

The Religious Philosophy of A. Losev and Marburg Neo-Kantianism

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Abstract: The article provides an analysis of the relationship of one of the most famous Russian religious philosophers, A. F. Losev, to the Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism on key issues in the history of philosophy and the application of research methods. It is noted that the Russian philosopher criticizes extreme logicism and methodology in interpreting the concept of an idea in Marburg Neo-Kantianism. Without denying the logical moment of the idea and emphasizing the merit of Neo-Kantians in its description, Losev, at the same time, insists on the limitations of such an understanding of the idea. He also believes that transcendentalism, both Neo-Kantian and phenomenological, with all its advantages, passes by the dialectic of Platonism. At the same time, in attracting the analysis of transcendental and phenomenological methods, A. Losev sees a serious advantage in clarifying the specifics of the dialectical method, the only one, in his opinion, capable of adequate comprehension of being.

Keywords: Marburg Neo-Kantianism, Neoplatonism, Plato, transcendental method, dialectics

Náboženská filozofia A. Loseva a marburské novokantovstvo

Abstrakt: Článok analyzuje vzťah jedného z najznámejších ruských náboženských filozofov A. F. Loseva k marburskej škole novokantovstva v kľúčových otázkach dejín filozofie a aplikácie výskumných metód. Je potrebné poznamenať, že tento ruský filozof kritizuje extrémny logicizmus a metodológiu pri interpretácii pojmu idey v marburskom novokantovstve. Bez popierania logického momentu idey a zdôrazňovania zásluh novokantovcov pri jej opise Losev zároveň trvá na obmedzeniach takéhoto chápania idey. Tiež sa domnieva, že transcendentizmus, novokantovský aj fenomenologický, so všetkými svojimi výhodami obchádza dialektiku platonizmu. A. Losev zároveň pri posudzovaní analýzy transcendentálnych a fenomenologických metód vidí vážnu výhodu v objasňovaní špecifik dialektickej metódy, ktorá je podľa neho jediná schopná adekvátne pochopiť bytie.

Klíčové slová: dialektika, marburské novokantovstvo, novoplatonizmus, Platón, transcendentálna metóda

Introduction

It is necessary to designate at once the specificity of character of the address of the Russian religious philosopher A. F. Losev to the basic provisions of philosophy of the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism. He does not have a special work entirely related to the analysis of the work of German Neo-Kantians, he needs the latter to clarify and substantiate his own philosophical position. Despite all the fluency in referring to the philosophical constructions of the 'Marburgers', one should nevertheless emphasize the fact of a comprehensive and deep acquaintance of Alexei Fedorovich Losev with the philosophy of Marburg neo-Kantianism, which is even confirmed by purely outwardly numerous quotes cited by Losev from the main works of Herman Cohen, his Marburg followers and opponents. It is also noteworthy that Losev most often considers the Neo-Kantian tradition as a whole but even brief comparisons of the positions of the Marburg Neo-Kantians indicate that he understands the dynamics of the development of the views of individual representatives within the Marburg school.

1. Plato in the understanding of Losev and the Marburg neo-Kantians

Myth, as the phenomenon itself, and dialectics, as a way of understanding it, are two elements of the philosophy of A. Losev, in which there is also an intersection with the philosophical constructions of the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism. Myth, according to Losev, is both primary reality and absolute reality, absolute being. This initial position is due to the special attention Losev paid to ancient philosophy, as the first attempt at a dialectical-rationalist interpretation of the mythological essence of human existence. He considers Plato's idealistic philosophy as the main achievement in this effort of ancient thinkers to the intellectual enlightenment of the mythological depths of being. It is precisely in a misunderstanding of the teachings of Plato that led to this distortion; Losev opens the starting point for the destruction of the true tradition of transcendentalism.

Losev is a staunch opponent of the "Kantianization of Platonism", that is, the identification of the dualism of the sensual and ideal in Plato and the thing-in-itself and the phenomenon in Kant by Marburg neo-Kantianism and the attempt to overcome such in Kant by the reinterpretation of the concept of ideas in Plato. In the rigid rejection of the psychologism of Kant's *a priori* and subjectivism of

Kant's thing-in-itself, according to Losev, in the philosophical system of Cohen and Natorp, both the true subject and the true being are lost. *The fact of science*, as a fundamental principle of the philosophy of Marburg neo-Kantianism, leaves behind the philosophical reflection of the subject-unlearned and extra-scientific reality, which entitles Losev to conclude the following:

Neo-Kantianism absolutely did not want to talk about any being. It understood the task of philosophy as follows: what is being in itself and the absolute reality of things and whether it is real or not isn't important for science; but if there is one or another being, it is very important how it is thought. Crucially, one can take any kind of being and any kind of thing, the philosopher speaks only about how to think it.¹

Cohen and his school dissolve both subject and reality in hypothesis and method, so Losev prefers to characterize this philosophy as hypotheticism and pan-Methodism. The Marburg philosophers find the basis for such a correction of Kant's transcendentalism, which is emphasized by Losev and sharply criticized by him, in the interpretation of Platonic ideas as hypotheses, methods, principles, i.e., as purely logical structures. Without denying the logical moment of the idea and emphasizing the merit of the neo-Kantians in its description, Losev at the same time insists on the limitations of such an understanding of the idea:

What the neo-Kantians consider to be the only admissible thing is nothing but one of the derivative moments. There cannot be a simple "opportunity" and a simple "method", but only a method of something and a method of something.²

In his criticism of the one-sided interpretation of ideas by neo-Kantians, Losev resorts to the help of the phenomenology of E. Husserl and the eidetic sense of the essence of ideas discovered by him. In contrast to the logical, the eidetic refers more to the intuitive side of the essence of the idea. Only together, but not separately, can eidetic and logical ideas express essence as such. However, for this purpose, according to Losev, the eidetic and logical ideas should be considered not unilaterally, but dialectically. The whole trouble of the neo-Kantians, on the one hand, and Husserl, on the other, as he believes, is that, correctly assessing the intellectual formality of the semantic content of human and natural reality, they missed the very dialectic of the interaction of being and its meaning, which

¹ Losev, A.F.: Thing and name. In: *Being. Name. Space*. Moscow: Mysl, 1993, pp. 861–862.

² Losev, A.F.: The Philosophy of Name, *ibid.*, p. 799.

cannot simply be their mutual influence on each other, but is the reality generated by this interaction.

2. The transcendental method of neo-Kantianism and its criticism by Losev

Losev is even more critical of the neo-Kantian version of the *transcendental method*. He is a consistent opponent of the identification of Platonism with transcendentalism. It is in dialectics that he finds the main difference between Plato and Cohen. Transcendentalism as a whole – both neo-Kantian and phenomenological – with all its advantages passes by the dialectic of Platonism, in the rediscovery of which Losev concentrates his efforts. At the same time, he sees a serious advantage in involving the analysis of the transcendental and phenomenological methods to clarify the specifics of the dialectical method, the only one, in his opinion, capable of adequate comprehension of being. It is also noteworthy that for the purposes of his analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of transcendentalism of Cohen and his school, Losev attracts such complex concepts of neo-Kantianism as Infinitesimal, *Ursprung*, Negation.

Referring to the method of the infinitesimal with which Cohen enriched the transcendental method, Losev emphasizes the falsity of its application in view of the general methodological principles of neo-Kantianism and the difference in his understanding of this method. If in Cohen's version – “this is the method of generation by thinking of all being”, then in Losev's – “the method of reflection of matter in thinking.”³ Thus, in the understanding of the method of the infinitesimal by Losev, not only the is orientation of the connection between thinking and being changing, but the very existence of this other thinking, that is, being, is also assumed. Furthermore, only dialectics, in his opinion, is able to provide the last opportunity to thinking.

Narrowly epistemological, scientific interests of neo-Kantian philosophy did not allow it, according to Losev, to properly dispose of the principle of the original, separating it from any being given. As he asserts,

the neo-Kantians in the classical period of their existence did not reach the first principle in the proper sense of the word, and their ‘origin’ (as Losev translates the neo-Kantian *Ursprung*) refers mainly to the logical processes of thought. They did not yet know that there is the first principle of everything logical and illogical at the same time.⁴

³ Losev, A.F.: On the method of infinitesimal in logic. In: LOSEV, A.F.: *Chaos and structure*. Moscow: Mysl, 1997, p. 617.

⁴ Losev, A.F.: Most self. In: Losev, A.F.: *Myth. Number. The essence*. Moscow: Mysl, 1994, p. 518.

Moreover, only a dialectical interpretation of the semantic generation or “origin” is able, according to Losev, to remove its logical contradiction. Having thus identified the shortcomings and one-sidedness of the transcendental and phenomenological methods in relation to the dialectical method, Losev states that both of these methods are only

two sides that must be united in a truly philosophical method; they are two extremes abstractly isolated from the whole, single method and applied each in isolation from the whole. Phenomenology captures a static image, refusing to design their entire dynamic element... Transcendentalism, on the contrary, constructs the dynamic element of the whole idea and meaning, its semantic efficacy and functioning... He is not interested in meaning, but in comprehension. Dialectics speaks of complete and static meanings only to the extent that they are derived from the foundations of thought itself, to the extent that they are generated by the element of thought itself - only to the extent of those completed formulations that precisely and dynamically meaningfully arose.⁵

3. Neoplatonism in Losev's philosophy

However, in order to approach Losev's understanding of myth and dialectics, of course, one appeal to the philosophy of Plato and his doctrine of ideas is not enough. The thought of Losev is not absolutely retrospective. He undertakes the reconstruction of ancient philosophy in order to demonstrate the existence of another, namely Christian, line of development of Hellenic wisdom. Therefore, Platonism, with its mythology and dialectic, receives its further realization not in the transcendentalism of Kant and Cohen, who renounced real existence, not in the phenomenology of Husserl, who also did not approach being, but in Neoplatonism and further in the apophatic theology of Areopagite and the formulations of the essence of the Trinity and Christ in the Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church.

According to Losev, everything conceivable in any way can be represented through a triad: idea or meaning, matter, and thing. Both transcendentalism and phenomenology work only with the idea, treating it one-sidedly, ignoring the matter, and therefore do not come to real things, which can be discovered only through the synthesis of idea and matter. The absolute myth, as an expression of the triadic essence of everything embodied in the faces of the Holy Trinity⁶, ac-

⁵ Losev, A.F.: *Mathematics and Dialectics*. In: LOSEV, A.F.: *Chaos and structure*: Moscow: Mysl, 1997, p. 799.

⁶ It is noteworthy that Losev seeks to prove the idea of the great dependence of the Christian

cording to Losev, has its otherness (pre-effusion) in the primordial essence, the first-created essence, in contrast to the uncreated Trinity.

We will not go into the details of Losev's mythology, philosophy of the name and dialectics here in connection with the designated subject of our study, we will stop only on his understanding of that part of the triad of primordial essence, which in the intellectual sphere generates ideas or meanings. After all, it is the narrowing of their interpretation in the "hypothesis" of Cohen and his school that Losev finds a distortion of the true content of ideas hidden in the teachings of Plato.

According to Losev, that which in transcendental schematism appears in an idea or sense, torn off from the matter of this idea or meaning and embodies the pure intellectual element of primitive nature, should be defined through the concept of an angel and its dialectic. Since only this concept and its dialectic best represent both the meaning itself, the meaning-in-itself, and its expressive content, the meaning-for-us:

If we take the meaning to the maximum extent of its intellectual and expressive content, then we get the angelic nature. For there to be something fluid... there must be something non-fluid... This is an elementary requirement of dialectics, and it makes us talk about the "ideal" "Eidos" and "forms" of each thing. But a thing is not only flowing; it is also something living, for example, a person...⁷

As a result, according to Losev, we must constructively accept being as a whole, personality as something whole and personal in being, as their indispensable relationship. At the same time, he draws attention to the fact that

this personal-being, regardless of the passage of time, is also something whole and cannot but have its "ideal", "disembodied" correlate. Thus the world of disembodied forces is a purely dialectical necessity of absolute mythology.⁸

Obviously, such a logic of reasoning cannot be understood, much less accepted, without the Christian context of all Losev's thought, which was decisive for it. It is also obvious that the extra-Christian philosophy of the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism could not be perceived by it as positive and friendly in any way,

dogma of the Trinity on the neo-Platonic doctrine of the three hypostases (the One – the Mind – the World Soul) – for example: LOSEV, A.F.: *The History of Classical Aesthetics. The results of the millennium development*. Published in 2 books. Moscow: Iskusstwo, 1992, Book 1, pp. 47–67.

⁷ Losev, A.F.: Primordial Being. In Losev, A.F.: *Myth. Number. The essence*, ibid., p. 236.

⁸ Ibid., p. 237.

which, in our opinion, is evidenced by the fragments of texts and intellectual constructions by Losev presented here.

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