

Hermann Cohen and the Philosophy of Dialogue*

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Abstract—This article proves that the philosophy of dialogue in its various manifestations, in based on the ideas of Hermann Cohen. He researched in detail crucial for the philosophy of dialogue ideas of relations of persons (I, Thou, We) already in his works 1904 and 1919. Other authors of the philosophy of dialogue (Rosenzweig, Buber and Bakhtin) formulated their ideas later (1921-1929) and relied heavily on the works of Cohen. Cohen not only researched in detail relationships of persons, but he introduced into philosophy the idea of correlation, which underlies the understanding of the I-Thou relationship. Cohen also realized that the concept of correlation gives access to the actual time that cannot be comprehended within the framework of classical ontology.

Keywords—*philosophy of dialogue; ontology; neo-Kantianism; person; I; Thou; We; correlation; relationship; actual present (Gegenwart)*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, radical changes have taken place in the heritage of Hermann Cohen!

A hundred years after Cohen's death, his thought may sound more relevant than it did a hundred years before. Not only has Cohen greatly influenced the twentieth-century philosophical tradition, but he also went further and possibly discovered something outside his contemporaries' framework.

His philosophy becomes actual. Due to the fundamental research of his teaching, carried out at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, Cohen can become a kind of bridge between the classical European philosophy of the Modern Age and the philosophy of the future.

My thesis is that Hermann Cohen is the most important source of the philosophy of dialogue.

Philosophy of dialogue is, in our understanding, not the existentialistic emphasis of the value of interpersonal relation, and not the research of interpersonal features of a literary text, but rather a fundamental direction of philosophy, a new take on "the first philosophy", which conceives the world as the object of creative interpersonal relations [1][2][3].

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Assertion that Hermann Cohen is the most important source of the philosophy of dialogue, does not mean that he is not a critical idealist, neo-Kantian, Marburgian philosopher, etc. (Until the end of the 20th century, the heritage of Hermann Cohen was considered very fragmented. For some, he was an interpreter of Kant, for others the creator of the Marburg philosophical school, for someone — a Jewish thinker. Starting from the 80s of the 20th century, the tendency to see Cohen as a full-fledged philosopher, the author of his own system, uniting logic, ethics, aesthetics and philosophy of religion, becomes dominant. The Cohen system is considered in terms of critical idealism, which goes back to Plato, Descartes, Kant, and others [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9]. This paper adds to Cohen, but does not detract.¹

I demonstrate four proofs of my thesis, even though I could give it a more extensive justification.

It is not by chance that researchers and the general public associate the philosophy of dialogue primarily with Buber, Rosenzweig and Bakhtin. They were the first to proclaim that dialogism is a fundamentally new view of the world than classical ontological philosophy that was defined by Rosenzweig as philosophy "from Parmenides to Hegel" [12]. However, despite the fact that all three of them were great specialists in philosophy, none of them formulated the philosophy of dialogue systematically.

In order to compare the place of these thinkers in the philosophy of dialogue and compare them with Hermann Cohen, I want to dwell on three rubrics of dialogue philosophy that unite the above-named researchers:

Dialogue — relationship of persons

Dialogue is an event of actual present (Gegenwart) that cannot be reduced to ontology

The dialogue turns another person into the source of my existence; thereby ethics becomes fundamental philosophical discipline in the context of which other disciplines can be considered

To study the philosophy of dialogue, it is necessary to add a number of additional provisions, but these three rubrics are sufficient for study of the connection of Cohen with the philosophy of dialogue.

¹ The point of view that origin of the philosophy of dialogue is based on Cohen's works is characteristic of Russia, where philosophy of dialogue is viewed in a wider context that includes of the teachings of Bakhtin and others [10] [11].

II. THE FIRST THESIS: H. COHEN WAS THE FIRST WHO PRESENTED THE DETAILED CONCEPT OF RELATIONSHIP OF PERSONS

Philosophy as a theory of I-Thou relations opposing I-It relations is best of all represented by Buber. Rosenzweig considers in detail the dialogue as the system I-Thou-He-We. Bakhtin regards dialogue as a polyphonic reality that meets several personal positions. All ideas of these authors were expressed by them in the period 1919-1923, although all three returned to them during their life.²

As is well known, Cohen dwells on the description of interpersonal relationships in his last posthumous work, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism* [15], but their basis is described in detail in *Ethics of pure will* [16].

The most important question that Cohen considers in this work is what exactly the correlate of the subject is, i.e. to what his will is directed. As is known, Fichte views subject-object relations in the form of an I-not-I opposition. But what is this non-I? In his "Ethics of pure will", Cohen explains that the real correlate of I is not the world, but another person. But the status of this other person is different from just the other, the neighbor, or, as he is called by Cohen "Neben-Mensch". This other one must be in special relations with the Self and act as its Source, like the relation of object to subject.

- Ethik des reinen Willens, [17]

...Der Nebenmensch wird als ein Nebenmensch gedacht, oder vielmehr vorgestellt als einer der vielen Nebenmenschen. Gehen wir dagegen von dem richtig verstandenen Begriffe des Nicht-Ich aus, so tritt an die Stelle des Nebenmenschen der genauere Begriff des Andern. Der Andere ist nicht ein Anderer; er steht in der genauen Correlation, vielmehr in der Continuitätsbeziehung zum Ich. Der Andere, der alter Ego ist der Ursprung des Ich.

- Hermann Cohen. Ethics of pure will

...The people around us are perceived as another and another one of many persons. But if we take a correct understanding of Not-I as our basis, then the concept of "another man" will be replaced by a more precise notion – that of the Other. The other does not equal to any other; instead, the other exists in an exact correlation to I, or rather, in a relation of continuity to I. The other, the alter ego, is the source of I.

Realizing that the opposition for I is not just not-I, not an object-thing, not even another person He, Cohen comes to the conclusion that the real realization of I is realized in the person to whom I address, i.e. in Thou. The new I-Thou relationship becomes the basis for other relationships, including relations with He, as well as the basis of the new personal position expressed in the concept We.

² It is not necessary to mention here that personal pronouns were used as philosophical concepts throughout the Modern Age, starting with Descartes, Kant, Jacobi, Kierkegaard, Feuerbach, and others [13-14]. Cohen's significance is that he properly incorporated relationship of persons in the context of classical philosophy.

The concept of I-Thou in Cohen is not a simple development of the idea of subject-object relations, such as inter-subjectivity. Cohen's ethics flow from his logic, i.e. the first part of his system [18]. Thou are regarded as the source (Ursprung) of I, relationship between I and Thou are correlation.

- Ethik des reinen Willens, [19]

Die Allgemeinheit kann hier gar nicht mit der Allheit verwechselt werden: denn die Allheit wird allein schon durch Ich vertreten. Bei der Allgemeinheit dagegen kommt es auf die Entfaltung zum Du und zum Er an, welches Er wiederum in Du verwandelt wird; und auf die breiteste Entfaltung aller Er, auf dass sie in Wir zusammengezogen werden. Es kommt dabei auch nicht auf die Zusammenziehung in Wir allein an, sondern auf die breite, deutliche Entfaltung der Einzelnen, auf dass sie als Allgemeinheit darstellbar werden.

- Hermann Cohen. Ethics of pure will

Unanimity cannot be interchanged with universality. Universality can be expressed through I alone, while in Unanimity, Thou and He are also unfolded, and He turns again and again into Thou. Moreover, here is also the widest unfolding of all He's — their gathering as We. This gathering is not just important by itself. Rather, it is relevant because it makes the Singular evident by representing it as Unanimity.

As I-Thou are a dynamic relationship, so is the formation of general We is not a simple combination of elements. It is clear that a subject cannot have its own special subject, like the first essence of Aristotle cannot have its one more noun. Attitude I and Thou give rise to a completely new concept, inaccessible to previous philosophy. It also entails radical changes in the self-consciousness of me, turning it into person.

- Herman Cohen. Ethik des reinen Willens, [20]

Das physische Einzelwesen kein echtes Selbstbewusstsein besitzt... Aber die Änderung musste das Ich doch erleiden, um Selbstbewusstsein zu werden.... Du ist nicht Er. Es wäre der Andere. Er kommt in Gefahr, auch als Er behandelt zu werden. Du und Ich gehören schlechterdings zusammen. Ich kann nicht Du sagen, ohne dich auf mich zu beziehen; ohne dich in dieser Beziehung mit dem ich zu vereinigen. Aber es liegt darin zugleich die gesteigerte Forderung: dass ich auch nicht Ich denken kann, ohne dich zu denken. So hat der Anderer im Selbstbewusstsein sich gleichsam in den Dualis des Ich verwandelt.

- Hermann Cohen. Ethics of pure will

An individual person does not really possess self-consciousness... But I shall experience the change (the otherness) in order to become self-conscious... Thou is not the same as He. He would mean the Other, who is in danger to be treated like He as well. But of all things, Thou and I belong together. I cannot say Thou without relating Thou to me; without uniting Thou with me in this relation. But then at once, there is the requirement: I, for my part, cannot conceive I without thinking of Thou. Thus, in self-

consciousness, the Other [person] immediately forms the dual form of I.

In Cohen's writings the I-Thou relation does not stand in opposition with the I-It attitude, as in Buber's works. On the contrary, I-Thou acquire subjectivity expressed in dual form. I, Thou, and He enter into dynamic relationships that give rise to the significance of the concept We. Cohen's doctrine makes a fundamental step not only towards a new psychology,³ but also towards sociology. The I-Thou relation within the framework of the We becomes for Cohen the substantiation of the concept *Mitmensch*, one of the central concepts of his philosophy of religion [21]. This attitude is a vivid expression of Cohen's social and legal thinking, which is directly related to his messianism and anticipation of the idea of the commonwealth of dialogue.

Thus, Cohen's relationship of persons is a systematic foundation, and not just a passing moment; it is connected with his entire philosophical system, including his theory of cognition, ethics and aesthetics. It is Cohen's dialogism that makes his philosophy of religion a fundamental part of the system, and not an extraneous addition.

Thus, it was precisely Cohen's theory of persons that played a decisive role in the conceptualization of relations of persons in the philosophy of dialogue.

III. THESIS TWO: COHEN'S CONCEPT OF PERSONS IS BASED ON HIS CONCEPT OF CORRELATION AND TEMPORALITY OF BEING

Already the Kantian Copernican revolution implies a transition of philosophy from the study of the static world of objects to consideration of the dynamic world of processes and relations, or, in the words of E. Cassirer, "from substitution to function"[22]. In his "Copernican revolution" Kant continues the work begun by Galileo. Challenging classical metaphysics, he insists on actuality of being, its procedurality and eventfulness. However, generally his philosophy remains static.

Trying to solve the difficulties of Kant's philosophy, Hermann Cohen introduces into the description of being a fundamental temporality, revealing the basic nature of actual present (*Gegenwort*). In contrast to Hegel, Cohen's actual being (*Dasign*) does not have the character of something complete, but is carried out in actual present [23]. It leads to an understanding of its relationality. The process of actual present is described as a correlation with the Source. Precisely these ideas of Cohen formulated in *Logic* lead to the concept of Thou" as the source for the "I" in his "Ethics" and understanding of the correlative relations between persons.

The relationship I and Thou are carried out in present time and are not reducible to past time. This is another important connection between Cohen's logic and ethics. The concept of present time (*Gegenwart*) has become an important element of a number of dialogical concepts. Buber

at the time of writing "I and Thou" read a course of lectures on the theme "Religion as the Present" [24]. Buber unfolds his concept of the actual present in the first part "I and Thou" [25]. Rosenzweig, relying on Cohen's logic, makes the present the most important concept of his philosophy, but unlike Cohen, he puts into the present, not thinking, but language [26].

It should be noted that the introduction of actual present is the most important basis for overcoming the ontology of finite being in all versions of the philosophy of dialogue.

IV. THE THIRD THESIS: COHEN'S LOGIC, ETHICS AND AESTHETICS ARE IMPORTANT STEPS TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE FUTURE

Hermann Cohen most decisively proved the fundamental nature of Kant's ethics and the non-ontological nature of the concept Other. This brings philosophy to a new level and opens up new perspectives for it.

Cohen ethics is the fundamental basis of his entire philosophical system. If the human personality acquires its own ego from another person, then the process of cognition cannot be regarded as knowledge of autonomous subjectivity, but acquires the quality of personality.

In this regard, it becomes clear that Cohen's logic, ethics and aesthetics are a holistic system, which in completely different way than Kant's system includes the philosophy of religion.

V. THE FOURTH THESIS: FOLLOWING COHEN AS WELL IN OPPOSITION TO HIM OTHER VERSIONS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF DIALOGUE ARE DEVELOPED

The above three theses unite the generally recognized creators of the philosophy of dialogue, and also connect them with the philosophy of Hermann Cohen.

As for Franz Rosenzweig, he himself speaks about this many times. For Rosenzweig, "our great mentor" (unser großer Meister) [27] was not only a teacher and spiritual source, but the foundation of his own philosophical system. He explicitly states that the concept of I-Thou relation is Cohen's great contribution to philosophy".

The relations of Buber with Cohen were not as clear as in the case of Rosenzweig. During the development of the philosophy of dialogue, Cohen was already a famous philosopher of the old generation, and Buber was a rising modern star.

There were disputes between the two greatest representatives of German Jewry on a number of issues, primarily concerning the interpretation of Jewry, Judaism and Zionism [28]. On all these questions, Cohen's and Buber's views diverged radically. However, what was the relationship between them in philosophy? For Buber, Cohen was a representative of the past 19th century. Nevertheless, in his philosophy of dialogue, Buber analyzes the typical Cohen's themes: I-Thou-He-It, Being as a relation, priority of ethics over ontology, paradoxality of man, etc.

³ This step was subsequently carried out by the eminent Soviet psychologist Sergei Rubinstein.

In his article "Toward the History of the Dialogue Principle" (Zur Geschichte des dialogischen Prinzips, Buber talks about his independent discovery of the philosophy of dialogue, agreeing that at the same time other authors, i.e. Cohen, Rosenzweig and Ebner also discovered the philosophy of dialogue. Speaking of Cohen, Buber refers to the Religion of Reason (1919) with his discovery of the personality as Thou: "erst das Du, die Entdeckung des Du mich selbst zum Bewußtsein meines Ich"[29].

Buber says he went to the philosophy of dialogue all his life. There is no doubt that he has dialogical ideas both in his early works and in the interpretation of Hasidism, but it seems that only in "I and Thou" these ideas acquire the character of the philosophical system. Speaking about the Buber concept of "I and Thou," it is necessary to remember the influence on him of the ideas of F. Ebner, whom he read in the process of working on his essay [30]. This largely explains the existential pathos of Buber. However, Buber's conception of relationships ("In the beginning was the relationship" (Im Anfang ist die Beziehung) [31] detailed in "I and Thou", directly or indirectly is linked to the Cohen correlation theory.

In this case, Buber notes that Rosenzweig read the *Religion of Reason* in manuscript before publishing. However, as we noted, the basic ideas of interpersonal relationships were systematically formulated by Cohen as early as 1904. Obviously, in the period 1916-1923, the ideas of the philosophy of dialogue were in the air, and differently formulated by different authors.

No matter to what extent the discovery of the dialogical principle occurred by Buber independently of others, but Cohen published his work before Buber. An outstanding merit of Buber is that he more than others understood the significance of this discovery. The concept of I-Thou relations in Cohen's works is drowning in all the power of his philosophy, in Buber's writings it is formulated very clearly and consistently and occupies a central place.

The advantage of Cohen's teaching is that his system acts as a clearly formulated version of the philosophy of critical idealism. This greatly facilitates the clarification of the connection between the philosophy of dialogue and the preceding philosophical systems.

The most interesting situation is observed in the relation of M. M. Bakhtin to Hermann Cohen. Bakhtin formulated his version of the philosophy of dialogue at the same time as Buber and Rosenzweig, i.e. in 1918-1924. But the publication of his work began only in 1929. Being repressed by the Soviet regime in 1929, until the 1960s, Bakhtin was not known to the general public, but since the late 1960s, he gained worldwide fame as the creator of his own version of the philosophy of dialogue.

Many of his contemporaries wondered about the connection of Bakhtin's philosophy with the ideas of Buber, Rosenzweig, Ebner and other dialogists. With all the similarities of ideas, no continuity can be traced to either side. However, the matter changes radically when we include Cohen in our consideration.

In his memoirs, Bakhtin repeatedly emphasized his continuity with respect to Cohen. First, Bakhtin repeatedly said that his doctrine is a philosophical doctrine:

Answering the question of V. D. Duvakin (in 1973): "You were (in your youth) more a philosopher than a philologist?" Bakhtin said: "A philosopher more than a philologist? Philosopher. And so I remain till this day. I am a philosopher. I am a thinker." [32]

Bakhtin's interest in H. Cohen began in his student years. In his memoirs recorded by Duvakin, he said that he began to study Cohen while he learned at Odessa University (1913): "He was a wonderful philosopher who had a great influence on me, a huge influence, a huge one" [33].

In the memoirs, Bakhtin declares that neo-Kantianism, from his point of view, is the center of philosophy [34].

In a conversation with Annie Epelbuen, held on January 25, 1971, Bakhtin directly notes his dependence on Cohen. S. Bocharov, who was present then, thus conveys the contents of the conversation:⁴

"Bakhtin: In general, I was studying precisely philosophy ...

Epelbuen: ... What are your philosophical sources?

Bakhtin: ... I will tell you one thing: I am a follower of Hermann Cohen. And that says it all! "

Direct allusions to neo-Kantianism and Cohen are already present in the first works of Bakhtin. So his small article "Art and Responsibility"[36] is based on the idea of unification in the creative act of the logical, ethical and aesthetic. Cohen's ideas also appear in two early, but posthumously published works of Bakhtin "Towards the philosophy of action and" Author and hero of the aesthetic..." [37].

In Bakhtin's works there are many references from Cohen's works, but one should not forget that Cohen was banned in the Soviet Union and references to them could lead to repressions. Nevertheless, a careful study of the philosophical ideas of Bakhtin testifies to his closest connection with neo-Kantianism and specifically with Cohen.

In addition to direct evidence of the connection between Bakhtin and Cohen, it is necessary to take into account very important circumstances. Beginning in 1918, Matvei Kagan, a neo-Kantian, a student and follower of Cohen, the founder of the neo-Kantian philosophy of history, was Bakhtin's closest friend and interlocutor [38]. In Nevel in the 20s, they studied the Cohen's "Religion of Reason", fragments of which were translated by Kagan into Russian. In this intellectual context that Bakhtin's philosophy of dialogue was born. It certainly does not deprive it of originality. Each of the philosophers of the dialogue of the beginning of the

⁴ The content of this conversation is described in the article "An event of Being" [35]. However, important details are missing there. They were cited by S. Bocharov to the author of this article orally during their conversation in May 2005.

20th century was original in its own way and contributed to this philosophical direction!

The presence of the Russian trend in the philosophy of dialogue, of course, is not an accident. It is due to a number of factors. Firstly, one should note the tendency towards dialogism of Russian culture itself.⁵

VI. CONCLUSION

Although Cohen's dialogical concept is the integral part of his system and is not recognized as a separate philosophical direction, it is deeply original and requires thorough research.

Cohen's ideas restore the continuity of the philosophy of dialogue with respect to classical European philosophy and create powerful prerequisites for its development in the future.

It is Cohen that is the starting point for the development of dialogism in the 20th century, both in Germany and Russia, and subsequently in other countries. Only Cohen's ideas allow the dialogical concepts of Buber, Rosenzweig, Bakhtin and all their many followers to be considered as a single whole.

Relationship of the philosophy of dialogue with other fields of philosophy, including the fundamental ontology of Heidegger, existentialism and even analytical philosophy, becomes possible thanks to Cohen.

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⁵ It is not by chance that Dostoevsky's dialogism became the subject of Bakhtin's research. In Russia, they often refer to the dialogical nature of the work of V. Ivanov "Thou are" with his concept of catholicity [39]. One should not underestimate the importance of the influence of neo-Kantianism in Russia in the early 20th century [40].

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