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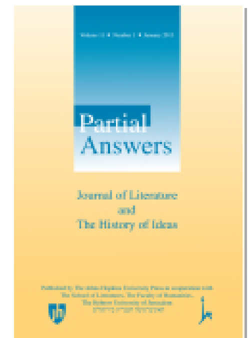

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Love and Bewilderment: Matvei Kagan's Literary Critical Concepts

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Matvei Kagan (1889–1937) was a prominent Russian-Jewish neo-Kantian, an original and brilliant philosopher and critic. His ideas were bold and often provocative; the times in which he lived were dark, as were those after his untimely death. He was a student of Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp, and Ernst Cassirer, and a close friend of Mikhail Bakhtin, with whom he held long philosophical conversations during and after the Nevel period.[1]

For decades Kagan was ignored, his reputation dwarfed by that of Bakhtin. A few years ago his writings, some translated from German and Yiddish, were collected and published with a short introduction and some biographical texts, by Vitali Makhlin (see Kagan 2004), who recently published an article on Kagan's lack of success in The State Academy of Artistic Sciences (Makhlin 2010). Brian Poole (1995 and 1997) has pointed to Kagan's influence on Bakhtin. Ruth Coates has conducted a primary comparison between Kagan's and Bakhtin's philosophical conceptions on the basis of a few selected early works. Leonid Katsis (2008 and 2009) has discussed Jewish elements in his thought. Nikolai Nikolaev (1998 and 2004) has mentioned Kagan in his work on the Nevel School, which focuses on Lev Pumpiansky. Students of the Marburg School and neo-Kantians in Russia, such as Vladimir Belov (2004: 345) and Nina Dmitrieva (2007: 191–92), also sometimes mention Kagan's contributions. These studies, together with a few brief references in books on Bakhtin (e.g., Hirschkop 1999: 142–48ff), are the sum total of academic attention given to the work of Matvei Kagan so far.

The role of neo-Kantianism in shaping Russian philosophy, literature, and literary criticism in the twentieth century remains one of the open questions in the modern history of ideas. Nina Dmitrieva (2007)

[1] I would like to thank Natalia Vladimirovna Makarova for her kind support and help, and particularly for documents and manuscripts from Kagan's archive, with which she generously provided me. I am grateful to Professor Leonid Katsis and Dr. Avi Bernstein Nahar for their valuable advice and comments, and for their practical support.

has made a major step toward answering it, but the issue of its Jewish and Russian-Jewish component (arguably, the phenomenon of "Russian-Jewish neo-Kantianism," as suggested in Katsis 2008) has fallen out of her scope. Today, as Marburgian neo-Kantianism is experiencing a re-awakening (see Munk 2005; Gibbs 2006; Poma 2006; and Makkreel and Luft 2010) and is regaining its "world-historical importance" (Dmitrieva 14), the role of Kagan in the "transmission [and] transformation" (Dmitrieva 15) of this tradition merits a closer examination.

The present paper discusses two major literary concepts of Kagan: "tragic bewilderment" (*tragicheskoe nedoumenie*), as it appears in his work on Aleksander Pushkin, and "love of the environment" (Yiddish: *svive-libe*), according to Kagan's work on Ivan Turgenev. I discuss these concepts in the context of Kagan's philosophy of history and art, particularly his notions of purposefulness and work, sanctity and sacrifice, myth and gift, love and Creation, partly inherited from the Marburg School and the Russian Silver Age. After a brief biographical sketch, I argue that in the center of Kagan's historical theory of literature lies the idea of the Jewish community as a model for canonization of the cultural work. Kagan discusses literature as generating self-awareness and national-cultural identity, either through tragic bewilderment at the loss of freedom and love in history (in the case of Pushkin) or through a culture's self-defining dialogue with other cultures (as in the case of Turgenev). The central concept of this approach is that of *svive-libe* — "love of environment," interpreted as love for a community's cultural contribution in the context of its purposefulness in a universal human context.

I

According to official records, Matvei (Morduch Nisan) Kagan was born in the city of Nevel on November 5, 1888, although according to other sources he was born in 1889 in the small village of Piatnitskoie in the Pskov province ("Autobiographical Notes," 2004: 24), in the family of "a not wealthy leather merchant" (Iudif' Kagan 2004: 11), Saadiya Shneur Zalman (Shaye) Kagan. He received a traditional Jewish education and at the same time learned Russian. He was admitted to a primary school for Jewish children and later to a municipal school, but until 1904 he con-

[2] See Kagan 1916. The article "Vom Begriff der Geschichte" ("On the Concept of History") was not published; it came out in Russian translation in Kagan 2004: 287–307. The article "Von Gang der Geschichte" ("On the Course of History") has not been found.

tinued to study in a *kheider*. In 1905 Kagan was arrested at a meeting of the Nevel branch of RSDRP (Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party); he was amnestied the same year. In 1906–1908 Kagan was in Smolensk: "There I studied and worked as a propagandist of the Smolensk Committee of RSDRP" (2004: 25). In 1909 Kagan passed his matriculation exams and went to study in Germany. As a student at the University of Leipzig, he was attracted to the Marburg School and therefore moved to Berlin where Hermann Cohen and Ernst Cassirer taught. Later he went to Marburg where in 1915 he completed his Ph.D. thesis, "The Problem of Transcendental Apperception (from Descartes to Kant)," under the supervision of Paul Natorp. It was during this period that Kagan's main focus of interest emerged: "All the questions that arise in my mind — questions of logic, aesthetics, etc. — have since then been included in the integral philosophical problem of historical existence" (2004: 26). In this period he wrote and published several articles in German.[2]

In 1918, after the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, Kagan returned to Russia, and took up residency at Nevel. Together with Mikhail Bakhtin, Kagan established the "Kant seminar," which would be later known as the Nevel (or Bakhtin's) Circle. In 1918–1919, among the participants of the circle were Lev Pumpiansky, Valentin Voloshinov, Boris Zubakin, and Maria Udina. It was probably during the period of his cooperation with the Jewish University in Petrograd in 1918–1924 that Kagan wrote his Yiddish works on Turgenev and on Y. L. Peretz and translated into Yiddish several chapters from the Book 1 of Friedrich Albert Lange's *The History of Materialism* (*Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, 1866). From February 1922 he was a member of GAHN (The State Academy of the Artistic Sciences, Moscow), where Alexei Losev, Gustav Shpet, Mikhail Gershenzon, and Leonid Grossman were active at the time. There, he served as the vice-chairman of the Committee for publishing the Dictionary of Art Terms.[3] He participated in the meetings of The Free Academy of Spiritual Culture (Vol'naia acadamiia dukhovnoi kultury) established by Nikolai Berdyaev, which hosted courses by Andrei Belyj, Viacheslav Ivanov, Semyon Frank, Pavel Florensky, and others. Probably in 1922 Kagan taught in the Colony (orphanage) for Jewish Children in Malakhovka near Moscow, where Marc Chagall, Solomon Mikhoels, David Hofstein, and Joel Engel also taught or visited. Kagan also taught at the University of Oriol. He translated Paul Natorp's *Social Idealism* into Rus-

[3] As Makhlin (2010: 197) reports on the basis of materials published in Chubarov 2005, the entries written by Kagan were rejected because of "the subjectivist view."

sian. It was in this period that he produced his main works on the philosophy of history, such as "On the Course of History." Kagan gave a series of lectures on "Biblical Mythology" at the Jewish University of Petersburg. In May 1923 he married Sofia Isaakovna (Sara, 1902–1994), whose maiden name was also Kagan; they had a daughter, Judif' (1924–2000).

In 1924, he started working in VSNH (The Supreme Soviet of National Economy). Later he worked in the Institute of Energy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, when he retired "officially" from philosophical activity. However, he continued to correspond with Bakhtin and his other friends from the Nevel period, wrote new articles, and completed those he had begun earlier. In 1936–1937 Kagan resumed his meetings with Bakhtin. Iudif' Kagan, the philosopher's daughter, writes: "They met and spoke then every day. Also in the summer of 1937. After fifteen years, they were again dear and necessary for each other" (Kagan 2004: 13). Kagan passed away in December 26, 1937. His last work was "Motifs of Tragic Bewilderment in Pushkin's Oeuvre."

II

In October 2, 1973, thirty-six years after Kagan's death, Bakhtin wrote to the editor of the volume, where "Motifs of Tragic Bewilderment"[4] was to be published:

> The work of Matvei Isaevich Kagan is devoted to the analysis of the southern poems of Pushkin ("The Prisoner of the Caucasus," "The Robber Brothers," "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai," and "The Gypsies"). The poems are analyzed from a unique perspective of "tragic bewilderment" that permeates them. This perspective, in our opinion, was very productive: it helped to reveal such facets of the southern poems' meaning which have not yet found a sufficiently deep understanding in the enormous literature on these poems. It allowed M. I. Kagan to avoid the usual clichés in the interpretation of these poems, and allowed him to avoid those too certain solutions (convictions or statements) that have so often been imposed on Pushkin. By his well-grounded analysis, M. I. Kagan discovers in all four poems the "wisdom of bewilderment because of the impending doom of love and freedom that history itself is not aware of, and that is, at best, a source of bewilderment." The work of M. I. Kagan, well-founded on the plane of literary criticism, is at the same time imbued with a philosophical spirit, which is, unfortunately, so rare in our literary criticism.

[4] The paper was published under the title "O pushkinskikh poemakh" ("On Pushkin's Poems," Kagan 1974).

> The work of M. I. Kagan makes a gratifying and refreshing impression. I think that it certainly deserves publication. (Iudif' Kagan 1992: 88)[5]

Indeed, "philosophical spirit" and "a refreshing impression" characterize all the works of Kagan. In the article on Pushkin they are mingled with a light melancholy, which does not, however, turn into pessimism. At the beginning of the article one can find some notes that reflect what appears to be Kagan's life *credo*: "The dark demands enlightenment and a connection with something bright that cancels this darkness; poetry knows about that and does not retain anything dark" (2004: 599). Here one may find echoes of Hermann Cohen's thoughts on Judaism's overcoming of pessimism and darkness in history,[6] but Kagan's thought moves in a different direction.[7] It is not only that reality can be illuminated in poetry, but also "reality outside of art can be condemned to darkness" ("On Artistic Truth," 2004: 472). This conception of "light" invigorates Kagan's historical optimism, which provides the background to his philosophy of poetry[8]: "It is only at first glance that tragic bewilderment, as the main sense that remains after the reading of a literary work, seems to be contrary to the optimistic perception of life. In fact, tragic bewilderment is opposed to pessimism. Tragic bewilderment encourages a struggle against what looks unacceptable in life and is reflected in the literary work," 2004: 598). Thus, Kagan's enlightened bewilderment is opposed to Arthur Schopenhauer's pessimistic bewilderment and to Se-

[5] The letter is kept in the Kagan family archive. Here and below, in the absence of references to published translations, the translations are mine.

[6] Hermann Cohen writes that "Israel's suffering loses its obscurity" and "has no tragic connotation" (1972: 234–35), and that the power of Messianism lies in the fact "that it could transform itself into an optimistic power of the soul" (454). However, for Kagan the concept of tragedy preserves its validity, while the concept of brightness moves to the center of philosophy of history, not confined to Israel's history or to the history of suffering.

[7] In his programmatic work "On the Course of History," Kagan notes the conceptions to which he contrasts his own by calling them "dark" conceptions. These are all theories of the subconscious, which Kagan perceived as a dark and meaningless force of nature to which no significant role in the personality's becoming or the historical process can be attributed, as well as mechanical and biological materialism, which Kagan cannot accept because it leaves almost no role for the individual as historical responsibility is born by mechanical or biological laws (2004: 238–44).

[8] It should be noted, however, that Kagan's "optimistic" conception of tragedy in the late thirties differs from the views of his early works, such as "On the Live Meaning of Art," where he rhapsodizes proletarian revolution and its "live" art, and opposes it to the old art that "lives by monuments," art in which "there is something essentially tragic" (2004: 512).

mion Frank's bewilderment in the face of the meaninglessness of life. The key concept of this insight is that of love:

> Any time a question is raised, this is already a matter of bewilderment, as an answer is expected which one still does not have. It is always connected with but the *interest* in the answer. In poetry, this interest in the answer about the meaning of any individually represented event is directly linked with the unwillingness to turn aside from the event itself, no matter how seemingly incidental. No narrated event is random for the poet. If the case is clear, the poet represents it triumphing in its clarity. If it is not clear, if it is unjustified, illicit, the poet will still not leave it to its fate. The poet does not normally sacrifice the incidental; he cannot get rid of it. He can reveal only the internal bewilderment that suffuses the contents and meaning of the incident. The poetic bewilderment is connected, one way or another, with *love* for and profound sympathy with the content of the seemingly incidental or individual event represented. In this sense, the poetic experience, the poetic experiment — even when its contents are unacceptable — is not rejected as incidental; it is preserved, made memorable forever, as an important bewilderment, as are triumph and jubilation. Every significant poet has motifs both of triumph and of bewilderment? (2004: 597; my italics)

The source of Kagan's conception of love, in the form of the love of Creation, can be found in his works in the philosophy of history. The central concept in Kagan's philosophy of history, associated with the concept of interest mentioned in the above passage, is historical purposefulness by means of which only, in Hermann Cohen's terms, "does the spirit become one and whole" (1972: 92). The purpose itself transcends history, but it justifies the purposefulness immanent in the historical process (Kagan, "On the Course of History," 2004: 248). The purpose cannot be realized completely, and therefore history always remains open-ended. In this respect, Kagan, unlike Bakhtin, distinguishes history from a work of art or literature, which contains its purpose within itself and is closed in on its perfection (249). History is merely repeated efforts to envision and create immanent purposefulness. "Invention" of successful and persuasive historical narratives is not history but only the creation of myths that express the "anticipation" of historical purposefulness (249–51).

The transcendental purpose of history is free. It is not a given but a giver — it gives a task. The forcefulness of life in its teleological-historical freedom is measured in relation to this task.[9] This forcefulness defines

[9] Ruth Coates has pointed to the similar use of this neo-Kantian concept of "task" by both Kagan and Bakhtin.

love. Historically we live in attempts at love; in other words, an attempt to live in love *is* history. Love creates a vision of purposefulness (254). In the course of the struggle over history the vision of love is embodied in myth (255). The essence of love is love for attempts at the purposeful life. The course of history in its struggle over myth and love is revealed in a process of purposeful culture (256). Kagan concludes that the time of history is a rational-teleological voluntary struggle of love for the historical existence of humanity (258).

Bewilderment is thus motivated by love for the purposefulness of history; it strives to illuminate the darkness ("Motifs of Tragic Bewilderment," 2004: 599), to discover truth and order in chaos, and so to create history. Bewilderment is the tool of the work of history. That is the reason why the poetic experience, as bewilderment, remains in memory forever (597). Tragic bewilderment originates memory and history; it reactivates the *sacred* work of history that could have stopped if the creative work were completed. In great works of literature, the historical individual, who is revived and renewed in tragic bewilderment, demonstrates a responsible national-historical self-awareness, Russian in the case of Pushkin's poetry (601). Poetry is a verification and justification of truth that is hidden in the inacceptable reality:

> No truth, inasmuch as it really interested the poet, was accepted by him without verification. The content of every work of literature is such practical verification of the legitimacy and acceptability of the reality represented. Tragic bewilderment is what it is because of the concrete reality, evaluated not from outside but from within itself. This is not an abstract didactic significance of poetry, but the concrete meaning of its content. Every event related in a poem is subjected to the test of meaning. Naïveté in poetry means only an unmediated, live, concrete perception and announcement of the meaning — not irresponsibility or random choices of events for the plot. (601)

In order to demonstrate this, Kagan turns to a discussion of the poem "The Prisoner of the Caucasus," whose main historical issue, he believes, is the clash between love and war. Russia is engaged in endless fighting in the Caucasus. A Russian officer has been captured by the Circassians. A Circassian maid falls in love with him and rescues him from imprisonment, for which she pays with her life. Kagan writes:

> What the poem is concerned with is a vivid evocation of the historical fates of the peoples who are at war with each other, when they could be courageous creators of freedom. All this comes to a head in the most he-

> roic freedom of the act of love, showing that in the given course of history it is impossible to live by freedom and by love. Hence this course is not just. We are left with only the best of love and of freedom, and their sacrifice. (605)

The poet's bewilderment and his concern about the Russian nation's historical fate on the one hand and the Circassian girl's tragic victimization on the other, cannot be resolved. Yet it can awaken in readers, in a community, a new individual and national sense of history, a creative work of history motivated by love and capable of making the nations "historically worthy of this sacrifice" of the Circassian (607).

Pushkin's ethical revision of the Russian imperialism attracted also another member of the "Nevel Circle," Lev Pumpiansky. Like Kagan, Pumpiansky finds the concept of love at the center of Pushkin's philosophy of history; however he views it not as a cultural engagement but rather as an a-historical utopia.[10] But the main difference between the two thinkers lies in that while Pumpiansky perceives Pushkin in the terms of classical encyclopedic harmony and wholeness,[11] Kagan finds the poet's world broken down by the tragic, though optimistic, bewilderment.

Kagan's approach to the work of literature is thus essentially historical but not mimetic, positivist, or allegorical. The protagonists (the prisoner and the Circassian maiden) are not meant to embody abstract ideas, events, or laws, but the plot of love and of its failure; they are individuals and, as such, appeal to the reader's sense of responsibility:

> The Circassian's sacrifice is not a resolution of the events. It is only a bewilderment that brings the heroine closer to us, but at the same time, since it is not a resolution, also brings closer to us that which the poem condemns. It places on us an inner responsibility for these events.
>
> This is how Pushkin draws out our responsible self-awareness, a responsibility for people's historical fate. (613)

In terms of Kagan's papers on the philosophy of history, a work of literature turns sacrifice into an engagement with history, thus sanctifying culture and overcoming tragic pessimism and nihilism ("On the Concept of History," 2004: 297–99). In the anthropological sense, literature is the

[10] See, for Pumpiansky's comments on Pushkin's "The Monument": "Standing at the outfall of Empire, Pushkin untied his bond with it and entered into a free alliance with the eternity of Love" (2000: 208).

[11] See, in particular, Pumpiansky's essay "Ob ischerpyvajuschem delenii, odnom iz printsypov stilia Pushkina" (2000: 210–20).

rite of sacrifice, essentially individual sacrifice — that is, full commitment to historical work as to love.

Why is sacrifice necessary? The explanation involves another of Kagan's key concepts, that of the gift. He perceives the work of history as God's gift and grace, since it is what makes man what he is. When man receives history as a gift, he cannot enjoy its fruits without symbolically reciprocating the gift. That is the purpose of sacrifice: it is man's gift to the Creator in response to the gift of Creation (*Gabe der Schöpfung*), in return for history received from God, as a token of thanks and of recognition that what man obtains thanks to this gift is not his property. The sacrifice is such a gift-in-return. On this conception of history as the Creator's gift, Kagan's concept of responsibility is based.[12] In his view, one's ethical duty is not to the other but to history, memory, and one's own future. History is illuminated and it gives light, it has no room for the dark, the subconscious, the meaningless, the imperceptible, in other words, for otherness. This is so because history is love, and love is not love for the other if the latter is viewed as the imperceptible, unknowable, infinitely distant, as, for example, in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Love means love for one's work (as individual or collective) in the past, the present, and the future, love for the search for historical purposefulness.[13] This search is the individual's own, and it is free only as long as it is one's own, but this does not mean ignoring the fate of the other: the other is no longer an other (i.e., alien, distant, indiscernible) if he or she becomes part of history.

[12] It is closely related to the concept of a responsible deed in Bakhtin's philosophy of action, and also anticipates (and contrasts with) Emmanuel Levinas' concept of responsibility, especially in its connection to the concepts of love and sanctity, which Levinas sets into the metaphysical-ethical mold of the relationship between man and God, as a model for the face-to-face encounter with the other (see his ch. 9, "Revelation in the Jewish Tradition," 1994: 129–50).

[13] Cf. one of the kinds of the "four-fold love between God and man" as perceived by Hermann Cohen in the context of his concept of reconciliation: "If God loves not only the totality and plurality of men, and if man, too, is to be loved not only as the carrier of the idea of mankind but also as a symbol of plurality, as a fellowman, then man's own self — man as an individuality on his own — is no less a member of this plurality, a fellowman for the other man, as the other man is for himself. The commandment of neighborly love, which appeals to the love of oneself, is only now justified. I may love myself; I may consider myself as an object of love, because I must consider myself an individual who is subject to God's love, which extends also to myself. We know this reciprocal activity of love. It is the idea of reconciliation. The love of myself as an individual is the concern for my reconciliation with God. My trust in God is fulfilled in the reconciliation, which God promises me on the basis of my own work of repentance" (405–406).

Responsibility is always historical, whether it concerns relations between nations or people. The next poem Kagan analyzes in his article is "The Robber Brothers," which describes the private tragedy of a robber who mourns the death of his brother from an illness after years of crime, prison, and escape. Kagan reads the robber's confession of repentance and despair as part of the history of culture as a whole. Here, too, this is not an allegorical reading but one pertaining to the individual's life in terms of the philosophy of history. Here too, the ultimate responsibility for what the poem describes is placed on the reader:

> The poem does not evoke either utter despair or complete remorse. Yet the bewilderment that it arouses is, indeed, crucial. The responsibility for the brother's death is placed on mankind as a whole, on the entire social-historical life that we live. In the poem everything is arranged as if to demand remorse from ourselves, for the lack of brotherhood as a basis of historical life. The fact of the robbers' licentiousness reveals the tragedy of brotherly love owing to the absence of freedom from our historical lives, absence of genuine inner freedom. (2004: 618–19)

In his ensuing reading of the other two poems, "The Fountain of Bakhchisaray" and "The Gypsies," Kagan returns to his central themes, love and freedom:

> The bewildering issue in "The Gypsies" is the fatal irresolvability of man's absolute freedom in love. This freedom brings about murder, since for the other love is also a spontaneous and willful basis of life. This is the aporia of the absolute freedom of love, necessary for the absolute lived historical freedom of humankind. Dostoevsky's thought that the main point of the poem is the proclamation of humility is not as wrong as Viacheslav Ivanov considers it. Only humility could prevent murder, keep love alive, and maintain responsibility for life, and so pass the test of love. In this respect, Dostoevsky's judgment is very close to the contents of the poem; it is not, as some opinions have it, just a publicistic position.
>
> Yet this is not the only point. Love and freedom are held in captivity, and it is precisely because of this captivity that one can and must pit the life outside history against lovelessness in history. This opposition may, perhaps, not entitle us to the complete condemnation of history, yet it at least causes a bewilderment regarding the ways of justifying history in respect to the kind of freedom which makes talk about humility alone worse than pride. Between a declaration of humility and mere reconciliation with the lack of freedom, there is a third possibility. This third option is, precisely, bewilderment at the historical fact of absence of freedom and the tragic character of love that is free. (2004: 625)

By the end of the article, Kagan compares "The Prisoner of the Caucasus" and "The Gypsies": "It seems that in 'The Gypsies' Pushkin thought through the same issue that concerned him in 'The Prisoner of the Caucasus.' . . . In 'The Prisoner of the Caucasus' the outcome of love is tragic, since everything happens in captivity, in imprisonment. Here [in 'The Gypsies'] there is no imprisonment but tragedy remains" (627). We are thus all prisoners of history, and all responsible for this condition.

III

The relationship between the work's thematizing responsibility and its imposing responsibility on the reader stems from Kagan's aesthetics.[14] A work of art participates in the work of history only through being read; and reading is motivated by a freely endorsed duty to love history in its purposefulness. Kagan sketches an ethics of reading in dialogue with Bakhtin, especially with Bakhtin's philosophy of the act.[15] Kagan's thought differs from Bakhtin's not only, as Ruth Coates believes (27), in its rigorously systematic character and adherence to the Marburg School. Bakhtin bases the subject on the attitude towards the other ("I for another," 1984: 207ff), while for Kagan the other is not an "other" as long as he is one's partner in history, i.e. in the loving work of community, fraternity, and study. Bakhtin bases responsibility on man's uniqueness, while Kagan bases it on love. Bakhtin does not make it clear why a man would want to actually realize his uniqueness, that is, to take responsibility, while Kagan solves this problem through the concept of historical purposefulness. For Bakhtin the individual is only a person, while for Kagan both persons and nations are individuals in the work of history. These ideas are clearly expressed in Kagan's short paper "Ivan Sergeievich Turgenev: On the Centennial of His Birth."

[14] Kagan's aesthetics, developed in such works as "The Two Aspirations of Art" (2004: 451–66), "On the Artistic Truth" (467–82), and "On the Live Meaning of Art" (483–519) is in fact a phenomenology of reading that anticipates and parallels Roman Ingarden's *The Literary Work of Art* (1936).

[15] Bakhtin wrote the unfinished chapters that would later be published under the title *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993) over the same years (1920–1925) as Kagan wrote the first version of his article on Pushkin. Later, in 1935–1936, Bakhtin urged Kagan to complete the study (see Kagan 2004: 700). Kagan's death in 1937 prevented this.

This article was written in Yiddish in 1918 and published in January 1919 in the Moscow Yiddish journal *Kultur un Bildung*.[16] Kagan praises Turgenev's writing, which he compares favorably with that of Dostoevsky, for whose genius he expresses an appreciation (2013: 6). The comparison revives the old rivalry between these two great Russian writers, in their lifetime and beyond,[17] despite the contemporary "lively debate" about Turgenev's importance.[18] Kagan raises the question of the novel's *raison d'être* as a self-sufficient art form; he thus anticipates the work by György Lukács (1920) and Mikhail Bakhtin.[19] In this early work Kagan sets up a contrasting background for Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929; an earlier version completed in 1922). He speaks of the all too personal, mystical, and "aggressive" character of Dostoevsky's writing,[20] which disqualifies him from maintaining a dialogue with other nations. As if in a kind of bitter irony, Bakhtin would later describe Dostoevsky's novel as "polyphonous," thus establishing Dostoevsky as the type of dialogism in literature.

[16] For a reprint of the Yiddish original see Kagan 2012. The English translation is published in the current issue of *Partial Answers* (Kagan 2013).

[17] Pumpiansky likewise compared the two writers, distinguishing, for instance, between Dostoevsky's "novel as deed" and Turgenev's "novel as personality" (2000: 382) and thus explaining the social relevance and popularity of Turgenev's novels at the time of their publication. Predictably, he focuses on the phenomenon of the "unproductive personage" (the "superfluous man" — Turgenev's own term whose adoption by Herzen and others Pumpiansky rejects) using the class-stratification theory, so that the cultural-dialogical dynamic, seen by Kagan, remains beyond his scope (see ibid., 396). Pumpiansky's best essay on Turgenev ("Turgenev the Novelist"), deals with Turgenev's influence on Western literature. His other work compares the character of the revolutionary in the novels of Turgenev and Dostoevsky, certainly not in favor of the latter.

[18] Indeed, a discussion had unfolded on the pages of Russian press close to the twentieth anniversary of Turgenev's death in 1903 (in particular, in *Orlovskii vestnik*), and then again, in *Russkii filologicheskii vestnik*, in 1912, in connection with the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Fathers and Sons*. M. O. Gershenzon wrote on Turgenev in 1908, 1910, 1912; his book *Mechta i mysl' I. S. Turgeneva* was published in 1919. See also Kagan 2013, n.1.

[19] In an August 5, 1936 letter to his wife Kagan writes: "I shall be reading a work of M. M. [Bakhtin] 'On Word in the Novel' [in English translation – "Discourse in the Novel" — R. K.]. He gave it to me in manuscript. As one can judge from the beginning, it is written under the impression of one thought that I voiced in the article on Turgenev. You do not know it, I believe. This article was published. In Bakhtin, the issue is far more developed, while in my work it is just a comment *en passant*, though it is the central one on which the short article is founded" (2004: 663–64).

[20] Cf. Pumpiansky's descriptions of Dostoevsky's writing as exorcism, tragedy without dialogue, frustrated myth, imposture ("Dostoevsky kak tragicheskii poet," 2000: 559–61).

Kagan represents a completely different view of dialogue, derived from his own understanding of history and aesthetics. For Kagan the concept of dialogue has, first and foremost, a historical and cultural meaning (with love and the work of justification out its center). He shapes the concept by criticizing Ancient literature:

> Ancient Romans and Greeks had not yet understood that one should seek an aesthetic justification of one's own cultural existence in the eyes of other peoples or that this justification could be attained through an ordinary Greek or Roman character, not only through a hero. The people itself, that is, should become the hero, in its collective individuality. Drama and heroic epos are the highest art forms of ancient culture. They give us the formal shape of individual lives: in tragedy, specific individuals in their heroics; and in epic, the joint heroism of a people as a national community. What they lack is international cultural-ethical values, whether of man, people, collective, or humankind. What the ancients did not teach us is that individual love is the background for love of a national and human collective environment, love for one's environment [*svive-libe*], with its lyricism, its irony, and its tragic. (2013: 4)

In his article "On the Live Meaning of Art," Kagan uses the general concept of "environment" to designate the scene on which the imperialistic wars and exploitation take place and on which they should be replaced by the historical work of the live and "justified" nations (2004: 494–95). In the article on Turgenev, however, this concept attains a specific character. Kagan's "love for one's environment" is his version of Bakhtin's concept of existence-for-the-other, which was still being developed at the time. To "justify" one's culture to others means, ultimately, to shape and strengthen its identity and power within its surroundings. In Turgenev there appears, for the first time, a sense of Russian intelligentsia as representing the whole nation as the living and powerful collective. Kagan's concept of environment is centripetal, in contrast to the centrifugal approaches like that of Bakhtin. A culture's self-justification will not be transformed into self-erasure if it is done through a self-aware cultivation of love for the culture's historical purposefulness. According to Kagan, this is where the novel has a major role:

> The novel is the classic form for the aesthetic formulation of life's concerns. Paradoxically speaking, the novel is the classic representation of a nation's collective cultural self-definition as part of the international cultural whole. It is therefore no accident that Turgenev's novels were the works owing to which Russian culture was recognized in world culture, so that world culture could no longer be indifferent to Russian culture. (2013: 4)

These statements are associated with the dispute on the crisis of culture in the German philosophy of history at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is difficult to say whether Kagan was already familiar with Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918) when he wrote this article, but it is clear that the demand for intercultural dialogue is opposed to Spengler's conception of a systematic misunderstanding between cultures. In his later works, such as "The Crisis of the Church" and "Judaism in the Crisis of Culture" (1923), Kagan already openly argues against Spengler. For Kagan, who continues the tradition of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, it is not blind and mysterious fate and not natural law that rule history, but creative and loving "canonization" of labor and "care" for culture.[21] According to Kagan, novels possess a kind of special national or collective common "tone of love" (2013: 4).

Unlike Bakhtin, Kagan did not develop his insight into a general literary theory. But literary theory can be seen as growing out of his works in the philosophy of history and aesthetics. In particular, the historical role that Kagan ascribes to the novel is associated with his concepts of *work* and of *myth*.

Work is key concept in Kagan's philosophy. It is a purposeful activity, a gateway to history ("On the Course of History," 2004: 276). Work is the vision of transcendental purpose, and in that sense it is sacred (277). It is the struggle against the "natural" and the subconscious, against indifference and the sin of forgetting oneself, against the curse of fatigue and complacency (279). The working individual takes responsibility for history; he is aware that he has been selected to serve and worship a transcendental purpose, and is therefore saintly (281). Moments or periods of decadence recur but are only identified as such after the fact, when they are already part of the historical past. In order to save history from decadence, it is therefore necessary to love the past in the name of the culture of the future (283–84). This love is what motivates work.

A person or a collective may occasionally lack the strength needed to predetermine culture, and such a situation causes suffering in history. But work always returns, redeems people from pain, and renews the love of purposefulness (286). The essence of work does not lie in value, as in Marxism, but in the dignity of work *per se* ("On the Concept of History," 2004: 295). The product of creative work is culture (296), and its main success lies in the pleasure of the holiday, the leisure that comes after and

[21] For a further discussion of Kagan's works on the crisis of culture see Katsis 2009 and Katsman 2013.

in the wake of work. Art is historical work followed by the pleasure of the holiday; a work of art is a holiday sacrifice (299).

Another meaning of creative work is giving birth as a sacred act (301). According to Kagan giving birth to (human) life is the creative act of history and not only the coming into being of nature (302); therefore the preservation of life, giving life without death, is a historical task (303).[22]

The purpose of art is thus defined in terms of historical creative work. What gives a work of art its meaning is the aspiration towards a plot (*siuzhet*) as myth and history:

> Any plot is a myth. A plot in essence is nothing but a myth. . . . Myth is always no other than a revelation of the meaning and connection of events and phenomena whose purpose is foreshadowed by their internal character. . . . After all, the purity of accident and of fact in history is not complete! But completeness does exist. It bursts into history, as it were, and is given it as a gift. A myth is just this prior perfection of the concrete. This is the principle and the fact of the constant creative origin of the anticipated revelation of the future in the present, and in the inclusion of the past within the constantly unfolding present, which lives the future, already lives the future. . . . An episode's pure being is the myth, the artistic plot. . . . There is no causal factor or regularity. What operates here is foreshadowed in-

[22] Kagan thus reads the biblical story of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden as the imposition of the historical task, embodied in work and in giving birth (304). He draws a distinction between Jewish and Christian views on this issue: Judaism sanctifies work and giving birth, whereas Christianity causes them to be forgotten. The idea of Christ at the End of Days, says Kagan, deprives immanent history of its meaning; the idea of the Immaculate Conception puts an end to all of history (305), because there cannot be a holiday without work. The Christian faith created humanity without giving birth, and therefore humankind has been turned into a sacrifice (306). History cannot be just a play, even if the play is a tragedy of the playing death of a child as the play's protagonist. History as a consequence of birth-giving is work, responsibility, and reason, as reflected in the double meaning of the biblical word "know" (307). On the other hand, in the letter to his wife in 1936, recalling the events of 1922–1924, Kagan wrote: "I realized then (I — a Jew to the bone and nails), what significance for a man, who sensed it, is held by the Virgin, Mother of God, what monastic life and brotherhood means as an idea. Of course, all this came together with the general course of thoughts in which I lived. And the objective ideas associated with this have not lost their power for me to this day; they only took their particular place in my views. . . . In connection with the thoughts of the monastic brotherhood, I went to work in Malakhovka, a Jewish colony, where I did not have any need to go. I left just because I was unable to stay there after I found out that one of the administrators had an abortion . . . I could not find peace with myself! A place where children are raised engaged in the liquidation of life — I could not grasp it! And, of course, what a monkhood, what a freedom of man and people from the state and socially conditioned element!" (Iudif' Kagan 1992: 81note 7).

> dividual purposefulness, individual closure, and completeness. . . . The sequence is not fantasized nor does it have a prior existence; rather, it is inspired as the foreshadowing of the purpose of being in the image, through the content which has perfected the form, or rather . . . that has achieved inner closure in the formal individuality of the created work of art. ("The Two Aspirations of Art," 2004: 460–61).[23]

Turgenev's novels and Pushkin's poems maintain the work of history. Whether they justify a culture (as in the case of Turgenev) or gaze at it in bewilderment (as in the case of Pushkin), they create a continuum of sought purposefulness. Reading is yet another attempt, another phase in this work, this pursuit of a vision of purposefulness, which is a prophetic vision, both advocacy and admonition.

Now we can explain the concept of "love of the environment" — *svive-libe* — as creative work and vision. In fact, Kagan's idea of *svive-libe* is based on the spiritual and personal experience of the Jewish community, and of the community of learners,[24] which he viewed as the best form of human coexistence. The demand of love is applicable to a community as an individual. In his article "Judaism in the Crisis of Culture" (1923) Kagan outlines in detail what can be called his "philosophy of community," which seems to be based on but also distanced from

[23] "The Two Aspirations of Art" is a lecture given in 1922. In this period Kagan worked in the Academy of Artistic Sciences (GAHN) in Moscow, together with Alexei Losev, whose *Dialectics of Myth* appeared in 1930. Losev defines myth as a miraculous personal history given in a verbal medium, when miracle is viewed as a realization of the transcendental purpose of a personality in the empirical history (2003: 185–86). Kagan's conception of myth diverges from Losev's (see also 2010: 202): Losev's starting point is the Christian idea of the embodiment of the deity in a historical personality, while for Kagan the personality discovers God in the purposefulness of the loving work of history. Moreover, in contrast to Losev, Kagan assumes that the personality's becoming is not a given; it is not experienced by the personality but is created by it with a strenuous effort. That is also the reason why Kagan distinguishes real historical work from mythology, although the latter is seen as the foundation of the former since it foreshadows becoming as purpose. Although Kagan often calls history God's gift to man, it remains only a potentiality; to be realized, history, as a work of the God-chosen historical individual, must be purchased by constant cultural creative work of the individual for the sake of a goal that transcends history.

[24] "The natural and traditional Jewish world-image assimilated by Kagan already in his Nevel childhood, superimposed in his work on the Hermann Cohen philosophical school. This superimposition determined the originality of his thought. . . . It should be noted that M. Kagan studied with Cohen in the last years of the philosopher's life, when the Jewish element of his work directly and openly came to the fore" (Katsis 2008).

Hermann Cohen's view of a congregation.[25] According to Kagan, the moment the nation grasps its historical task, it sees itself as one that has been designated to execute it, and thus defines its identity, its historical, creative individuality (its "genius"). The genuine hero of history is not a single person but the people as a whole. Individuality is realized and history unfolds not between the individual and the eternal (as in paganism), but rather between the people (or another historical collective) and its chosenness for its historical task. This is the significance of accepting responsibility, of cultural freedom and creation. Following Herman Cohen, Kagan views this as an essentially Jewish perception,[26] but, unlike his teacher, he does not deprive myth of its constitutive role at any moment (*episode*) of history.[27]

Arguing with Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918), Kagan presents his community model as a solution to the crisis of culture:

> The anticipation of the wholeness of humanity and of a wholeness and unity of the meaning of being as a historical universe cannot be non-organically technical, or civilizing legal, or abstract and theoretically scientific. It can be individual and creative only in the work of love, in concrete creation. Canonization of culture is possible as the loving work only in smallish fraternities of working cultural groups. Such fraternities can be numerous; they should be numerous. . . . Their way of working and creating is not magical, ritualistic, nor is it a matter of church aesthetics. Their path is not without hard work. They are communal fraternities of working culture, which can include the culture of mythological creativity. . . . I think that this is precisely how the Jewish unbreakable wholeness, that seemed so strange in the Middle Ages, presents, in a sense, a free proto-image of the Renaissance of a genuinely canonized creative culture. ("Judaism in the Crisis of Culture," 2004: 180).

Here Kagan reproduces some elements of Natorp's "Social Idealism" (1920), a paper that he translated into Russian (1922): the ideas of fra-

[25] "The congregation is the original soil of the Kingdom of God" (1972: 385).

[26] Cf. Cohen's conception of "service between man and man and between people and people." Cohen adds that "[t]he new concept of God, however, demands justice and love for all men" (246).

[27] Kagan enlisted his Jewish agenda for his polemic with thinkers such as Bakhtin, Losev, and Berdyaev, with the "God-seeking" (*bogoiskatelstvo*) movements that were widespread in the Russian Silver Age period, with the searches for the identity and the mission of the Russian people in the difficult years following World War I, and with the repeated attempts to define the Russians as a "God-Bearing People" (*narod-bogonosets*).

ternity, apprenticeship, infinite openness of history and its tasks, energy of cultural productivity (2004: 110–14). Yet he also imagines the cultural model of the Jewish community of learners as a prototype of the "canonization of the work of culture."[28] Despite the multiplicity of Jewish communities, they are focused on the same historical task. This is a model of the multiple wholeness that Kagan is seeking, one that, he believes, can solve the crisis of culture. The Jewish learning creativity is simultaneously individual and free, as well as canonical and responsible, which is reflected, for example, in the traditional concept of renewal (*khidush*). The canonization of work in and by a community is but another name for his conception of the sanctity of historical work. The cultural, technical, secular practices are not only not separate from sacred work but are themselves sanctified within it; they seek responsibility for history, for a unified historical task that is directed to the future. In his essay "On the Truth of Art," Kagan writes that "if it were possible to speak about the canonization of culture, this would first of all be in the work of art" (2004: 480). This communal canonization of the historical-mythological work of culture is, we can conclude, the essence of the *svive-libe*, which motivates novels in general and Turgenev's novels about the Russian intelligentsia in particular.

In his essay in memory of Hermann Cohen, Kagan writes: "To solve the riddle of this or that philosopher's personality means to register the new phase to which his genius raised philosophy, in comparison to the level at which he found it at the beginning of his career" (2004: 34). Kagan's philosophical contribution lies not only in his dialogue with Bakhtin, but also, and perhaps mainly, in a philosophy of history and art that underlies his literary-critical writing. Kagan was an enlightened philosopher in one of the darkest ages of human history. What he wrote was not meant for his own desk-drawer: he published his work, gave public addresses, spoke at length with his colleagues, and taught at universities. Like any philosopher, Kagan aspired to speak to his generation, to convince, to influence. In the given circumstances, however, he could hardly say everything he wanted to say, and therefore his underlying assumptions and main ideas are not always sufficiently explicit. As Vitali

[28] To some extent, the concept of "canonization of culture" can be viewed as emerging from Hermann Cohen's characterization of Judaism's intention "to transfigure all human deeds in the light of the eternal" (368). Yet Kagan critiqued religion in "On the Live Meaning of Art," saying, for example, that "[i]nstead of proclaiming the sanctity of humankind and of human work, [religion] has become their curse" (2004: 502).

Makhlin notes, Kagan's most interesting ideas are hidden in his broken, underdeveloped sentences. They are still to receive the recognition and appreciation that they deserve.

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