

# Философия Германа Когена и судьба критического идеализма

## Hermann Cohen's Philosophy and the Fate of Critical Idealism

DOI: 10.22363/2313-2302-2021-25-3-371-377

Research Article / Научная статья

### Is Hermann Cohen a Classical Philosopher?

A. Poma<sup>1</sup>, V.N. Belov<sup>2</sup>✉

<sup>1</sup>*10, Corso Mortara, Turin, 10149, Italy*

<sup>2</sup>RUDN University

*6, Miklukho-Maklaya Str., Moscow, 117198, Russian Federation,*

*Center for the Study of Philosophy and Culture of India Purushottama,*

*Moscow, Russia*

✉[belov-vn@rudn.ru](mailto:belov-vn@rudn.ru)

**Abstract.** The article attempts to raise a question and give an answer to it regarding the evaluation of the philosophical creativity of Hermann Cohen, the German-Jewish thinker of the late XIX — early XX century. Moreover, following the philosophical style of Cohen himself, the question posed and discussed in the article is not idle, but it contains a hypothesis that forms our answer in a certain way. It is important to identify the difficulties and intellectual determinants that prevent the formation of a clear and unambiguous answer. At the same time these difficulties contain an initiating moment for opening a philosophical debate. The historical and philosophical reasons that make the very beginning of the discussion of the question more complex, are considered. The article, of course, cannot claim to be an exhaustive answer on such a fundamental topic, which is contained in the designated question. But the article itself, and the articles following it in the section devoted to the work of Herman Cohen, may be indicate that the time for this discussion has come.

**Keywords:** Hermann Cohen, German Classical Philosophy, German Philosophy of XX century, Neo-Kantianism, Cohen Studies, Post-Neo-Kantianism

**Funding and Acknowledgement of Sources.** The paper is realised in the frames of the Agreement between Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation and Peoples' Friendship University of Russia No 075-15-2021-603.

---

© Poma A., Belov V.N., 2021



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

**Article history:**

The article was submitted on 30.07.2021

The article was accepted on 10.08.2021

**For citation:** Poma A., Belov V.N. Is Hermann Cohen a Classical Philosopher? *RUDN Journal of Philosophy*. 2021;25(3):371—377. DOI: 10.22363/2313-2302-2021-25-3-371-377

Let us clarify the meaning of the question in the title. First, it is not whether Cohen is a classical philosopher. No one has ever had any doubts: the founder of German Neo-Kantianism is certainly the continuer of the classical philosophy oriented towards scientific rationality. Nevertheless, whether his name can be placed on the same level with such generally recognized German classical philosophers as Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, or the joined the classical rank Husserl and Heidegger is an open and challenging issue. A balanced and objective answer is hindered both by intra- and periphilosophical reasons. As for the latter, we have in mind a relatively long historical period of oblivion of Neo-Kantianism, which occurred almost immediately after the death of its prominent representatives, for purely ideological reasons — the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany, — and partly for religious reasons, since many followers of Neo-Kantianism were Jews. This forced "pause" in Neo-Kantian studies prevented an objective and balanced evaluation of the achievements of the Neo-Kantian schools and their representatives. It is precisely Hermann Cohen's work that caused the significant rejection among the opponents, both because he was the founder of the leading Neo-Kantian school and because he was a Jew who fought for the equal rights of Judaism and Christianity in the life of human civilization.

As for the philosophical reasons for the apparent "underestimation" of Cohen's conception of transcendental critical philosophy, we should single out, in our opinion, two grounds. The first one relates to Cohen's belonging to the Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism. Even though no one doubts that he is not just one of the representatives of this school, but its founder, nevertheless, many researchers perceive Cohen's name in the "school" context along with the names of Paul Natorp and Ernst Cassirer.

Furthermore, the second, more essential take relates to the direction's name, which implicitly implies only the continuation, development, albeit with some transformations, of the Kantian philosophy project. We find something similar in Fichte, who declared that his only goal was to clarify Kantian transcendentalism, which the Königsberg sage himself presented in a very complex and confusing manner. However, such, without exaggeration, apologetic elaboration of Kant's ideas as we see in Cohen's three fundamental works *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, *Kants Begründung der Ethik*, and *Kants Begründung der Aesthetik* is missing not only in Fichte or other "renewers" or "subversives" of Kantian principles, but also in most orthodox Kantians. Nevertheless, is this fact a sufficient reason to consider Hermann Cohen's philosophical position as insufficiently independent and even

less original and fundamental? In our opinion, it is precisely the opposite. It was Cohen who, because of his Kantian studies, understood the depth, fundamentality and, at the same time, openness, and heuristic nature of the Kantian system, realized the connection and difference between its letter and spirit and was able to introduce these properties into his system as well. That is why even today, two directions can be singled out in Cohen studies: the first, focusing on deepening the understanding of Cohen's theories, originality of its ideas and concepts, its systematicity; and the second, emphasizing opportunities for its development and enrichment through the doctrines of Hegel, Husserl, N. Hartmann, Heidegger, Peirce, etc. It is possible to nominally designate the first direction as *Cohenology* [See: 1—10] and the second as *post-Neo-Kantianism* [See: 11—12].

Thus, the initial question, "Is Hermann Cohen a classical philosopher?" can and should be answered positively. Moreover, his philosophy has already received some recognition. In particular, his *The Ethics of Pure Will (Ethik des reinen Willens)* has been included among classical philosophical works (ref. *Klassische Werke der Philosophie. Von Aristoteles bis Habermas*, hg. Von Reinhard Brandt und Thomas Sturm, Leipzig 2002; the chapter on Cohen, *Hermann Cohen: Ethik des reinen Willens*, was written by Helmut Holzhey) [13]. This acknowledgment pays tribute not only to Cohen's thinking but also to the history of philosophy. It also redeems the oblivion to which his thought was consigned after the academic departed from the University of Marburg and the dissemination at that university, which was considered the *Mecca of continental philosophy* [14. P. 681], a very different philosophical direction (primarily initiated by Martin Heidegger) that has removed the memory of the great tradition of Cohen and Natorp and reduced that to narrow and largely erroneous labels.

Only at the end of the 1960s, thanks to Dieter Adelman's dissertation *Unity of Consciousness as a Basic Problem of Hermann Cohen's Philosophy (Einheit des Bewußtseins als Grundproblem der Philosophie Hermann Cohen, 1968)* [15], the interest in Cohen's thought sparked. Researchers commenced their study from new perspectives, free of obscuring prejudices. In the following years, an essential contribution to Cohen's research was made by the Cohen-Archiv established at the University of Zurich and the publication of the newly edited collected works (Cohen's Werke). These were initiatives of Helmut Holzhey, author of the seminal work *Cohen und Natorp* [16]. This cause made an indispensable contribution to forming an international research community, small in numbers but quite active and fruitful in results, proposing new topics and reviving the interest of philosophical and religious circles in Cohen's works. Studies of the philosopher's works continue nowadays, including by young scholars, which testifies to the fundamentality of his legacy as a benchmark for cognizing the new problems that the ongoing cultural transformations pose to philosophy.

The articles collected in this issue precisely demonstrate Hermann Cohen's intellectual properties that make it attractive to modern researchers, i.e., belonging

to classical German philosophy and openness to possible productive syntheses with the latest trends in world academic discourse.

The article of Professor of Moscow State University **Z.A. Sokuler** reveals the primary methodological problems of Cohen's thinking, set before the humanities of the beginning of the 20th century by the scientific revolution. In those intellectual conditions, Kant's critical system was in demand as a concept opposing the materialistic and positivistic tendencies that belittled the role of philosophical thought in the mastery of reality. On the other hand, the abstract and distracting dogmatism diminished the role of scientific thought and severed the link between philosophy and science. At the same time, the achievements and discoveries of the early 20th century exposed the shortcomings and inaccuracies in Kant's concept of idealism, associated primarily with his notorious concept of the thing in itself, of the initial objective of knowledge and the passivity of thinking. The founder of Marburg Neo-Kantianism acknowledged straight away the obvious fact that a simple transformation and selective changes in Kant's system are not enough. So Cohen elaborated the philosophical concept, equal to such idealistic constructions as those of Kant, Fichte, or Hegel.

Z.A. Sokuler's article is devoted to the adaptability of Cohen's logical-methodological principles to the scientific theory undergoing radical changes at the beginning of the twentieth century. **H. Wiedebach's** article is devoted to the comparative analysis of Hegel's logical ideas. Wiedebach provides a comparativist analysis of the logical ideas of Cohen and Hegel. The question of the relationship between the logic of the two German philosophers originally arose because of the desire of both in their constructions to focus exclusively on thinking itself. However, the general idea of Cohen's philosophical system, the one open to the facts of scientific knowledge and putting these on the same plane with intellectual creativity, contradicted the idea of Hegel's system, closed and self-sufficient, focused exclusively on philosophy. In contemporary studies of transcendental school of thought, there is a clear tendency to consider the possible interaction between the Kantian and Hegelian projects as a potential basis for the productive development of continental philosophy. In this light, Cohen's Neo-Kantian reflections on the logical foundations of pure cognition seem highly relevant and significant.

**E. Gamba's** article raises another central and controversial theme of Cohen's work, namely his philosophy of religion. Opposite points of view are expressed regarding the disputes, whether Cohen's philosophy of religion is the basis of his system, just a component, or in general a marginal part in Marburg scholar's schemes. The notions can be summarized by slightly restating the statement of C.G. Jacobi about the thing in itself by Kant: "Without a philosophy of religion, one cannot enter the Cohenian philosophy. Yet with the philosophy of religion, one cannot remain in it". What adds complexity to a more or less unambiguous interpretation of Cohen's statement on religion is that this position of the German and Jewish thinker was not the same throughout his long creative life. An example

of this undoubted evolution of Cohen's views on the possibility and justification of depicting God and divine phenomena in religious art and the related evolution of his views in general on Christianity and the need for a dialogue between Christianity and Judaism is given just in the study of the Italian philosopher.

If readers think that philosophy and the mind games are incompatible, we advise them to pay attention to another article in the section devoted to the work of H. Cohen, namely the one by **H.M. Dober**. Not only does the author address the topic on which the publication of the Marburg Neo-Kantian never took place, but the topic itself would seem to be at least marginal for Neo-Kantianism, which opposed psychologism in scientific knowledge. However, first, the publication did not occur, but there is evidence that Cohen was preparing it. Second, Neo-Kantianism opposed psychologism but not psychology per se as one of the essential sciences. Let us recall at least that Natorp, Cohen's colleague and associate at the University of Marburg, made a considerable effort to justify and substantiate psychology philosophically. One of Herman Cohen's favorite Russian students, Sergei Rubinstein, became a prominent Russian psychologist.

**I. Dvorkin** traces the intellectual connection between the German Neo-Kantian and Russia. The author thoroughly and comprehensively seeks to reveal the influence of the ethical and religious concept of Hermann Cohen. The researcher is trying to uncover the influence of Cohen's ethical and religious concept on M. Bakhtin's philosophy of dialogue. Although the Russian thinker himself has repeatedly stressed in interviews and memoirs the unique and even decisive significance of the German philosopher's teaching for forming his concept, this aspect of the analysis of Bakhtin's work remains marginal in international Bakhtinology.

### References

- [1] Adelman D. *Reinige dein Denken. Über den jüdischen Hintergrund der Philosophie von Hermann Cohen*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010.
- [2] Belov VN. Hermann Cohen in the History of Russian Neo-Kantianism. *Russian Studies in Philosophy*. 2016;(54):395—407.
- [3] Belov VN. Hermann Cohen's System of Critical Idealism. *Voprosy Filosofii*. 2006;4:144—150.
- [4] Belov VN. Is Hermann Cohen Neo-Kantian? *Kantian Journal*. 2015;3(53):38—46. doi: 10.5922/0207-6918-2015-3-3.
- [5] Edel G. *Von der Vernunftkritik zur Erkenntnislogik. Die Entwicklung der theoretischen Philosophie Hermann Cohens*. Freiburg/München: Edition Gorz; 1988.
- [6] Gamba E. The Problem of Individuality in Hermann Cohen's Aesthetics. *RUDN Journal of Philosophy*. 2019;23(4):413—419. doi: 10.22363/2313-2302-2019-23-4-413-419.
- [7] Marx von W, Orth EW, editors. *Hermann Cohen und die Erkenntnistheorie*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann; 2001.
- [8] Munk RW, editor. *Hermann Cohen's Critical Idealism*. Dordrecht: Springer; 2005.
- [9] Sokuler ZA. *German Kogen i filosofiya dialoga [Hermann Cohen and Philosophy of Dialogue]*. Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya Publ.; 2008. (In Russian).

- [10] Wiedebach H. *Die Hermann-Cohen-Bibliothek*. In: Cohen H. *Werke. Supplementa. Band 2*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag; 2000.
- [11] Munk R. Der andere kritische Idealismus von Hermann Cohen. In: *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*. 2011; 59(2):271—282.
- [12] Poma A. *Cadenzas. Philosophical Notes for Postmodernism*. Cham: Springer, 2017.
- [13] Brandt R, Sturm Th. *Klassische Werke der Philosophie. Von Aristoteles bis Habermas*. Leipzig: Reclam; 2002.
- [14] Nipperdey Th. *Deutsche Geschichte 1866—1918. Bd. 1*. München: C.H. Beck; 1990.
- [15] Adelman D. *Einheit des Bewußtseins als Grundproblem der Philosophie Hermann Cohen [PhD Dissertation]*. Heidelberg: University of Heidelberg; 1968.
- [16] Holzhey H. *Cohen und Natorp*. Bd. 1: *Ursprung und Einheit. Die Geschichte der "Marburger Schule" als Auseinandersetzung um die Logik des Denkens*. Bd. 2: *Der Marburger Neukantianismus in Quellen*. Basel—Stuttgart: Schwabe & Co; 1986.

**About the authors:**

*Poma Andrea* — PhD, Professor, Turin, Italy (e-mail: andrea.poma@unito.it).

*Belov Vladimir N.* — Doctor of Philosophy, Professor, Chair of Ontology and Epistemology, RUDN University, Moscow, Russia (e-mail: belov-vn@rudn.ru).

## Является ли Герман Коген философом-классиком?

А. Пома<sup>1</sup>, В. Н. Белов<sup>2</sup>✉

<sup>1</sup>*Italy, 10149, Turin, Corso Mortara, 10*

<sup>2</sup>Российский университет дружбы народов,  
*Российская Федерация, 117198, Москва, ул. Миклухо-Маклая, 6,*  
Центр Исследования философии и культуры Индии Пурушоттама,  
*Россия, Москва*  
✉belov-vn@rudn.ru

**Аннотация.** В статье предпринята попытка поставить вопрос и дать на него ответ относительно оценки философского творчества немецко-еврейского мыслителя конца XIX — начала XX века Германа Когена. Причем в стиле самого Когена вопрос, поставленный и обсуждаемый в статье, не является праздным, но включает в себе гипотезу, которая определенным образом формирует наш ответ. Выявляются те сложности и интеллектуальные детерминанты, которые мешают формированию четкого и однозначного ответа. Но в этих же сложностях содержится и иницирующий момент для начала их обсуждения. Рассматриваются исторические и философские причины, затрудняющие самое начало обсуждения поставленного вопроса. Статья, конечно, не может претендовать на исчерпывающий ответ по такой фундаментальной теме, которая заключена в обозначенном вопросе. Но и сама статья, и статьи, следующие за ней в рубрике, посвященной творчеству Германа Когена, могут свидетельствовать о том, что время для ее обсуждения пришло.

**Ключевые слова:** Герман Коген, немецкая классическая философия, немецкая философия XX века, неокантианство, когеноведение, постнеокантианство

**Информация о финансировании и благодарности.** Статья подготовлена в рамках Соглашения между Министерством Образования и Науки РФ и Российского университета дружбы народов № 075-15-2021-603.

**История статьи:**

Статья поступила 30.07.2021

Статья принята к публикации 10.08.2021

**Для цитирования:** *Poma A., Belov V.N. Is Hermann Cohen a Classical Philosopher? // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Философия. 2021. Т. 25. № 3. С. 371—377. DOI: 10.22363/2313-2302-2021-25-3-371-377*

**Сведения об авторах:**

*Пома Андреа* — доктор философии (PhD), профессор, Турин, Италия (e-mail: andrea.poma@unito.it).

*Белов Владимир Николаевич* — доктор философских наук, профессор, заведующий кафедрой онтологии и теории познания, Российский университет дружбы народов, Москва, Россия (e-mail: belov-vn@rudn.ru).