

Philosophy of Numerical Symbolism in World's Cultures

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ABSTRACT

Understanding symbolic consciousness as a specific way of knowing reality, the semantic center of which is a symbol, suggests the possibility of representing global meanings in a symbolic form. In the absence of sufficient scientific knowledge, a person by nature inclined to symbolization, in the process of cognition creates a special way of mastering this world symbolic, which, reflecting the most essential relations of the surrounding reality, provides him with the key to understanding the ontology of the world. The idea of number, considered, in the words of G. Biedermann, as the "arche" (originals and essences) of all things, as a dominant and uncreated connection and the basis of the eternal stability of the intra-world order of things¹.

KEYWORDS: Cassirer, number mythology, Pythagorean philosophy, one, two, three, seven, eight, 40, 666, sacred numbers, Homer's ideology, harmony in numbers.

INTRODUCTION

Similar reflections on mathematical theories and numerical symbolism are characteristic of the subsequent stages of the development of European culture up to the 20th century inclusive. Summing up the original results of philosophical searches in the field of mathematics at the beginning of the 20th century, the philosopher considers number along with two other great formal motives determining the structure of the mythological world - space and time. Cassirer defines the mythological function of number by contrasting it with the theoretical meaning of number. Scientist sees the main difference between numbers in science and numbers in myth in the fact that in science a number is a concept, an element of a system, a kind of "construction", while in mythology each number still has an individuality.

In contrast to the sphere of scientific thinking, a completely different role is assigned to number in mythological thinking. If in the sphere of scientific consciousness the number serves as a form of transformation of "sensible into intellectual", then in the sphere of mythological consciousness the number is intended to turn the "profane" into "sacred". All aspects of mythological reality that are involved in some way with a number or that reveal in themselves the image and power of a certain number - all this for the mythological-religious consciousness no longer refers to simply irrelevant existence, but thereby acquires a completely new meaning.

¹Biedermann, G. 1996. *Entsiklopediyasimvolov*. Moskva: Respublika. (In Russ.)

²Эрнст Кассирер: *Познание и действительность*. Москва 2006, с.36

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20th century, the prominent German philosopher Ernst Cassirer, whose works were known and popular at the beginning of the 20th century, wrote in 1910 that between the basic concepts of pure science, the concept of number ranks first as with historical and systematic point of view. Number is affirmed as a connecting facility that holds together the various forces of consciousness, which binds together the realms of sensation, contemplation and emotion. In this case, the number drops out the function attributed by the Pythagoreans to harmony. It ... acts as a magical connection not so much uniting all things together as generating their consonance in the soul.³

Results and Discussion

"Everything is a number" - the modern worldview is not far from this ancient saying and the verses of the mathematician Jacobi sound prophetically: "What you see in space is only a Divine reflection. And over the Gods reigns existence forever Number"⁴. The above quote testifies to the enormous role which was pinned on the number in the theories and philosophical concepts of all scholars. European culture of the 20th century is characterized by increased attention to the problem of number and numerical symbolism in the field of philosophy, not to mention research in the field of mythology.

³Эрнст Кассирер: *Познание и действительность*. Москва 2006, с.152

⁴Священник Павел Флоренский: *Сочетания в 4 томах*. Том 2. Москва 1996, с.632,635

Homer's poems, representing European civilization in the archaic period, have become a classic example of demonstration of ancient Indo-European mythological symbolism of numbers. These literary monuments that have today been scrupulously studied for the functioning of numerical symbols in the artistic world of antiquity. Of all the aesthetic categories inherent in Homer's relation to reality, the category of number was subjected to a special and, at the same time, exhaustive analysis. Most researchers of antiquity emphasize the fact that the Homeric epic, on the one hand, reflects the Indo-European numerical symbolism, which is characterized by the use of number not chaotically, but naturally, in relation to a certain sphere of reality. And on the other hand, already in Homer's poems, the aesthetic meaning of number, the meaning of the principles of symmetry, which is characteristic exclusively of antiquity, manifested itself, while it is in antiquity that number is one of the main aesthetic categories and, long before the Pythagoreans, is interpreted as a principle of aesthetic structure and artistic design of everything that exists⁵.

In Babylon, Egypt, Canaan, the Roman Empire, whole systems of sacred numbers were developed and used in various ways. Perhaps in its most complete form, numerology as a mystical-philosophical doctrine was developed in Greece by the Pythagoreans. In their cosmological constructions, number is the central concept, it was interpreted as a synthesis, the unification of the limit and the infinite, as the divine principle in the world, the principle of all things and the soul itself. With their teaching about the number of Pythagoreans, they embraced all being. Pythagoreanism is a doctrine 1) about numbers themselves or about gods as numbers 2) about the cosmos as number 3) about things as numbers 4) about souls as numbers and 5) about art as numbers⁶. For Pythagoras, number is the eternal essence and the beginning of everything - heaven, earth, nature. Pythagoras said that everything happens not from number, but in accordance with it. He considered the universal principle "one" and "two", and he also called "two" as chaos. As Porphyry writes, "of the two opposing forces, he [Pythagoras] drew the best as "one", light, truthfulness, equality, strength and persistence; and the worst - "two", darkness, leftism, inequality, fragility and changeability"⁷. The Pythagoreans believed in the mysterious, mystical meaning of number and numerical relationships. The numbers 1 and 10 were revered by them as symbols of perfection; 5 - as a symbolic designation of the marriage union; 7 - as a sign of the universal world-ruling principle (Pythagoras) or as a symbol of virginity personified in the image of Athena-Virgin (Philolaus).

The early Pythagoreans perceived number as the beginning of the dispensation and, accordingly, the knowledge of the world. In the study of numerical relationships, they saw the same means of saving the soul as in religious rituals. The Pythagoreans were the first to elevate mathematics to a previously unknown rank by considering numbers and

⁵Алексей Лосев :*История античной эстетики*. Ранняя классика. Москва 2000, с. 192

⁶Алексей Лосев :*История античной эстетики*. Ранняя классика. Москва 2000, с. 285

⁷Лосев А.Ф. *История античной эстетики*. – М.: Искусство, 1980. – 766 с

numerical relationships as a key to understanding the universe and its structure.

According to Aristotle, the Pythagoreans assumed that the elements of numbers are the elements of everything that exists and that the whole sky is harmony and number. And everything that they could show in numbers and harmonies consistent with the states and parts of the sky and with the entire world order, they brought together and brought into agreement with each other ... they consider the even and odd elements of the number, of which the last is the limiting, and the first is unlimited; one thing is them from both (namely: it is even and odd), the number comes from the one, and the whole sky, as has been said, is numbers⁸.

The materials that have come down to us about the famous Pythagorean Philolaus contain the doctrine of the composition of everything that exists from the limit and the infinite. Number, according to Philolaus, makes possible the very knowledge of things, or the knowledge of harmony. By this harmony, according to experts in Antiquity, one should understand, firstly, the most ordinary musical interval, and secondly, in general, any combination of the heterogeneous, any unity. Philolaus said that harmony is the combination of a varied mixture and the agreement of disagreements, or the unity of opposites. Aristotle lists 10 main Pythagorean opposites: finite and infinite, even and odd, one and many, right and left, masculine and feminine, resting and moving, straight and curved, light and dark, good and evil, square and oblong-quadrangular. Philolaus calls the unity of these opposites harmony. And the Pythagoreans saw the prototype of any harmony in the harmony of musical⁹. Aristotle in "Physics" explains the Pythagorean doctrine of the even and odd like this: "... the Pythagoreans consider the infinite to be an even number, it, being enclosed within and limited to an odd number, imparts infinity to existing things. The proof is what happens to the numbers: namely, if you put gnomons around the unit and do it further (for even and odd separately), in one case you always get a special kind of figure, in the other - the same."¹⁰

Analysis of the factual material shows that the numerals of the first ten are a universal indicator of cultural significance in phraseological units with a numerological component. So, word, denoting the number "two", in the structure of phraseological unit leads to the formation of deep meanings associated with ambiguity and indecision. This is probably due to the fact that even Plotinus used the Pythagorean complex of ideas about the so-called indefinitetwo, the first difference and "audacity", which became the reason for the transition of a single into a multitude¹¹.

⁸Гайденко П.П. *История греческой философии в ее связи с наукой*. – М.; СПб.: Центр гуманитарных инициатив, 2012. – 319 с.

⁹ С.А. Гудимова. ЧИСЛА САКРАЛЬНЫЕ, ЧИСЛА СИМВОЛИЧЕСКИЕ.- *Вестник культурологии*, 2017

¹⁰ Кириллин В.М. *Символика чисел в литературе Древней Руси, (XI–XVI века)*. – СПб.: Алетейя, 2000. – 320 с.

¹¹ Плотин. *Избранные трактаты* : в 2 томах / Плотин ; пер. с древнегреческого под ред. проф. Г. В. Милованского. — Москва : РМ, 1994. — Т. 1. — 128 с

O. Marquard points out the correlation between the words *zwei* ("two") and *zweifel* ("doubt") in the German language, which, according to the philosopher, indicates that the number "two" automatically brings uncertainty and hesitation into our lives¹². It should be noted that a culturally significant symbolic opposition can be considered the fact that in the minds of representatives of the Chinese linguocultural community, the number "two" is associated with the bipolarity of the cosmos, the feminine and masculine principles, which ensure stability, polarity and harmony in the Universe¹³.

Among the numbers of the first ten, three stood out for its peculiar symbolism. In the era of antiquity, the mystical symbolism of the triplet as the number of spells and curses was established, in contrast to the Christian sacred symbolism of this number. The origins of such ideas lie in the Pythagorean doctrine of the special role of unpaired numbers: three is the first unpaired number in the arithmetic series, like the first "proper" number. "One" was a symbol of the cosmos and symbolized the "unity", two was a symbol of absolute informality, and only the synthesis of one and two, that is, two formed with the help of one, becomes the principle of formation in general, that is, a number¹⁴. Since spells were addressed to the Gods, it is understandable why the trinity had a magical and sacred meaning.

The famous Solon wrote a special poem "The Weeks of Human Life", in which he presented a poetic understanding of the seven as the most important period in human life. Our whole life, in the concept of this ancient Greek politician and poet, appears as a string of weeks, we change every 7 years, and so on until very old age, by 10 sevenths. A boy at 7 years loses his first tooth, after the next seven years the adolescent already shows signs of maturity, in the third week a beard appears, and the fourth becomes a symbol of the flourishing of physical strength, the fifth is the time of marriage and the birth of children, the maturation of the mind is associated with the sixth week, developing of mind and speech - from the seventh and eighth, and then the fading of physical and mental forces begins¹⁵.

F. Kessedy writes about the traditional belief of the ancient Greeks in the mysterious and universal nature of the number 7, drawing attention to the fact that "the fascination with the mysticism of numbers led some followers of Pythagoras, for example Philolaus, on the path of revising his ideas about the world-ruling role of the number seven", which in turn resulted in replacing the rule of the seven with the rule of the tens (decades). But the seven continued to haunt the minds of the ancient philosophers who considered this number "virgin", since the number 7 as a result of division does not "give birth" to any of the numbers and itself "is not born"

¹²Marquard O. In *Defense of the Accidental*. Philosophical Studies / O. Marquard. — Oxford : University Press, 1991. — 144 p.

¹³Тань Аошун Китайская картина мира : Язык, культура, ментальность / Тань Аошун. — Москва : Языки славянской культуры, 2004. — 240 с

¹⁴Плутарх: *Застольные беседы*. Ленинград 1990. с. 173-177

¹⁵Античная лирика. Греческие поэты. Москва 2001, с. 133.

from the numbers of the first ten (with the exception of one)¹⁶.

The analysis of the symbolism of a number indicates the fact that, just as objects, phenomena and events differ from each other, one number differs from another in its inherent individual characteristics. The characteristic properties of numbers formed in the mind of a person in the process of reasoning are imprinted in a symbolic numerical code. So, for example, symbolism, reflecting the qualitative nature of numbers, is directly represented in the conditional division of numbers into the so-called "unlucky" and "lucky". In Western cultures, thirteen is often perceived as an "unlucky" number. According to W. F. Hopper, this fact can have several explanations. One of the explanations is related to the need to bring the early lunar calendars in line with the solar year, which forced the addition of the thirteenth "extra" month, which was perceived as dissonant, violating harmony and, therefore, associated with misfortune. In addition, in Faustus the number thirteen was associated with the devilish arts and constituted the Hellish Hierarchy. In the UK and other Western countries, 13 is associated with witchcraft and black magic. There is also a superstition associated with the presence of thirteen at the table, which is associated with the last meal of Jesus Christ¹⁷.

The so-called "lucky" numbers in Western cultures traditionally include the numbers "three", "seven", "nine", while, for example, in Chinese culture, the numbers "six" and "eight" symbolize success and prosperity, in the connotative aspect of meaning the latter has the sign of 'wealth'¹⁸. Of particular interest is the ethnocultural singling out of the number 40. From the point of view of etymology, the meaning of this number is controversial. Most scientists agree that the number 40 symbolizes a complete cycle in the process of divine accomplishments or a certain indivisible wholeness¹⁹. So, in the Christian tradition, the number 40 is associated with test and trial. For 40 years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness; the downpour that hit the earth during the flood rained 40 days and 40 nights, Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai and Jesus - in the desert. Great Fasting, during which Christians are preparing for Easter, also lasts 40 days. In funeral rites, it takes 40 days for the body to completely free itself from the soul. Finally, it is 40 weeks that a woman is carrying a baby.

Kabbalistic numerical symbolism, based on the numerical value of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, acquired a unique significance in the European poetic tradition. By itself, the fact of the numerical value of letters is not original, moreover, according to modern data, numerical values

¹⁶Феохарий Кессиди. От мифа к логосу. Становление греческой философии. Санкт-Петербург 2003, С.177.

¹⁷Hopper, V. F. 2000. *Medieval number symbolism: its sources, meaning, and influence on thought and expression*. New York, Mineola: Dover Publications Inc.

¹⁸Pshenkina, T. G. 2014. *Rolsimvolnoy sostavlyayushchey prianalizesoderzhaniya frazeologicheskikh edinit: sopostavitelnyy aspekt*. In: *Funktsionalno-kognitivnyy analizyazykovykh edinit i ego aplikativnyy potentsial: materialy II mezhdunarodnoy nauchnoy konferentsii*. Barnaul: AltGPA. 239—241. (In Russ.).

¹⁹Лосева А.Ф. *Бытие-имя-космос*. Москва, 1993. с. 396

appear only in the Greek alphabet, and in its Semitic prototype they were absent and were perceived with the Semitic alphabets later from the Greek. A feature of the Jewish Kabbalah is that the numerical symbolism in it is elevated to the level of philosophical doctrine, numbers and letters explain the origin of the world, its past, present and future²⁰. A well-known example of the kabbalistic tradition of numerical symbolism is the interpretation of the number 666 as the name of the emperor Nero in the text of the Apocalypse. In the text of the Apocalypse, the number 666 is presented as the ominous Number of the Beast: "Here is wisdom. Whoever has a mind, count the number of the beast, for this number is human; its number is 666"²¹.

Conclusion

Thus, since ancient times, number has been a means of comprehending the world, space. At the same time, a significant place is given to the first two terms of the numerical series: "One", actualized in the linguistic consciousness of the ethnos, serves as the initial, the highest beginning of being and thought, "Two" is the categorical basis of the emerging pluralities, a symbol of correspondence, connection and opposites of things. With the help of numbers that have directions and order in a person's representation, the space perceived by a person is organized. As a result, the cosmos appears as a system of heterogeneous spaces interacting with each other, overlapping one another. The most important thing in understanding the number is that it serves as a way of uniting separateness outside their qualitative differences and thus acts as a tool for understanding the world. This is the cognitive and philosophical significance of each concert, its melodic role in the formation of the linguistic picture of the world.

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