

# Herman Cohen's Influence on the Baden School of Neo-Kantianism in Russia

Based on Works by Boris Valentinovich Yakovenko

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*... A scholar's identification with a school is a rather vague notion. Two followers (A and B) of one school can share fewer similarities than two representatives (A and C) of absolutely different schools. [4]*

*I. Lapshin.*

**Abstract**—The end of the 19th, and the beginning of the 20th centuries in philosophy are marked as absolute dominance of schools and trends concerning the issues of cognition. On the whole, the philosophical views of Boris V. Yakovenko was influenced both by the classics of philosophical thought, (the most authoritative for Yakovenko were Plotinus, Hume, Kant, Fichte, Hegel) and V. Windelband, Rickert (whose lectures he listened, studied their works and participated in their seminars in 1905-1907, 1910), and also Husserl and Cohen. Moreover, the impression of the ideas of G. Cohen is so strong that there is a temptation to classify Yakovenko to Marburg school. The essence of Kant's transcendentalism is to develop the idea of consciousness activity in the course of cognitive activity. The subject of knowledge is built by knowledge, and this is how G. Cohen interprets this idea. In the article "Theoretical philosophy of Hermann Cohen", Yakovenko examines in detail Kogan's achievements and pays tribute to his merits. And the book of B. V. Yakovenko "Power of philosophy" shows that the authority of mathematically based ideas of Cohen is the authority of achievements of a narrow specialist-in the field of methodology of scientific knowledge. Yakovenko and G. Rickert distinguish between science and philosophy, which has wider cognitive tasks.

**Keywords**—*neo-Kantianism; transcendental; the Baden School of the neo-Kantianism; historiography; B. V. Yakovenko; H. Cohen*

## I. INTRODUCTION

When viewed through the prism of philosophy, the late 19th – early 20th centuries can be characterized by absolute predominance of cognition-based schools and trends. A small group of young inexperienced philosophers and philosophical publicists, "having completed their philosophical education in Western countries, especially in Germany," [6] were "infatuated with cognitive research" [2]<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On p. 99, V. F. Ern puts it even more categorically: "All contributors to the Logos journal (both Rickert from Freiburg and Hessen from St. Petersburg, and Yakovenko from Rome) venerate the myth of

and proceeded to realize their ardent desire to cultivate genuine philosophy in Russia on the basis of the Logos philosophy journal. S. I. Hessen, F. A. Stepun, and B. V. Yakovenko, the Logos regulars<sup>2</sup>, believed that the prerequisite for cultivating genuine Russian philosophy lied in the fusion of Greek and German philosophies, which enabled Russian philosophers to "adopt peculiar and potent cultural motifs, previously reduced to fiction and mysticism." [6] The young philosophers' critical assessments rested on the postulate that Russian philosophy required theoretization. In his novel "Nikolay Pereslegin" F. A. Stepun argued: "Russian philosophers have Hegel, Schopenhauer, and the Romantics, while Kant has been totally ignored. However, Kantian views are essential, especially in Russia, for criticism, in its metaphysical aspect, rests on conscience." [9] During the pre-revolutionary period, B. V. Yakovenko, S. I. Hessen, and F. A. Stepun worked in close collaboration. Having immigrated to Europe, B. V. Yakovenko was spared poverty and the horrors of the Revolution and the Civil war and hence "concentrated on the pre-revolutionary philosophical ideas" [9]

## II. B.V. YAKOVENKO AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BADEN SCHOOL OF THE NEO-KANTIANISM IN RUSSIA

Treating B.V. Yakovenko as a representative of the Baden School of the neo-Kantianism in Russia, it is essential that we should explicate the term. A classification is always conventional. However, provided there is a criterion, we can attribute a thinker to a particular school. The Baden School of the neo-Kantianism in Russia encompassed Russian thinkers of the 1910s-1920s, whose interests lay in historiography and who attempted to formulate their ideas on major philosophical issues on the basis of works by W.

scientism, worshipping the meonic (unreal – S.N.V) idol regurgitated by positivism".

<sup>2</sup> See also: Pankova T. Yu. B. V. Yakovenko i zhurnal "Logos" [B. V. Yakovenko and the Logos Journal] // Kantovskiy Sbornik, No 1, 2013 P. 73-77.

Windelband and H. Rickert. S. I. Hessen, F. A. Stepan, and B. V. Yakovenko, as well as N. N. Bubnov, can be considered representatives of the School.

Describing his philosophical views, B. V. Yakovenko writes that they “cannot be limited to a particular philosophical trend” [6] We do not attempt to restrain the freedom-loving son of a Russian populist V. I. Yakovenko, but we have to admit that an independent thinker cannot but be rooted in a common philosophy, which solely can enable theoretization. B. V. Yakovenko projects himself as a transcendental pluralistic idealist: “B. V. Yakovenko’s pluralism shows his awareness of the necessity to critically process the entire experience in all its manifestations as a token that Russian idealism requires a new orientation.” [6]

B.V. Yakovenko’s philosophical views were largely shaped under the influence of classical philosophers (he was especially infatuated with the ideas expressed by Plotinus, Hume, Kant, Fichte, Hegel), under the influence of W. Windelband and H. Rickert (whose works he studied and whose lectures and seminars he attended in 1905-1907 and in 1910), and under the influence of Husserl and Cohen.

### III. HERMAN COHEN’S INFLUENCE ON THE WORKS BY BORIS VALENTINOVICH YAKOVENKO

H. Cohen’s influence is so great that one is tempted to attribute B. V. Yakovenko to the Marburg School. B. V. Yakovenko maintains that his sincere admiration of H. Cohen is accounted for by the fact that “having based his philosophy on Kant’s views, Cohen proceeds to develop an individual philosophy, which represents the very essence of modern philosophical development. Resting on Kant’s philosophy, Cohen’s philosophical system is truly modern.” [7] B. V. Yakovenko also compliments Husserl and Schuppe and criticizes Cohen for the latter’s psychologism, which B. V. Yakovenko believes to hinder reliable research. B. V. Yakovenko argues that psychologism is a philosophical study that consciously or subconsciously attaches importance to psychological aspects, believing them to play direct or indirect roles in a particular sphere of philosophy [8]. B. V. Yakovenko maintains that passive perception enables one to avoid psychologism, which makes his philosophy closer to Husserl’s phenomenology. The phenomenological method, which is based on phenomenological reduction (bracketing, or suspending judgment about the natural world) or transcendental reduction (bracketing, or suspending one’s consciousness as a psychological entity), is descriptive and devoid of presuppositions which are not instantiated in experience. Husserl focused on “the things themselves” disregarding causative and functional links between human consciousness and objective reality. Philosophical research questions objective reality. Kant’s transcendentalism consists in developing active consciousness through education. H. Cohen argues that the object of knowledge is developed via knowledge. In his article “On Herman Cohen’s theoretical philosophy”, Yakovenko analyzes Cohen’s views and underlines the differences between philosophy as a whole and neo-Kantianism in particular, which, in its turn, explains Yakovenko’s infatuation with Cohen’s ideas: “While philosophy as a whole is extremely versatile, a philosophy is

narrow and self-sufficient. A philosophy promotes itself taking into consideration only classical works and completely disregarding contemporary ones unless they are originated by philosophers of the same school.”<sup>3</sup> [7] Should a researcher only consider this article, they will think that B. V. Yakovenko venerates H. Cohen’s ideas. However, the analysis of B. V. Yakovenko’s book “Philosophical Power” shows that B. V. Yakovenko treats Cohen’s mathematized ideas as only suitable for methodology of cognition. Both B. V. Yakovenko and H. Rickert distinguish between science and philosophy, which has broader cognitive goals and should never be reduced to mere science: “Philosophy ... focuses on genesis; it follows criticism and is preceded by it. Philosophy is sensible, sensitive, and purely theoretical. Mathematization consists in hypothetical combinability of abstract elements. Applying methodological principles of mathematics to philosophy, a researcher risk to turn philosophy as absolute knowledge into a philosophical hypothesis, rob philosophy of its ingenuity, and make it lifeless and spiritless.” [8]

The same is true about philosophical goals: “to critically process an Entity, to identify its true nature, to analyze it in its entirety is the main goal of philosophy.” [8] Compare it with what Rickert says: “How do the understandable (devoid of all immediate forms) form the intelligible world, i.e. the cosmos of nonsensual meanings and meaning configurations? How does our perception (devoid of immediacy – S.N.V.) generate the intelligible world, the universe of non-sensitive entities and sense structures? ... a method of converting intelligible mass into the knowledge of the intelligible world cannot but differ from the method employed by scientific research to theoretically comprehend the sensitive world.” [3]

The followers of the Marburg school, according to G. Shpet, are limited to scientific methodology and are proud of the fact. They treat genesis as the genesis of thought. Rickert maintains that philosophy and its goals undergo constant changes, which are triggered off by the changes in human knowledge and human perception of the world. The concepts of worldview and culture are key concepts of Rickert’s philosophy. To better understand Yakovenko’s point of view, we can rely on an archivist A. M. Shitov’s accounts of Yakovenko. A. M. Shitov presents a document in which Yakovenko briefly formulates his philosophical ideas:

- “My general perception of history. See my article about Rickert ...
- I am a pluralist. The methodology of pluralism enables one to focus on an object, not on a concept.
- I am an ontologist. Anti-psychologist. Hence I am against schemes and for authentic objects and objective reality ...
- I am a critical, antidogmatic, idealistic ontologist. Hence I am against all forms of naturalistic monism in history.” [1]

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the research is still accepted as an authoritative analysis of H. Cohen’s views. One cannot imagine a Russian encyclopedia entry on Cohen without a reference to this research.

B.V. Yakovenko states that he adheres to transcendental pluralism, which underlines that entities are both absolute and versatile. B. V. Yakovenko believes that this way a philosopher can overcome the dual character of human thought. We find it necessary to highlight that B. V. Yakovenko speaks about an ontological attitude to the universe as a polyvariant self-organized variety of numerous entities regulated by one factor. Rickert also adheres to the same idea of pluralism, which is described in his “System of Philosophy”. Rickert underlines a transcendental, symbolic nature of the three components of the universe: the subject (a pro-physical entity), values (the intelligible world), the objective reality. [5]

Taking into consideration Kant’s analytical method (Kant’s Prolegomena), which states that conditions are secondary to the reality, Yakovenko maintains that conditions accounting for the uniqueness of Russian history are a self-organized multitude, a unity of independent entities. B. V. Yakovenko adheres to the principles of academic accuracy (he adheres to the critical views he formulated in the beginning of his scholarly career), however, “... the mystic component of Yakovenko’s theory is related to the necessity of maximal self-denial (discarding one’s sense of self one perceives the world directly), the skeptical component of Yakovenko’s theory is associated with anti-dogmatism (criticism of theoretical and pre-theoretical cognition, whose objective character is doubted). Both components create an illusion of existence and cognition.” [1] In Kant’s theory rational cognition is limited. Human cognitive powers are subjective. The irrational serves as a background for the rational. One cannot cognize the irrational, unless one’s mind qualitatively transforms, enters a new stage of existence. Yakovenko maintains that “philosophical cognition consists in a critical transition from persistent doubt to positive mysticism.” [6]. Developing his system of transcendental pluralism, Yakovenko states that his gnosiology is critical and mystical, which is hardly characteristic of the followers of the Marburg school.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, we can draw the following conclusions:

Treating Herman Cohen as a paragon of academic accuracy, B. V. Yakovenko adheres to the principle throughout his life.

B. V. Yakovenko highly values H. Cohen’s methodological achievements.

H. Cohen’s influence on B. V. Yakovenko is within neo-Kantianism and is limited to certain spheres. B. V. Yakovenko’s philosophical views, in their entirety, are closer to those of the Baden school of neo-Kantianism.

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