

WORD AS A PHILOSOPHICAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL-RELIGIOUS CONCEPT

Abstract. The article deals with mythological, religious and philosophical aspects of the concept Word that form its inner content. The Word is one of the most significant notions inherent to all cultures as the word is the main tool of cognition and expressing thought, as well as communication. The article identifies three major levels of interpretation of the concept Word: mythological, religious, and philosophical. On the mythological level, the word is perceived as a magical and sacred entity, capable of creation or destruction, having a power to impact man and nature. Examples from Vedic, Zoroastrian, Slavic, and Uzbek linguocultures demonstrate that spoken words, names, and sacred speech formulas function as instruments of transformation and communication with supernatural powers. From the positions of Philosophy, Word being correlated with the ancient Greek notion of Logos (Heraclitus, Plato, the Stoics) is interpreted as an “idea” identical with being itself. The ideas of ancient philosophers laid the foundation for the religious interpretation of the Word, according to which the Divine Word is the creative principle of the world through which the act of creation is carried out. The study concludes that the concept *Word* serves as a fundamental cultural category reflecting the unity synthesizing different mythological and religious senses and meanings. The analysis of complex, multi-layered structure of this concept necessitates a **multidisciplinary approach**, integrating the data of linguistics, philosophy, theology, and cultural studies.

Key words: word; mythological; religious; philosophical; name; conceptualization; interpretation.

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СЛОВО КАК ФИЛОСОФСКИЙ И МИФОЛОГО-РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЙ КОНЦЕПТ

Статья посвящена исследованию мифолого-религиозного и философского содержания концепта Слово, формирующего его внутреннюю форму. Слово является одним из наиболее значимых понятий присущим всем культурам, т.к. слово является основным средством выражения мысли и коммуникации. В статье анализируются три смысловых уровня концепта *Слово*: мифологический, религиозный и философский. На мифологическом уровне

слово осмысливается как магическая и сакральная сущность, способная к созиданию или разрушению. Приводятся примеры из ведической, зороастрийской, славянской и узбекской традиций, где произнесённое слово, имя или молитвенная формула выступают как инструмент воздействия на реальность. На философском уровне *Слово* сопоставляется с античным понятием *Логоса* (Гераклит, Платон, стоики) и трактуется как «идея», тождественная бытию. Идеи античных философов положили основу религиозной трактовке Слова, согласно которой Божественное Слово есть творческое начало мира, посредством которого осуществляется акт творения. Результаты исследования подтверждают, что концепт *Слово* является ключевым элементом духовной и интеллектуальной культуры человечества, синтезирующим различные мифологические, философские и религиозные значения. Исследование его многоуровневой структуры требует междисциплинарного подхода, учёта как языковых, так и внеязыковых факторов, включающих научные данные лингвистики, культурологии, философии и теологии.

Ключевые слова: слово; мифологический; религиозный; философский; имя; концептуализация; интерпретация.

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*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God (John 1:1)*

The Word is a unique concept inherent to all cultures that is explained by its ontological nature and interdisciplinary character. Possessing a multidimensional cultural potential on a global scale, this concept has repeatedly become and continues to be the subject of research by various scientific disciplines, such as philosophy, cultural studies, psychology, theology, history, and sociology. In linguistics the research of complex nature of the concept Word was in the focus of many scholars (Stepanov 2004; Degtev, Makeeva 2000; Lebedeva 2003; Zykova 2006; Galieva 2010, Stepanenko 2006). It is conditioned by the fact that the Word being the main linguistic unit is a major tool of communication as well as instrument of representing and transferring culture and information about the world. Yet, the significance of the Word transcends the purely linguistic domain, encompassing mythological, religious and sacred dimensions making it a subject of interdisciplinary research.

The article is aimed at studying the philosophical and mythological-religious conceptualization of the Word that shapes the perception of the Word as both a linguistic phenomenon and a metaphysical category. Special attention is given to the ways in which philosophical thought, mythological and religious worldviews have contributed to the formation of the semantic and symbolic significance of the Word, revealing its dual nature as an instrument of

human communication and as a bearer of sacred and ontological meaning. Through this analysis, the article aspires to elucidate how the interrelation between language, thought, and belief systems are manifested in language.

The mythological conceptualization of the concept Word goes deep into history. As A.A. Potebnya notes, “The word is the main and primordial tool of mythical thinking” (Potebnya 1976). Mythological consciousness, according to N.B. Mechkovskaya, is “a primitive, collective (pan-ethnic), imaginative representation of the world with a mandatory (supernatural) component” (Mechkovskaya 1998). According to L. Lévy-Bruhl, mythological consciousness is characterized by attributing mystical and magical properties to all objects. The researcher asserts that “Since everything that exists possesses mystic properties, and these properties, from their very nature, are much more important than the attributes of which our senses inform us, the difference between animate and inanimate things is not of the same interest to primitive mentality as it is to our own. As a matter of fact, the primitive’s mind frequently disregards it altogether” (Lévy-Bruhl 1985). The word was also endowed with mystical abilities, as it served as a mediator between humans and supernatural entities. Subsequently, this non-conventional attitude toward the Word led to the emergence of various prayers, spells, incantations, etc., through which people ‘communicated’ with the gods. In many religious traditions of the world, the word was perceived not just as a means of communication, but as a sacred energy capable of influencing divine forces. It was believed that the precise, sequential, and rhythmic pronunciation of words opens the way to higher powers, making prayer effective. Thus, for example, in Vedic India, the mantra was considered the ‘sounding Brahman’ (śabda-brahman) – the manifestation of the divine through sound. In the Rigveda (I.164.35) it is said: “Let the words be one, let there be a common sacrifice”, so the harmony of speech and thought ensures connection with the gods. Many commentators on the Rigveda emphasize that it was believed that a mistake in sound or word order could destroy the spiritual effect: an incorrectly pronounced mantra “burns the fruit of the sacrifice”. For example, changing one sound in the formula *agnim īle* (I praise the fire) was considered a violation of the sacred ritual. In the Islamic tradition, correct pronunciation of letters, words (tartil), and observance of the norms of tajweed are considered conditions for the prayer to be ‘heard’ by Allah. Even the slightest distortion of sound or word order changes the meaning and spiritual power of the address. Similar ideas exist in Christianity as well; for example, the order of words in prayers, especially in the Pater Noster (Our Father) (Bible, Matthew 6:9), is considered to have been given by Christ himself, and violation of its form is perceived as a distortion of dogma.

At the mythological level, the Word closely interacts with the Name. In mythological consciousness, the word was perceived as an entity endowed with magical power, since after “naming or designating an object with a word”, the object began to live; consequently, the name in mythological consciousness was seen as a mysterious entity, knowledge of which gave power over the named object (Mechkovskaya 1998). The mythological function of the name, as noted by N.I. Tolstoy and S.M. Tolstaya, is manifested in the fact that the name acts as a mediator regulating a person’s relationship with nature, the cosmos, and the supernatural world. The name “becomes the full representative (substitute) of a person in front of the higher, divine, celestial protectors, at the

same time it also exposes him to dangerous, demonic, otherworldly hostile forces... it is endowed with magical properties and is used in rituals as a tool of magic – protective, expelling, productive, healing; the name is tabooed, concealed, duplicated, subjected to substitution; the choice of a name and process of naming are subjects to strict regulation and magical purposes” (Tolstoy, Tolstaya 2000). In this regard, according to archaic beliefs, knowledge of the true name gave power over its bearer: by pronouncing the name, one could influence a person, summon spirits, or even cause harm. Therefore, in many cultures, the real name of a child was kept secret, and in everyday life a second, ‘protective’ name was used, it should have been neutral or ‘deceptive’ to hide the child from evil forces and spirits. Thus, for example, in the ancient Egyptian tradition, the name was considered part of a person’s essence: destroying the name on inscriptions meant destroying the soul itself. The true names of gods and pharaohs were known only to initiated priests; so, for example, according to legend, the god Ra lost part of his power when the goddess Isis learned his secret name. In Slavic linguoculture, a child was often given a ‘substitute’ name – for example, *Nezhdan* (not awaited), *Nekras* (not handsome), *Plokhish* (the bad one) – to deceive the spirits of illness or death. The true name (if not forgotten) was revealed only in adulthood or during initiation rituals. In ancient Chinese tradition, there was a distinction between “ming” (official name) and “zi” (courtesy name): the real name of a child was not uttered aloud not to attract the attention of evil spirits. Similar beliefs about names still exist, particularly in Uzbek linguoculture, where a child is given the name of a saint or great figure. If the child then often falls ill, the name is changed to a simpler, more ordinary one so that the spirits leave him alone. According to A.A. Potebnya in mythological consciousness there was also a belief that “the mere utterance of a known word can itself produce the phenomenon with which it is associated” (Potebnya 1989). This function is especially vividly manifested in situations where a family faces repeated loss of children, as a result parents try to ‘trick fate’, through the name, instilling the world and otherworldly forces the idea of resilience and life. Parents who have lost several children name the newborn with names like *Ulmas* (will not die, immortal), *Tursun* (let him live), *Urish* (let him take roots), *Tokhta* (stop, ‘so that death stops’), *Jonli* (alive). Thus, in Uzbek linguoculture, such names carry apotropaic (protective) semantics so that name itself becomes a magical speech act shaping the desired reality. Similarly to archaic ideas about the magical-protective function of the name, in a number of cultures there was also the opposite belief according to which knowledge of someone’s or something’s name endowed a person with power over that being or phenomenon, up to the possibility of destroying it. Thus, in Uzbek culture, children born with numerous birthmarks (nor, khol in Uzbek) are often named *Anora*, *Gulnora*, *Dilnora*, *Kholida*, *Kholid*, etc., so that the birthmark does not harm the child or disappear, i.e., the word/name acts as an amulet protecting from misfortune. According to a number of researchers the non-conventional attitude toward the personal name as a substitute for the person himself explains “the widespread use of the name in magical practice, first, as an object of magical operations with the help of which one can influence the bearer of the name; second, as an instrument of magic itself” (Tolstoy, Tolstaya 2000). That is why illness, especially of a child, was explained by an incorrectly chosen or ‘spoiled’ name which required changing the name to a more suitable one.

Thus, in mythological consciousness, the Word is endowed with magical power, possessing certain abilities, since “the name finally forms (creates, gives birth to) a person” (Tolstoy, Tolstaya 2000). Through the word one could create, destroy, revive, so the life and fate of the named object depended on the word. It was enough to know and say name to cast a spell on a person (Zinoviev, 1987:129). These beliefs subsequently led to the emergence of onomastic taboos, customs of double naming, name changes, and euphemisms in language and culture.

According to V.N. Toporov, one of the most ancient civilizations, namely ancient Indian culture, was distinguished by its word-centeredness and retained the deepest understanding of the sovereignty of the Word and Speech. It had a unique awareness and regarded the word as the highest reality, at core of culture (Toporov, 1985). Thus, according to one of the ancient Indian myths the God of Mind competed with the goddess speech and inspiration Vach (literally Word, Speech), who invented Sanskrit and the Indian alphabet. The God of Mind won the competition, but he had to admit that without the goddess of Word and Speech, he cannot carry out his activities. As O.A. Donskikh notes, ancient Indian culture also emphasizes the connection of the Word with reasoning and thought. Thus, in the Shatapatha Brahmana and in the Upanishads, there are passages where it is said “Truly, the Rig and the Saman are speech, word. Truly, the Yajus is thought. Where there was speech, everything was accomplished... ... where there was (only) thought, nothing was accomplished. Truly, they do not understand the one who thinks with thought (but does not speak)... It is precisely thought and speech, like a harness, that bring the sacrifice to the gods” (Donskikh, 1984:15).

Zoroastrian texts also preserve one of the oldest testimonies of how people conceived the relationship of the triad thought – word – deed. According to the Zoroastrian prophet Zarathustra, the word in this triad is central one. The highest and most powerful gods, both of Goodness and Evil, are precisely those gods who possess the power of the Word. According to K. S. Braginsky, here the Word “embodies thought (spirit), is identified with deed” (Braginsky, 1983).

Thus, it can be concluded that mythological consciousness tends to attribute various supernatural properties to the Word. The Word is endowed with magical power, possessing certain abilities to influence the environment and humankind.

The philosophical and religious levels are mainly represented by the necessity to study the concept Word in its interaction with such concepts as Logos, Knowledge, God. Thus, according to the definition given in the philosophical dictionary, Logos (Greek logos – word) is a philosophical term “originally denoting the universal law, the foundation of the world, its order and harmony” (FS, 1986). The study devoted to the concept Word by Yu.S. Stepanov showed that as a philosophical term, Logos (literally Word) was used in ancient Greece by Heraclitus (late 6th–early 5th centuries BC). According to him, Logos is the foundation, the rational principle of the world and nature, which is arranged according to true reasoning, i.e. Logos. According to S. N. Trubetskoy, Heraclitus laid the basis of later idealism: if nature is knowable through “true reasoning,” then “it is in accordance with it Logos as a rational principle lies in its very foundation” (Trubetskoy, 1915). The Stoics (Zeno, Chrysippus) developed Heraclitus's idea, defining Logos as the divine reason and creative principle of the world. It permeates the Universe, giving form to all

that exists (Long, Sedley 1987). Socrates considers Logos as concept since 'the true principle, norm, or objective beginning is the logical thought itself, the concept itself. Socrates saw in Logos the source and criterion of objective knowledge and believed that a system of correct behavior that gives a person a possibility reach true supreme goodness (Stepanov 2004).

Plato, the founder of idealism, views Logos as an 'idea' – a bodiless, eternal, invisible 'form' that is identical to being. The 'idea' (Logos) is eternal, it neither appears nor disappears and does not depend on space and time. Aristotle interpreted Logos as the essence of things, the rational principle, the logical form of reality, through which everything that is knowable by man is determined in the world. He also stated that besides Logos, there also exists 'matter' – a formless, unknowable beginning. If 'matter' in Aristotle is a passive principle, then 'form' is the primary productive force, the active principle of motion, and ultimately its final goal, i.e., the attainment of the 'unmoved mover' – God' (FS, 1986). His thoughts were developed in the philosophy of the Stoics, who believed that if Logos is the essence of things, then it also includes matter. Therefore, according to their teaching, Logos is everything – divinity, nature, reason, the element of the world (Trubetskoy, 1915). Here, according to Yu. S. Stepanov, "the doctrine of Logos for the first time acquires a religious coloring, becoming a moral-theological doctrine of divine providence" (Stepanov, 2004).

The ideas of ancient philosophers, especially Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics regarding Logos were borrowed by Christianity leading to the emergence of a theological interpretation of the philosophical Logos. Thus, according to S.N. Trubetskoy, the teaching of Philo of Alexandria became a mediator between the ancient philosophical and Christian understanding of Logos. According to Philo of Alexandria, Logos is regarded as a mediator (in the form of Platonic ideas) between God and the world he created, since Logos is a certain combination of Platonic ideas and creative divine power (FS, 1986).

In further Christian philosophy Logos lost its original meanings and acquired a religious connotation, becoming one of the main concepts of Christianity and began to be interpreted differently than in ancient philosophy. Thus, according to the religious, more precisely the Christian doctrine of Logos the Word is the God, the beginning of all beginnings which exists eternally. The Gospel of John begins with the verse "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Bible, John 1:1-2) (cf. in the Greek original λόγος – Logos, word, thought, meaning, concept), which is interpreted as "the revelation of the Essence of God, the eternal image of God" (Trubetskoy, 1915), i.e., according to the Gospel, God is incarnated in the Word in the person of Jesus Christ. Here, Logos is identified with the God Himself – the eternal Word through which everything that exists was created. This radically distinguishes the Christian understanding of Logos from the ancient one: Heraclitus understands Logos as an impersonal cosmic reason, Book of Jonh sees it as the living Divine Word, a personal Mind/Soul incarnated in man. The early apologists and Church Fathers, especially Justin Martyr (2nd century), developed the idea that Logos is presented in every human soul as a foreshadowing of Christ's truth. Clement of Alexandria and Origen united the divine and the human asserting that Christ is the Logos, i.e. enlightening Mind/Soul. Thus, in Christianity, Logos became the name of the second person of the Trinity – the

Son of God, Jesus Christ, incarnated for the salvation of the world. This understanding was the subject of debate among philosophers, theologians, and linguists. From the Christian point of view, the doctrine of the Word presents faith in revelation and in the complete incarnation of God in man, while from the position of philosophy, the Word in this context is understood as thought, reason, the basis of creativity. It should be noted that philosophical understanding is close to some with ideas of Christian and Islamic scholars, since the act of creation is carried out through the creative essence of the Word. In Eastern patristics (the Cappadocians – Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa), Logos is understood as the eternal Word of the Father through which creation and revelation are accomplished. In the Qur'an, the Word is also personified in the name of Jesus Christ (Isa ibn Maryam) who is called the Word of Allah (kalimatullah): – ... “O Mary! Allah gives you good news of a Word from Him, his name will be the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary... (Imran 45). However, in Islamic theology, unlike in Christianity, Isa (Jesus) is not the son of God, but only His Word and prophet, as emphasized in the following verse: – The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was no more than a messenger of Allah and the fulfilment of His Word through Mary and a spirit from Him (Women 171). The lexeme 'Kalima' (literally, the Word of God) here means that the birth of Isa/Jesus is directly connected with the Word of Allah, creative and generative, which in the Quranic text corresponds to the lexeme بَ – Be! That is why, from the point of view of Islam, Jesus is the embodiment of the creative Word of God, as confirmed by the following verse: Indeed, the example of Jesus in the sight of Allah is like that of Adam. He created him from dust, then said to him, “Be!” And he was! (Imran 59).

However, despite the differences between philosophical and religious viewpoints, according to S. N. Trubetskoy, there is “an undeniable parallelism between them... philosophers either identified their Logos with the Deity or saw in it an emanation of the Deity... On the other hand, theologians see in contemporary revelation and incarnation of the Deity the ultimate goal, and therefore the creative principle of the world”, so “in the development of Christian theology, elements of the religious and the philosophical naturally coincide” (Trubetskoy, 1915). Thus, to summarize, one can conclude that from the Christian point of view, the Word is faith in the complete incarnation of God in man, while from the philosophical position it is thought, reason, the basis of creativity, the beginning of all that is knowable, through the comprehension/understanding of which the ultimate goal is achieved.

Special attention should be given to A. F. Losev's work “The Philosophy of the Name”, which discusses the Word and its hypostasis, the ‘Name’. As Yu. S. Stepanov rightly notes, “‘word and name’ in the main part of his (A. F. Losev's) concept are synonyms (Stepanov, 1985). This treatise generalizes the ideas of imyaslavie, the philosophical doctrine of the mighty power of the Word, which was relevant in the 4th–7th centuries AD and at the beginning of the 20th century, with major representatives such as P. A. Florensky and S. N. Bulgakov. Thus, A. F. Losev, in a peculiar poetic form, wrote: “If essence is name, word, then it means the whole world, the universe is name and word, or names and words. Man is a word, an animal is a word, an inanimate object is a word, for all this is meaning and its expression. Everything lives by the word and testifies to it... every science

is a science of meaning or of meaningful facts, which means that every science is in words and about words” (Losev 1990).

The doctrine of the Logos of Greek philosophers did not go unnoticed in the East, where the dominant religion was Islam. Interest in Greek sciences arose with the rise to power of the Abbasid dynasty. Under the patronage of Caliph al-Ma'mun, who valued the science and arts encouraging the pursuit of enlightenment by a number of scholars, and founded the famous House of Wisdom considered the first academic university in the East. In the House of Wisdom, scholars of various nationalities and beliefs actively conducted their research. Many works from around the world, especially Greek philosophical and scientific texts, were translated into Arabic at this university. As a result of Arab scholars' acquaintance with the philosophical views of Aristotle and Plato, the philosophical-religious movement of al-Kalam appeared in Islam. Notably, the name of this movement is translated as Word. A number of Islamic tenets were subjected to rationalization leading to the development of a system of theoretical Islamic theology. The mutakallimun (followers of Kalam) were the first to attempt to substantiate Muslim doctrine with logical-philosophical arguments treating reason (the Word-Logos) as the highest authority. Many tenets of the philosophy of al-Kalam were also adopted by Sunnis Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, whose teachings remain relevant to this day. Thus, the doctrine of al-Kalam (Logos) made a huge contribution not only to the development of Islamic philosophy but also to world philosophy, as its philosophical and theological concepts and tenets also influenced the rationalization of Christianity in Europe during the Renaissance.

Thus, the analysis of the mythological and philosophical-religious aspect of the Word, aimed at revealing the deep structure of the concept Word, testifies to the conceptual significance of its content, which is characterized by its multifaceted nature, and therefore requires an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of its complex, multidimensional structure.

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