

Z. A. Sokuler. Hermann Cohen and the philosophy of dialogue

When people say about the ideas that they are ahead of their time, they of course do not mean their timeliness, but their brilliance and depth. Speaking about the monograph written by the Professor of the Department of Philosophy of Moscow State University Z. A. Sokuler, it is possible to say without any exaggeration that she was ahead of her time.

But in this case some reservations are needed. First of all, due to the fact that this work was ahead of its time for the national research space. While philosophy of dialogue for a Western intellectual is one of the modern perspective philosophical trends, which has its tradition, founder, followers, and quite substantial stock of research literature, philosophy of dialogue for Russian philosophical thought is limited to two outstanding people, though scarcely connected with each other, — Mikhail Bakhtin and Martin Buber. In the West, the names of H. Cohen and F. Rosenzweig have firmly established themselves among of the classics of Western and Jewish thought, but in our literature the study of their work is at the very beginning. And, of course, to call them representatives of philosophy of dialogue and to justify not only their relationship but also a decisive contribution to the principles of this philosophical movement is such a development of research thought, which even for the European consciousness is bold and controversial.

Emphasizing the Jewish roots in the dialogical tradition in philosophy can also be called bold and original. The author of the book seems to highlight two story lines in the formation of a philosophical movement called the philosophy of dialogue: the transformation of Kant's ideas of transcendental philosophy related to all parts of the system — the theory of cognition, ethics, philosophy of religion — and liberal interpretation of Judaism as a religion of reason. Both of these lines are well coordinated in the work of one man, the heir of the main intentions of Classical German Philosophy, Jewish Hermann Cohen, who became the founder of a new philosophical direction. The usual characteristics of Cohen as a founder of the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism naturally focus on his adherence to the spirit of Kant's transcendental philosophy and limitations of the interpretation of this philosophy, which the Marburg followers did, but the assignment of his work in the tradition of the philosophy of dialogue opens up new and broad perspectives in the study of this German-Jewish thinker. In the first case, the theory of cognition, which acquires the features of the logic of cognition in Cohen's works, is distinguished as a main focus of his philosophical system, but in the second case, it is the ethics and philosophy of religion. Again, the logic of cognition proposes a main set of ideas interpreted in a special way for ethics and philosophy of religion, but Judaism provides them with a common focus in this interpretive work, on the one hand, and on the other — provides basis for separating ethics and philosophy of religion.

We shall enter a reservation that the interpretation of Cohen's philosophical work made in Z. A. Sokuler's monograph is not unique and has its supporters and opponents among Western researchers of Cohen. The researchers of the German philosopher's heritage can be conditionally divided into two groups: the first focus on Cohen's general theoretical achievements, considering his Jew-

ish studies at the end of his life to be quite compatible with the efforts of the founder of the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism. The others, however, believe the influence of the Jewish roots to be decisive when Cohen chose his general theoretical orientation. With the best will to get away from a clear definition of her position, which is welcome, the work of our philosopher should be referred to the second group.

The task — to reveal the origins of the philosophy of dialogue in the philosophical position of Hermann Cohen — is solved by the author through the presentation and justification of the two inter-related themes: Judaism as a religion of reason and the new concept of the subject, which is characteristic for the ethics and philosophy of religion of the German thinker.

Z. A. Sokuler tries to present Judaism as a religion of reason by providing the proof of unfair attitude to Judaism from Kant and the eligibility of interpretation suggestions about the Jewish faith from Cohen, which interpret all of the postulates of the Jewish faith only by means and capabilities of the mind. The arguments, put forward by the author against Kant and relying upon the positions of Cohen and his famous predecessor in defending Judaism as a religion of reason of Moses Mendelssohn, can be summarized as follows: elementary smattering of Judaism, subjectively unconscious rejection of Judaism by Protestant Kant and, in fact, proposal of a utopian model of the religion of reason, which is to oppose all existing religions. Kant's model of the religion of reason suggests singling out a moral component in every religion and removing all the rest — ceremonial, ritualistic, mythical, and others — as being contradictory to reasonable grounds. Neither Mendelssohn nor Cohen objected to this interpretation of religion of reason, but they tried to prove that such is exactly Judaism. Sokuler finds a "lever of Archimedes" in Mendelssohn's works, which is capable, correcting Kant, of complete justification of Judaism before the mind: a new understanding of the subject, who socializes only owing to the community that keeps its traditions and hands them down to future generations, and the Jewish community was designated to play such role.

This intention, overcoming Kant's metaphysical concept of the subject, according to which the subject is a self-sufficient intelligent individual, establishing the norms of his own social behavior, is successfully developed and elaborated by Hermann Cohen.

First of all, he corrects Kant in the *thing per se*¹, and in the interpretation of the formal character of the moral law through the laws of the community. Interpreting objectivity the Kantian *thing per se* epistemologically, as an idea, an ideal of scientific cognition aspiring to completeness, Cohen also makes changes in the characteristics of the subject of scientific cognition, because Kant's *thing per se* deals not only with external objects, but also with the transcendental subject. What Kant understood as given to the human mind acquires the character of the predetermined, the aim of the development of the individual in Cohen's works; i.e. the substantial characteristic of the subject changes to the existential one.

¹ Here I use the wording used by the author, but I have to make a reservation as for the deviation from the accustomed and fixed translation of Kant's *Ding an sich* ('thing-in-itself'). In my opinion, firstly, this change in translation does not make a principal difference; secondly, Kant time and again uses the phrase *Ding an sich selbst*, which should be translated as 'thing per se'.

As for the ethical *a priori* of the subject, according to the well-known researcher the Cohenian ethics P. Schmid, "Cohen does not read Kant individually, but socially and ethically"². That is a moral act of a man is justified only in the presence of a moral community. Echoing with the position of Mendelssohn is more than obvious here.

According to Sokuler, the "ontological turn" in the transformation of the concept of the subject, which the philosophy of religion by the Marburg philosopher continued, is already laid in this interpretation of Kant proposed by Cohen. Z. A. Sokuler insists precisely on ontological understanding of those changes in the interpretation of the subject in Cohen's philosophy of religion, which are often taken for purely methodological, as they deal with the fundamental characteristics of the human being.

The main notions of Cohenian philosophy of religion, which substantiate his "ontological turn" in the interpretation of the subject (and here the author of the work is completely in line with the position of the majority of researchers of the German philosopher's work), are the concepts of correlation and uniqueness (*Einzigkeit*). The concept of uniqueness becomes a concept that determines the distinction between philosophy of religion and ethics. Kant, however, does not separate these domains, and philosophy of religion is identical to ethics. The concept of correlation as a method permeates the whole system of Cohen's philosophy, but it acquires special productivity in his philosophy of religion.

In ethics, according to Cohen, the individual is cognized as a representative of the human race, i.e. in the unity (*Einheit*) with the humankind. Ethics reveals this truth. But revealing the truth of human individuality, exclusivity and uniqueness is the task for philosophy of religion. Thus, the philosophy of religion is justified through the doctrine of the individual, and along with ethics the German philosopher seeks to give it this very meaning. "The primary character of the distinction between 'uniqueness' and 'unity'," emphasizes Adelman, "is manifested in the fact that this results in the purifying effect in the relationship between 'ethics' of scientific philosophy and... 'religion'"³.

The correlative approach, according to Z. A. Sokuler, is already applied by Cohen in his theory of cognition when the thing per se, understood as an endless task, the ideal of completeness and wholeness, serves as a correlate of the cognition itself. But he plays his leading role in the philosophy of religion of a Marburg neo-Kantian, becoming an effective intellectual tool for the transformation of Judaism into the religion of reason, i.e. helping to reasonably explain all the religious doctrinal theses and thus depriving them of any mythology and mystery.

² Schmid P. A. *Ethik als Hermeneutik: systematische Untersuchung zu Hermann Cohens Rechts- und Tugendlehre*. Würzburg, 1995. S. 158. Schmid refers at this to a passage from Cohen's work "Kant's foundations of ethics" (3rd edition): "Moral consciousness originates from the society's thought about laws. As moral does not root in the subject's feeling, but should be founded in objective law, so do we find out now that this law, in fact, rests upon the society's thought, which is the only that has sense. This society of law becomes the society of legislation and consequently the legislator. And it leads to the society of absolute objectives. Thus, the society of autonomous essence contains formal moral law". (Cohen H. *Kants Begründung der Ethik* // Cohen H. *Werke*. Bd. 2 / Hrsg. H. Holzhey. Hildesheim; Zürich; New York, 2001. S. 227).

³ Adelman D. *Ursprüngliche Differenz. Zwischen Einzigkeit und Einheit im Denken von Hermann Cohen* // *Man and God in Hermann Cohen's Philosophy* / ed. by G. Gigliotti, I. Kajon, A. Poma. Padova, 2003. S. 40.

First of all, of course, Cohen is talking about the correlative relationship between the individual and God, which can be explained only on the basis of morality. In human existence the correlativity is peculiar to the relationship "I – Thou". This is the correlation that is capable of connecting the unity of the human race and the uniqueness of the individual in a non-contradictory way, i.e. of connecting ethics and philosophy of religion. This is the only conclusion that Cohen proposes from his understanding of the uniqueness of the individual; this conclusion does not oppose the individual to the society and does not turn him or her into a self-sufficient and closed monad.

From the basic correlation between God and the individual, according to Cohen, follow all other correlations: between reason and Revelation, between existence and Creation, between history and messianism. Insisting on the correlative relationship between these phenomena, the German philosopher finds nothing contradictory in their correlation, and he finds nothing super-rational in the presence of Revelation and Creation. In Judaism as Cohen's religion of reason, Revelation becomes an indicator and a guarantee of the human reason and his morality, Creation is those of the development as the possibility of improvement of created nature, the prophets are indicators and guarantees of the future just human society.

The author of the work fairly considers messianism to be the most important in Judaism, calling it the "culmination" of religion of reason of the German philosopher. It leaves us perplexed that Z.A. Sokuler did not use in her analysis of Cohen's philosophy the work that has remained the only one translated into Russian for a long time: Cohen speech at the V World Congress for free Christianity and religious progress "The role of the Jewish in the religious progress of humanity"⁴, in which he is delighted with the idea of the Messiah, deriving the concept of humanity from it: "Truly," exclaims Cohen, "if the Jewish religion did not bring anything other than the messianic idea of the prophets, it would be a great cultural source of moral mankind"⁵. And at the same time he is trying to justify the continued expectation of the Messiah by the Jewish by noticing the impossibility of equating the Messiah and Christ, because the Messiah is destined for the salvation of the whole human race, but Christ came into the world for the salvation of every separate individual.

Moreover, the German philosopher emphasizes the great importance of the Jewish Messianic affect of hope, which gave strength to the Jewish people during the most difficult periods of their history and which can help modern Christianity avoid nihilistic and pessimistic sentiments.

It would be fair to say that the author of the work somehow missed the critical remarks to Cohen's position in his understanding of the essence of Judaism, only hinting that such remarks existed. Filling in this gap, we would like to refer to the opinion of two Russian Jewish scholars, young in those times, D. Koigen and A. Gurliand.

David Koigen did not doubt that Cohen's philosophy "is important to us only to the extent that it is needed for Judaism developed by him. Judaism has grown up with him and is a hidden motive of all his philosophical direction"⁶. He believes that the German philosopher in all his work was possessed by the

⁴ See: Коген Г. Значение еврейства в религиозном прогрессе человечества // Теоретические и практические вопросы еврейской жизни. СПб., 1911.

⁵ See: Ibid. P. 15.

⁶ Койген Д. Платоно-кантовский иудаизм // Теоретические и практические вопросы еврейской жизни. СПб., 1911. С. 21.

secret thought of the synthesis of philosophy and Jewish truth. According to Koigen, Cohen synthesizes the transcendentalism of Plato and Kant and Judaism, solving the antinomies of mythologism and rationalism, individualism and collectivism, mysticism and humanism. Continued rationality of knowledge, legal collectivism of morality and humanism of human culture are the main ideas that Cohen opens by correlatively existing ones both in philosophy and in Judaism. Therefore, Koigen believes the main merit of the German philosopher to be his attempt "to coordinate the consciousness of the Jewish world with a broad wave of world idealism in the New Age"⁷.

However, this coordination, according to D. Koigen, is achieved at a heavy cost: by too liberal interpretation of the teachings of Judaism, and even by its direct perversion by H. Cohen. Historical Judaism and Jews have different views on the place of a real individual in the Jewish beliefs and on its absolutely rationalistic character. The Russian colleague of the German philosopher points out that, transforming an individual into a legal entity and dissolving him in state legal relations, Cohen unfairly and thus erroneously denies moral and individual concept of conscience and the idea of personal immortality in Judaism.

Koigen accuses the German philosopher of the fact that his system Judaism has lost its living breath of faith, having become a rationalized scheme. But real Judaism, according to the Russian thinker, has its own mythology and its mystique as fundamentally irrationalized components of the living Jewish faith. Moreover, the mythological element of Judaism has become unconscious base that conditioned Cohen's philosophy. Koigen notes that Cohen failed "to do without 'the birth from nothing', without 'revelation'". The latter moved to the other side of consciousness, it rather became his guiding star instead of being an engine"⁸.

Arkady Gurliand in his articles also draws attention to the conscious rejection of the myth-making component of the Jewish community in Hermann Cohen's philosophy. As well as Koigen, he believes that "Cohen is not only philosopher and scholar working in the general cultural field, but he is also an outstanding Jewish thinker in the best sense of the word (not that a thinking Jew!), the one who substantiated Jewish worldview and provided one of the most interesting syntheses between cultural humanity and its guiding ideals, on the one hand, and religious truth inherited from the spiritual past of his people, on the other hand"⁹.

Gurliand considers this synthesis in Cohen's philosophy to be quite successful due to the fact that the German thinker seeks to build its own philosophy, basing it on a certain system of values and truths of Judaism. However, this objective-value approach, as opposed to the subjective-relativistic one, along with unique advantages and benefits is also coupled in Cohen's philosophy with obvious drawbacks and errors. A. Gurliand finds in the philosophical system of the German neo-Kantian philosopher a gulf between his theory and the concrete practice of Jewish life. Speaking of general eternal cultural values of the Jewish religion, Cohen completely ignores its historical dimension; the issues of national practices remain outside the scope of his attention and study. And this, according to Gurliand, is not just failing, but the very fact of the internal contradictions of a philosophical system of Cohen, for which morality is justified only by the moment of deed, action (*Handlung*).

⁷ Ibid. P. 37.

⁸ Ibid. P. 34.

⁹ Гурлянд А. Проф. Герман Коген // Новый восход. 1914. №16. С. 8.

The most complete synthesis of philosophy and the religion of the Jewish community, according to the Russian researcher, is made by Cohen in ethics. Only through the prophets does scientific ethics for the first time acquire understanding of its subject — the notion of a moral personality, which Hellenic culture could not provide. Besides the religion of the Hebrew prophets, who “gave the world two great ideas — the basis of any human morality: the idea of a moral personality saving her soul through repentance... and the idea of God as a guarantee of the triumph of truth in history, as a pledge of the moral principle in human and international relations”¹⁰. Cohen reveals the ethical meaning of the messianic idea of Judaism, which produces the idea of universality, social equality and the concept of united humanity.

However, the trends of identification of ethics of the Jewish religion, in Gurliand’s opinion, comprise both the strengths and weaknesses of the Cohenian social and cultural justification of the Jewish community. The religious position of the German philosopher is criticized by his Russian colleague in terms of the eschatological perspective of Judaism. According to Gurliand, it is the eschatological perspective that makes it possible to move from abstract theoretical construction of Cohen’s ethico-theology to concrete historical representation of the Jewish community. It is eschatology that returns individual dimension, lost in the pan-logical system of the German philosopher, to ethics. It is eschatology that generates the mythological feeling of the soul of the Jewish religion “murdered” by the rationalist schemes of the Marburger. In short, the Russian researcher believes that the eschatological perspective opens another aspect of the Jewish religion, ignored by Cohen but no less important, which was presented in the prophets, namely its irrationality in the apocrypha, mysticism, Kabbalah, where “it touches the innermost recesses of the human heart, the strings that make our eschatology is moving closer to the deepest currents of modern thought and modern religious quests”¹¹.

In Z.A. Sokuler’s opinion, the direct followers of the traditions of philosophy of dialogue, which was founded by Hermann Cohen, were Franz Rosenzweig and Emmanuel Levinas. A lot of attention is devoted to the substantiation of this claim in Sokuler’s book. Taking into account the fact that the representation of the part of the book, which is dedicated to Rosenzweig and Levinas’s philosophy of dialogue, is a difficult undertaking, and that the author of the review does not consider himself an expert in the study of these thinkers, he refers those who are interested in modern philosophy to the book by Zinaida Sokuler “Hermann Cohen and philosophy of dialogue”.

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¹⁰ Гурлянд А. Пан-этическое обоснование еврейства у Германа Когена // Новый восход. 1914. №18. С. 36.

¹¹ Гурлянд А. Этика и эсхатология // Новый восход. 1914. №20. С. 38.