of values. That leads us beyond his epistemology. It is time now to leave the epistemological considerations, and focus our attention on his philosophy of values. It will be the main subject of the next chapter. After that, we turn to his ideas about natural-scientific and cultural-scientific concept formations, for which the road was paved by his epistemology and his theory of values.