

Problem-based History in Nicolai Hartmann and the Neo-Kantians

Jacinto Paez

The objective of this presentation is to analyze Nicolai Hartmann's conception of the history of philosophy and its relation to the neo-Kantian tradition. In his earlier writings, Hartmann held a conception of the history of philosophy that shared at least two features with the neo-Kantian thinkers. First, he believed in a conceptual connection between systematic philosophy and the history of philosophy. Second, he sought to elucidate this connection by reference to the concept of 'philosophical problem'. Hartmann developed a type of methodology for the history of philosophy, namely problem-based history, which was already present in the historical works of the likes of Kuno Fischer and Wilhelm Windelband.

In the case of their neo-Kantian predecessors, they were in the wake of Hegel's philosophy. They were preoccupied with the overcoming of Hegelian metaphysics. For instance, Windelband criticized the parallelism between the structure of the logical system and the ordering of the historical development of philosophy that was characteristic of Hegel's history of philosophy. The concept of philosophical problem, at least for Wilhelm Windelband, the most important promoter of the model, was part of an attempt to re-introduce an empirical dimension in the history of philosophy without completely abandoning the idealist framework of German classical philosophy. Philosophical problems were for him expressions of the quest for the self-knowledge of mankind, the recognition of its own rationality unfolding over time, but the articulation of those problems was a matter of historical research, i.e., it was contingent.

For Hartmann too the problem-based conception of the history of philosophy was the approach that allows the comprehension of the historical development of reason. The concept of problem was the linking point between the system of philosophy and its history, and, in this particular sense, he shared the neo-Kantian standpoint regarding the way to understand the historicity of thought. The unity of history is understood through the idea of problem: the problem of self-knowledge of mankind and the world. But, at the moment of clarifying the details of the model, Hartmann introduced two innovations. In the first place, when the topic of the multiplicity of particular problems was to be considered, Hartmann departed from Windelband's and other neo-Kantians solution. Hartmann held the view that the multiplicity of problems corresponded to the internal articulation of reason, being the contingent factor only the expression of problems by individual authors. In the second place, Hartmann moved on to interrogate the possibility of divergent historiographical accounts realized under the model of a problem-based historiography. The reconstruction of the history of philosophy became in this sense a

proper philosophical problem in itself. It expressed the necessity of the philosophical system to articulate its own development through time, i.e., its own historicity. Hartmann returned to a position rooted in Kant's idea of a History of Pure Reason (KrV A852/B880), therefore he was able to formulate and develop a question that was not obvious in relation to problem-based historiography, namely, how is a pure history of philosophical problems possible. In this sense, Hartman offers an original stance in relation to the neo-Kantians, especially with the members of the Baden School.

With this thematic exposition in mind, we shall try to determine with more thoroughness the nature of these two divergences between the conceptions of a problem-based history of philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann and the neo-Kantians. We will try to show how these innovations are grounded in a different understanding of the systematic nature of philosophical thinking.