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**Language, Being, History in Jacob Boehme's Theosophy\***

A.V. Karabykov

V.I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University, Simferopol, Russia

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**Summary**

The aim of the research is to elucidate the key notions of the German mystic thinker Jacob Boehme's linguistic-philosophical theory: language of Nature (*Natursprache*), Adamic language and sensual language in regard to each other and to post-Babel historical languages of humankind. This theory is considered in a dual context of the Late Renaissance "Adamicist" studies and of Boehme's theosophical project as a whole. Since a considerable part of his work had a form of an extensive commentary on *Genesis*, Boehme's interpretations of the biblical stories are devoted to linguistic topics. Explaining the stories concerning Babel (Gen. 11), the theosophist gives some considerations to the essence of historic transformation and loss of the primordial language. Based on the story of Adam's naming of the animals (Gen. 2.19–20), Boehme formulates his views on the substance of Natural and Adamic languages. It is argued that, according to the theosophist, the rise of polyglottism, caused by Babel catastrophe, was a culmination of spiritual disorientation of humankind. Having started from the Fall, that process led to a fundamental distortion of ideas about being and the Deity. Due to this, people decided to look for Him in a reified form by technical means. A cognitive and linguistic aspect of that disorientation consisted in alienating of still single primordial language from *Natursprache* as its ontological foundation. Boehme thought that this alienation mainly caused rapid development of linguistic pluralism. Meanwhile, the language of Nature was a unique "guide," which made possible for Adam to create his epistemically perfect language, and his descendants could keep its understanding for some time.

**Keywords:** Renaissance occultism, Adamic language, language of Nature, signatures of things, Genesis, Babel, monogenetic theory of language origin.

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**Anton Karabykov** – D.Sc. in Philosophy, Ph.D. in Philology, Professor, Department of Philosophy of Natural Sciences, V.I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University.

meavox@mail.ru

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9675-5429>

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**Anton Karabykov** – D.Sc. in Philosophy, Ph.D. in Philology, Professor at the Department of Philosophy of Natural Sciences, V.I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University.

meavox@mail.ru

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9675-5429>

### **Introduction: Adamicist context**

In an age marked by an upsurge of reflections about what the primordial language of Adam was in its essence and whether it was possible – if so, how? – to restore that incomparable instrument of conception and, perhaps, transformation of the world, the German mystic and theosophist Jacob Boehme (1575–1624) created, undoubtedly, the most original and complex theory of Adamicism. Not being autonomous, it forms one of the key aspects of his integral theosophical doctrine, combining Christian, Gnostic, Cabbalistic and some other esoteric elements. And before setting out to study this theory, it is necessary to determine its place in the system of analogous constructions that comprised the Adamic project of the late 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In the most general form, this project was a development of four basic strategies: *a) to corroborate* that one of the existing forms of language is primordial; *b) to find* the remains of *Ursprache* by its “traces” in existing languages or signs (*signatura*) in the natural world; *c) to accept* the language of Eden in a supernatural way through a personal epiphany; *d) to create* its less perfect substitute (1). Boehme's Adamicist speculations developed along the lines of the second and partly the third strategies.

Since the strategy *b)* comprised two variants, its adherents were divided into appropriate camps. One sought to approach knowledge of the Adamic language along the path of etymological research. Its representatives usually gave privilege to a certain language (or lan-

guage family), as having preserved the maximum of primeval forms. From their opinion, it became possible due to the unique fate of its speakers who proved to be excluded from a general current of historical changes. Apart from Semitic languages (most often Hebrew), since the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century such privilege was often awarded to Scythian and Germanic languages. Despite the fact that the scholars of that camp *en masse* considered the Adamic language to be lost, they attracted the strategy *a)* (*to corroborate*), proving the exclusive closeness of their candidate to it. As for those who saw the key to *Ursprache* in the signatures of natural things (*signatura rerum*), they generally supplemented the second strategy with the third (*to accept*). Almost exclusively Protestants, they shared Luther's and Calvin's belief in extreme gravity of the cognitive consequences of the Fall that made rational cognition of nature extremely difficult and precarious [Harrison 2002]. However, as mystics, they believed that that epistemic obstruction could be overcome in an act of spiritual illumination. Accessible only to the chosen, it could remove a dark veil of ignorance from nature and make the latter available to immediate intuitive comprehension in its signs.

Boehme joined both approaches within the strategy *b)* (*to find*), making the etymological-linguistic (rather than natural-semiotic) way of the primordial language recuperation predominant. On this path, the deep originality of his thought manifested itself most fully, whereas in his doctrine of the signatures he continued the line of his German predecessors: Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486–1535), Paracelsus (1493–1541), Kroll (about 1560–1609), etc. (2). At the same time, the Boehmean complex included additional elements of the third (*to accept*) strategy. The matter is that the linguistic speculations of the German mystic were radically different from the etymological constructions of his scientifically oriented contemporaries. Although the “nationalistic” variant of the second strategy supported by the belief in the intimate proximity to *Ursprache* of one of young European nations tongues, formally was close to his theory – Boehme was a convinced opponent of such an elitist-hierarchical stance. According to his cherished idea, all human dialects are equidistant, or, in the opposite perspective, equally close to the Adamic language. Therefore, those wishing to penetrate into its mystery do not need to “go far”: it is enough to turn to one's native – the most natural for everybody – tongue. “...Understand the language of your mother properly, then in it you are as deeply grounded as in Hebrew or Latin,” Boehme calls the reader of his first treatise, *Aurora*,

or *Morning Glow Ascending* (*Aurora. Morgen Röte im auffgang*) (VIII.73) [Boehme 2013, 253] (3). Subsequently, he will express this idea with even greater certainty, emphasizing that the Adamic basis with equal success “in every language of every nation, every one according to its own understanding [and meaning]” (*De tripl. vita* V.87) [Böhme 1842, 76] (4). Whence it gets clear, that, according to Boehme, in the current historical conditions the primordial language was not a separate tongue, but a metaphysical foundation and, as we shall see later, a hidden potency, without which no human language exists. Following his own attitude the theosophist made his way to that foundation through the “gateway” of his mother tongue. As a shoemaker, who neither had a university education nor knew the learned Latin, he thought and wrote in German. For this reason in the circles of his earliest followers he was nicknamed “Teutonic philosopher” and simply “Teuton.”

But why, refusing to grant privilege to this or that tongue, Boehme used elements of the strategy *c*) (*to accept*)? First, it was assumed in the doctrine of the signatures on which the natural-semiotic “derivation” of the second strategy was based and which played a significant role in Boehme’s Adamicist speculations (5). For the most part, the late Renaissance researchers of natural signs were convinced that without illuminating help from above it was impossible for the fallen man to comprehend them with sufficient fullness. It was even less possible to transform them correctly into the language once produced by the harmony between the universe and the mind of Adam [Karabykov 2014, 129–130]. Secondly, it was dictated by Boehme’s refusal to substantiate the historical priority and epistemic superiority of one of extant languages. Accepted *a priori*, the thesis of the closest proximity of a certain tongue to the Adamic language set the direction of etymological and, more broadly, comparative historical studies. Supporters of each nominee sought to find its forms in other “later” tongues, presenting seemingly self-evident proofs of the antiquity of their favorites to an educated public [Eco 1995, 80–103; Metcalf 2013, 33–56]. Thinking radically differently, Boehme could not offer another alternative that would claim to be objective. In the eyes of many, his constructions were extremely strange and arbitrary. For that reason the German mystic never tired of repeating the idea, which formed a topos of the Renaissance esotericism: the meaning of his teaching could be understood only by those who had a purified and illuminated mind. But such a state might not be achieved by human efforts alone, no matter how important they are *per se*.

### The Tower of Babel

It is not difficult to understand why Boehme created a version of Adamicism that differed from the others in linguistic egalitarianism and ahistorism. The whole his doctrine focused on the relationship between the Deity, the universe and man, was fundamentally alien to the pathos of ethnic, confessional and any other kind of exclusivity. As every language is equally close to the primordial one, so every true believer if he is a pagan or a Turk, he is as close to God as you are under the name of Christ (*De tripl. vita* VI.21) [Böhme 1842, 88]. Similarly, every natural thing serves as a manifestation of the Deity constantly creating His body in the form of intelligible and sensual spheres of the universe (6). “Teutonic” thought chiefly on a cosmic and universal scale, for he considered himself a herald of a new blessed era that seemed to him as well as many of his contemporaries already knocking at the door. It promised to put an end to all the disorders produced in the world by selfishness and self-exaltation [Franckenberg 1780, 31–32, 149].

The eschatological perspective of Boehme’s thought elucidates the reasons for his constant interest in the catastrophe of Babel. According to the view prevailing in his time, it gave rise to linguistic pluralism. Unlike most theorists contented with the traditional moralistic interpretation of this biblical story (Gen. 11), Boehme created his own, metaphysical, explanation of it. Instead of ascribing motives of the builders of the Tower to a sudden attack of vanity, he saw in Babel the apogee of cognitive degradation of mankind, which increased from the beginning of history. As before Lucifer, whose rebellion originated the material world, Adam fell because he was enflamed with the desire to constitute himself as a self-governing power independent of the source of being. Besides, tempted by the attractive appearance of sensual nature, he wanted to have it in his dominion: “to eat of the fruit of the corrupted earth, which in its external palpability had become evil and in the fire of anger hard and palpable” (*Aur.* XVII.19) [Boehme 2013, 509] (7). One of the consequences of the Fall resulting in man’s submission to nature, not *vice versa*, was a gradual existential disorientation of mortals. It manifested itself primarily in the aberration of the fundamental notions of God as the source and foundation of everything. Thus the hour came when people began to understand Him as a separate object among other entities of this world. But, not having found the Deity in a reified image they imagined that He was hidden from them in the visible heaven. So in order to find Him, who

is in everything and everywhere, they decided to erect a Tower with help of which they would have ascended to heaven and (here Boehme follows the letter of the Scripture) have immortalized their name (*Myst. Mag.* XXXV.65) [Böhme 1843, 262].

These reflections of the theosophist are associated with his Adamicist views. In particular, the vain search for the Godhead makes us remember the “learned” attempts to find *Ursprache* in the form of a given historical form. And the “right” conception of Deity prompts us to think of Boehmean notion of the primeval language as the ontological basement of all human tongues. In his other works, especially *Mysterium pansophicum* (1620) and *Mysterium magnum* (1623), – “Babel” and “Adamic” themes are connected even more directly. According to Boehme, the immediate cause of the fundamental disorientation – to search for the material god in an outward technical way – was the loss of the “guide” (*Führer*), by which people were previously directed. In one passage of *Mysterium pansophicum*, he identifies it with nature, which he refers to as a mystery, for its life is the eternal incarnation of the Deity. In the other place he associates that guide with the “voice of the Holy Spirit.” sounding for the forefathers in the primordial language still perceived by them (VII) [Boehme 2013, 814–815]. And since in Boehme’s interpretation the Adamic language was a human form of the other-being of “the language of nature” (*Natursprache*), which I will consider in more detail later, the presented statements coincide in essence. Godhead “articulates” Himself in nature in the “sensual language” (*Sensualische Sprache*) of the tangible properties and signs of things. On his part Adam could, as if from a tuning fork, adjust his speech to it, achieving harmony between them. When the connection with nature was broken the human race began to disintegrate into groups determined by the conditions of their physical and cultural life. From then on each of them wanted to rely only on their own reason and, having withdrawn into itself, to fight for existence alone. Thus disagreement arose in humanity. For some time it progressed with a formally single tool of communication and then produced speech diversity. It was not reduced to a simple loss of linguistic unity, but was connected with a mutation of the very substance of the language. As a result, the latter has become what people know it till now (*Myst. Mag.* XXXV.58) [Böhme 1843, 261].

In the picture of the Babylonian catastrophe created by Boehme, whose understanding of God was rather impersonal and Neo-Platonist than Christian, His role was reduced to passive permission. After all, if

the whole universe was conceived as nothing but the emanation of the Deity, the events accompanying the erection and destruction of the Tower were just moments in the drama of His inner life. “For everything that lives and thrives is in God. And God Himself is all. And everything that is formed is formed out of Him, whether in love or anger” (*Aur.* XIII.115) [Boehme 2013, 409] (8). The Fall of the devil and Adam, the loss of the primordial language, the bloody wars and the attempts of the learned nationalists to extol their tongues over others – all those seemingly unrelated events, the theosophist thought, stemmed from a passion for individualistic division living in the mysterious depths of the Deity Himself. Equally similar in their effects, they bring discord into the peaceful flow of the divine cosmic life, leading it into a state called *Turba* by Boehme (9). “if the *turba* in a thing be grown up with it, which of one makes many, where the multiplicity is at enmity with itself, then the turba also breaks the multiplicity, – the theosophist teaches. – For the first will to a thing desires only that one thing which is its body and delight: But the multiplicity in a thing makes *enmity*: for the one will always rise up above the other; and yet the other will not endure it” (*De tripl. vita* XIII.32) [Böhme 1842, 207].

Speaking of the “germination” of chaos, Boehme presents it as something natural and imminent, for which no one is responsible. Absolutely unqualified and indefinite, the Deity (*die Gottheit*), characterized as the *Ungrund* (Abyss), eternally strives for self-manifestation and self-knowledge. But this aspiration can be accomplished only through internal differentiation and transition to the plurality of limited entities. For “in a single substance, wherein there is no separation, but only totality, the knowledge is absent” (*Clav.* 13) [Böhme 1682, 228] (10). However, dividing and taking shape in the “yearning for something” (*Sucht nach etwas*), the Deity simultaneously suffers from the opposite desire – to return to nothing (*Nichts*), into a state of non-manifestedness and ignorance of Himself (*Myst. Pans.* II) [Boehme 2013, 796–797]. That is why the theosophist characterizes the cyclic life of the Deity as laden with the inescapable sorrow caused in Him by opposing drives. These processes are like exhalation and inhalation coinciding in time and correspond to the Neo-Platonist formula: *ex Deo – per Deum – in Deum* (11). Even the era of peace, whose coming was to wipe out any discord and confusion from the face of the world, was also interpreted by Boehme as a phase of never “parting” God-cosmic life, rather than a final state, dogmatized by an official theology. Equally unorthodox was Boehme’s understanding of evil. In the world of the German mystic

who defended the truth of Christian morality, there was no Christian “evil.” In the place of Augustinian “Evil is nothing,” the diminishing of being, Boehme places a contrarian idea that evil: the devil’s rebellion, the Fall of Adam and so on, leads to the increment and complication of being as well as under certain conditions, to enrichment of knowledge, including the linguistic one (12).

Returning to the theme of the Tower of Babel, we may liken the first stage of cognitive degradation of mankind (it was associated with the loss of the universal existential “guide” and causally preceded Babel) an incremental loss of absolute pitch: “subtle understanding,” (*subtilen Verstand*), in the theosophist’s words (*Myst. Mag.* XXXV.14) [Böhme 1843, 252]. That what happened as a result of the Babel may be compared with the loss of hearing as such. More precisely, with its intermediate stage, when deaf people still retain the acoustic image of the language in their memory, but, having lost the opportunity to hear their own and others’ speech, enter the short phase of its disintegration and “mumble” in their specific manner. And later, having realized what has happened to them, they have forced to learn a new – a very limited in comparison with the previous – language of gestures.

### **“The root of all languages”**

The analysis of the origin of linguistic pluralism presented in the previous section, showed how dynamic Boehme’s ontological model is. The essence of this dynamics occurring at two different levels of being is not homogeneous. On the one hand the theosophist following the letter of the Bible narrates about the events that led to the emergence of earthly history (the Fall of Lucifer and Adam), or occurred within it (the Flood, Babel etc.) or are to happen after its completion. On the other hand, seeking to recognize the spirit behind the letter, the deep meaning behind the events, Boehme interprets them generally in an atemporal way – as tangible symbols of the self-sufficient God-cosmic life, whose various dimensions coexist out of time. Moreover, this difference of two ontological plans the thinker turns into a key principle valid in relation to every corporeal entity. According to it, all earthly objects have “two properties: one from time, another from eternity; the first, temporary, is an explicit property, the second is concealed” (*Sign. rer.* IV.17) [Böhme 1842, 296] (13). Concepts and images describing what happens on both the historical and God-cosmic levels, often overlap and replace each other. For instance, when representing the self-embodiment of the Deity in images associated with articulation and

sounding of speech, the thinker juxtaposes these processes sometimes so closely that his texts confuse the mind of modern readers in this respect (14). Together with Boehme's unsystematic *modus cogitandi* and specific figurativeness of his style, it greatly complicates understanding of his doctrine, including its linguistic-philosophical facet.

The phonetic-articulatory images of the "Teutonic philosopher" are mainly grouped around the concepts already familiar to us. This is the "language of nature" and "the language of Adam," opposed by Boehme to all post-Babel tongues. *Natursprache* exists before and independently from any human imposition of names. Therefore it is called language only in a very limited sense. It is an ensemble of signatures – the sensual properties of natural things, in which their essence – and through it the Deity – is revealed. Being a part of cosmic nature as a body and of the composite signature of the Supreme, every entity directly participates in its eternal, never drying out Spring (15). For that reason, *Natursprache* is the active Word (*das Wort der Kraft*) of the Deity (*Myst. Mag.* XIX.22–23) [Böhme 1843, 104]. Created in the image of God as the "heart of all beings of this world," Adam perfectly perceived signs and essences of all creatures that is the very language of nature (*De trib. princ.* XXI.11) [Böhme 1841, 278] (16). It enabled him to transpose perfectly *Natursprache* into his, human, language, dependent on it as its foundation. Affirming that the language of nature is in this sense the source of the original names of all things, Boehme often identifies it with the semiotic system of Adam (17). As for the historic tongues eventually derived from the primeval, *Natursprache* is their deepest foundation as well. Being mediated by the Adamic language, this "root" is hidden in all extant tongues (18). Therefore, in principle – being enlightened from heaven – each one is able to comprehend like Adam either the natural (through correct "reading" of signatures) or primordial (through sensitive listening in the words of one's tongue) languages. If Boehme seems sometimes to forget about the necessity of supernatural illumination, he does so because of another confusion produced by the unification of the historical and the God-cosmic levels of being. I mean an overlap of the actual ("here and now") and eschatological perspectives.

According to the theosophist, the natural and Adamic languages are "sensual." So they are not completely closed for cognition in the earthly, transient reality. At the same time they are not opposed to each other as purely visual and purely sound, respectively (19). For among the signatures, whose totality forms *Natursprache*, a separate place is oc-

cupied by the acoustic properties of things: “sound, voice and speech,” revealed by creatures (*Sign. rer.* I.16) [Böhme 1842, 276]. Since the language of nature and the process of the divine incarnation expressed in it are primarily conceived in images associated with utterance of sounds, these properties play a paramount role in Boehme’s doctrine. According to the theosophist, “in the language of sense all spirits (*Geister*) speak one with another; they use no other language, for it is the Language of nature,” as the most suitable for these subtle material beings (*Myst. Mag.* XXXV.60) [Böhme 1843, 260] (20). That it is not just a metaphor is clear, in particular, from the passage in the Aurora, where the angelic – and, ideally, human – cosmic service is reduced to the formation of a sound. This sound is to act as God’s praise and “to participate in the formation of the fruits” of the Holy Spirit, i.e. the heavenly food of angels and pious people (21). So, not being purely mental, the language of spirits has a subtle sound substance and at the same time is identical to *Natursprache*. It allows to suggest two possibilities: either angels catch the sound emitted by each object, having an acoustic signature among others, or they have their own special language analogous to the Adamic one, which the German mystic often identifies with *Natursprache*.

In turn, the notion of a mental language (*mentalische Zunge*), which occupies a marginal place in Boehme’s theory, refers to the first immaterial energies flowing from the depths of *Ungrund*. Preceding the creation of the physical cosmos, they give the Deity initial knowledge of Himself. The theosophists associates those energies with the five vowels of the Tetragrammaton (*JHWH*), the sacred name of God transcribed by him in the German mode as *JEHOVA*. In Boehme’s interpretation, this name contains only one consonant – *H*, symbolizing the descent of the divine energies in a way like exhalation (*Myst. Mag.* XXXV.49–50) [Böhme 1843, 259]. Joining with the material elements arising from them, these “five holy languages” form all things. Accordingly, the mystic considers the everlasting creation of the world as the imprinting of the name of God in every natural object and as the manifestation of those “holy languages” in *Natursprache* (22). The sketched views help understand why the main hermeneutic interest of the thinker concerned consonant sounds. They denoted nuances and facets of the incarnation of *Ungrund*, while the vowels signified the incomprehensible mysteries of His pre-cosmic life. These notions allow us to see how closely the thought of Boehme was linked with the lore of Cabbala (23).

### The fate and language of Adam

We found out that, like *Natursprache*, the Adamic language had a “sensual” and, more precisely, an acoustic nature. But then what substantially differed it from all post-Babel tongues? For an answer to this question, let us turn first to Boehme’s anthropology that has a predominantly platonic pathos. According to it, Adam initially was not different from angels. Like them, he possessed a thin, “heavenly” body which did not need earthly food and was not subject to any physical damages and flaws. He could pass through material obstacles and, most importantly, had the ability for immortality (24). Endowed with the same speech apparatus as angels, he shared a common mission with them participating in communicational increment (and in consumption *sui generis*) of being. This cosmic function was not completely taken from mortals even after the Edenic and all subsequent catastrophes. In the spirit of the Boehmian doctrine, it remained buried under other, as if more urgent, tasks related to survival in the natural world. Therefore, even now, as in Paradise, “praying in Lord’s Prayer: Give us our daily bread,” we cannot doubt that “when our sound is incorporated in God’s sound, forming the fruit in this way, it must indeed be healthy for us, and we must be in God’s love, having the use of this nourishment as a natural right, that our spirit in God’s love has helped shape and form it” (*Aur.* XIII.110–111) [Boehme 2013, 409]. Constituting parts of the divine body, angels and Adam shared with the Deity the existential autarky. It is not fully lost by those now who aspire to live in fasting and prayer, following celestial creatures. But if the gaze and mind of angels are always focused on the divine ‘center’, man as a staple of the cosmic realms was also turned to an ontological periphery *i.e.* the earthly world. For that reason the Adamic language was somewhat different from the angelic one: they had different referential areas and not identical functions. Created to govern the Earth, Adam had a magical instrument in his language that helped to rule other creatures and elements (*De trib. princ.* X.20) [Böhme 1841, 87].

After the Fall, Adam was clothed in a new, gross material body, with which mankind has been burdened thereafter. It endowed people with a new cattle-like image instead of the former, angelic, one. Having entered the physical world, Adam lost his original, relative, sovereignty, for he became the object of astral and natural determination (25). As in the case with the formation of the universe and with the history of language, we can speak here of a kind of mutation consisting not in substitution, but rather in the *imposition* of one substance on another,

which has complicated the human nature. Boehme's view on the incarnation of Jesus partly confirms this thesis. Christ was to assimilate first a heavenly body of the perfect Adam, and then the animal and mortal flesh of his descendants. Accordingly, the theosophist considers the salvation not in terms of the Atonement, but as awakening and activation of primordial substance of man which had been hidden since Adam was cast into the "outer principle" (*äußere Principium*) (26).

A transformation affected the language of the forefathers. Boehme taught that when Adam's descendants stopped using *Natursprache*, "then the true and right understanding was put out in them; for they brought the spirits of the genuine tongue of sense into an external gross form, and framed the subtle spirit of the understanding into a gross form, and learnt to speak out of the form only; as at this day all nations speak only from this same form of their contrived sensual tongue" (*Myst. Mag.* XXXV.58) [Böhme 1843, 261] (27). Hence it gets clear that it was a fundamental qualitative change that took a long time. For despite the Fall of Adam, his offspring retained understanding of the primordial language which slowly faded to disappear in Babel. As I have shown, to understand the primeval language, in Boehme's view, means to perceive *Natursprache* as its ontological fundament. In this sense, the language of nature remained the only language, "for they had it in one form, and understood in the language and speech the sense (*Sensum*), viz. the ens, even how the will [of God] formed the ens" [Böhme 1843, 259] (28).

If to compare the above statements, we will see a contraposition between the two modes of communication and cognition. The first mode – "formal" (*aus der Form*) – is characteristic for post-Babel reality. The second one – original, which could be called "essential" (*aus der Natursprache*), – was proper to Adam and his immediate descendants who kept it valid to a certain extent till the destroying of the Tower. Since that calamity was the culmination of cognitive degradation of humankind, developing Boehme's idea one can assume that between the Edenic language and subsequent historical tongues there were a number of intermediate forms. *Ursprache* gradually degenerated in them before sinking to the bottom of tribal and then national tongues. It allowed the theosophist to associate the post-Edenic, but yet pre-Babel language with *Natursprache*.

Having considered the essence of the language of nature, we are able to conceive the core of the essential mode of communication. But how to understand that strange "to speak out of form"? After having entered

the “outer principle” Adam became one of physical objects of this world. Prior to it, remaining in the angelic condition he comprehended earthly things by means of intuitive perception of the signatures in which their substances manifested themselves. After the Fall mortals could acquire knowledge of things, mostly relying on the vague sensations of their roughened bodies. Their language was subjected to similar reification. Instead of the former immediate expression of images of things in the finest, extremely plastic material associated with the sound of the heavenly realm, words could only point to their referents like conditional labels. Although more than one generation of humans still had a formally single tongue, they were losing increasingly the ability to perceive *Natursprache*, which served as a “tuning-fork” for them. Without noticing that, they were forcedly distorting the Edenic mode of communication, framing “the subtle spirit of the understanding into a gross form.” Their words were turning into dead moulds, alienated from pulsating essences of natural things. Their true meaning was being lost, and they were becoming conventional signs, for which the very concept of “true meaning” got irrelevant. So a previously impossible opposition and, after Babel, the asymmetry of the form and content of linguistic units arose. Detached from its ontological foundation in the form of *Natursprache*, the language was reduced to its form, and it began to produce its content by itself, in a sense. That gave Boehme a reason to regard this mode of communication as coming from the form, and not from the essence of things expressed in the language of nature. On its part, the form itself became stiff and crude, like the human body producing it. Thus the linguistic form became organically incapable of resonating with *signatura rerum*. The less formal unity of communicated was provided by the wholeness of nature, the more it was kept only by inertia, which throws additional light on that appropriateness of Babel discussed above. In those conditions, the rise of linguistic pluralism was solely a matter of time and did not require an interference of the Deity.

### Conclusion

In the intellectual movement of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, inspired by the desire to get knowledge of the primordial language, Boehme had a unique and very important place. The original notion lay at the heart of his linguistic-philosophical theory. According to it the Adamic language not existing in the form of one of the extant tongues, can be found through a reflective “listening” to each of them

and “reading” the signatures of natural things. In the theosophist’s view, both ways originate in the language of nature, which serves as an intelligible facet of the material manifestation of the Deity. On the first way *Natursprache* manifests itself indirectly – as the ontological fundament of the primordial language resting inside all subsequent historical tongues. On the second way, it reveals itself immediately – as a system of signs that spatters the universe. In both cases, the reality of the language of nature is not generally obvious to people whose cognitive capacities have been drastically damaged by the Fall and later incremental degradation. Therefore, the restoration of the primordial language and, accordingly, the knowledge of *Natursprache* is impossible without the supernatural assistance in the current course of earthly history. But the spiritual illumination giving access to the deepest levels of being and speech, remains the lot of rare elects (29). We see that Boehme replaces with mystical elitism the nationalist one promoted by scholars who tried to prove the exclusive antiquity of certain tongues by means of etymology. Only those whose souls are enlightened by God or His angels are able to hear the Edenic language in the sound of every word, to read the great Book of Nature, and finally to see the Deity in everything as well as everything residing in Him. But if it is the case, then the question arises: for whom and why did our mystic create his lengthy writings? Believing in his possessing of a heavenly gift, Boehme perceived it as prophetic one and believed that he was called to proclaim the coming of “the great Day of the Lord” (*den Grossen Tag des Herren*) (*Aur.* XXIII.84–85) [Boehme 2013, 699]. That will be – and already *is*, he thought – the time when all humans will awaken to re-acquiring of the pristine knowledge of the Godhead and Universe. And the German mystic was sure that it was his mission to give the pledge and first outline of that knowledge amid the calamities of the Thirty Years’ War.

#### NOTES

(1) For an analysis of this project as a whole, see: [Karabykov 2014].

(2) For a discussion of the doctrine of signatures, see: [Willard 1989; Haferland 1989, 99–103; Bono 2008, 305–309].

(3) Here and onwards in this article I cite “*Aurora*” in a recent translation by Andrew Weeks [Boehme 2013].

(4) Here and elsewhere in this article I cite *De triplici vita* and *Mysterium magnum*, another Boehme’s treatise, in a translation by John Sparrow correcting it wherever necessary after checking it against the original in

the editions: [Böhme 1842] (for *De tripl. vita*) and [Böhme 1843] (for *Myst. magn.*). Sparrow's translations of these works by Boehme have been available to me only in digitalized editions placed on: <http://jacobboehmeonline.com>.

(5) See, in particular, his treatise *Signatura rerum* (1622) devoted to the doctrine of the same name. See also: [Weeks 1991, 188–192].

(6) A brief sketch of Boehme's onto-theology see: [Hanegraaff 2015].

(7) See also: (*Der Weg zu Chr.* IV.1.4–6).

(8) Cf.: “Beyond the one God, there is nothing at all. Even at the gates of hell there is nothing but the one God” (*Aur.* XXI.12) [Boehme 2013, 613].

(9) From ancient Greek *τὸ ἄβη* is “disorder,” “chaos.”

(10) Here and further quotes from the works of Boehme, given in my translation, are accompanied by the original. “...In einem einigen Wesen darinnen keine Schiedligkeit ist, das nur eines ist, da ist keine Wissenschaft.”

(11) «From God – by God – toward God» (Lat.) See: [Wolfson 2018, 35–47; Vassányi 2011, 133].

(12) See: (*Aur.* XI.72).

(13) “In jedem ausserlichen Dinge sind zwo Eigenschaften, einer aus der Zeit, die andre aus der Ewigkeit: die erste Eigenschaft der Zeit ist offenbar, und die andre ist verborgen.”

(14) Cf.: “For it [the spirit of man – *A.K.*] forms the word of the *name* of a thing, in the mouth; as the *thing* was in the creation” (*De tripl. vita* VI.3) [Böhme 1642, 85]. See also: (*Aur.* XIX.75–76, XVIII.118).

(15) Cf.: “The inner eternal activity is hidden in the visible world, and it is in everything and through everything.” (Die inwendige ewige Würckung ist in der sichtbahren Welt verborgen und ist in allen und durch alles) (*Clav.* 128) [Böhme 1682, 250].

(16) “das Herz aller Wesen dieser Welt.”

(17) Cf.: “For when Adam first spoke, he gave names to all creatures after their qualities and innate operations. It is the language of all nature. Not everyone masters it” (*Aur.* XX.91) [Boehme 2013, 605]. See also: (*Myst. Mag.* XIX.22); (*De trib. princ.* X.17–18).

(18) See: (*Aur.* XX.90); (*Myst. Pans.* VII); (*Myst. Mag.* XXXV.12).

(19) Cf. opposite position of O. Pompo [Pompo 1987, 43–44]. See also: [Fokin 2014, 58].

(20) “In der sensualischen Sprache reden alle Geister mit einander, sie brauchen keine andere Sprache, denn es ist die Natursprache.” It is worth noting that the view of the spirits as bodily creatures was very common in the Protestant circles of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

(21) Cf.: “An angel has nothing to expel from itself but the divine force that it takes into its mouth, by which it kindles its heart so its heart fires up all its organs. This force is expelled again by way of its mouth when

it speaks and praises God" (*Aur.* VI.13; XIII.113, 109–115) [Boehme 2013, 205, 406–409].

(22) Cf.: "The five holy speeches in the language of sense are God's Word; they are his operation through the sense tongue, viz. through the properties [of objects]." (Die fünf heiligen Sprachen in der sensualischen Sprache sind Gottes Wort, es ist seine Wirkung durch die sensualische Zunge, als durch die Eigenschaften) (*Myst. Mag.* XXXV.62) [Böhme 1843, 262]. See also: (*Clav.* 15–16).

(23) For Cabbalistic motives in Boehme's works see: [Wolfson 2018, O'Regan 2002, 193–205].

(24) See: (*De inc. verbi* I.2.13); (*De trib. princ.* X.18–20); (*Aur.* XI.61–62).

(25) See: (*Aur.* XVI.29); (*De tripl. vita* V.135–136); (*De inc. verbi* I.2.13–14).

(26) See: (*De tripl. vita* V.144–146); [Ruether 2005, 230].

(27) "Als sie sich aber der sensualischen Sprache nicht wollten gebrauchen, so ist ihnen der rechte Verstand erloschen, denn sie führten die Geister der sensualischen Sprachen in eine äußerliche grobe Form, und fasseten den subtilen Geist des Verstandes in eine grobe Form, und lerneten aus der Form reden, wie denn heutiges Tages alle Völker nur aus derselben Form ihrer gefassten sensualischen Sprachen reden."

(28) "Die einige Zunge war die Natursprache, daraus redeten sie alle, denn sie hatten sie in einer Form, und verstanden in der Sprache den Sensus, als das Ens, wie der Wille den Ens formete."

(29) See: (*Aur.* XIII.26–27, XX.91).

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