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Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy of pessimism

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SENIOR THESIS

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER'S PHILOSOPHY OF PESSIMISM.

1916

by

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Outline.

Introduction.

Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" paved the way for the pessimistic philosophy of Schopenhauer.

I. His Life and relation of his Philosophy.

- a. His early training.
- b. Relation between mother and son.
- c. His experience in teaching and as author.
- d. Reasons for his pessimism.

II. His sources.

- a. Kant. Points of agreement. Points of disagreement.
- b. Plato. Points of agreement.
Points of disagreement.
- c. Hindu thot. This his chief source.
Brahmanism,--Vedanta system.
Buddhism.
- d. A synthesis of these two,

III. His system

- a. The world as Will and Idea.
- b. The way of Salvation.

IV. His Idea of the Christian System.

- a. Danger lies in allegorical nature.
- b. The errors of Christianity.

V. The Conclusion.

The three great tests of processes.

1. That reality is to be found only in the universal.
2. That pain is the necessary accompaniment of will, pleasure being mere negation.
3. That intellect is completely subordinated to will.

Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Pessimism.

Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" had shown or had been taken to show, that in so far as we have objects only under forms of intuition,--viz., space and time, which we ourselves have introduced, we never really know the thing in itself, but only as it is affected by these forms. We never know nor can know the object as it actually is, but merely as it appears to us; absolute, unconditional knowledge is an impossibility; all we know is the relative and phenomenal. The Kantian doctrine thus naturally led to a one-sided subjective idealism; and it was such a subjective idealism that paved the way for pessimistic philosophy of Arthut Schopenhauer.

He was born at Dantzie in 1788 and spent his earlier years in mercantile persuits. But upon his father's death (by suicide) he relinquished a career for which he was eminently unfitted, and, under the guidance of his literary mother, and the friendship of Goethe, Schulze and others, devoted himself to the study of philosophy and art.

Between himself and his mother who was a popu-

lar novelist of the day, so little sympathy existed that they found it desirable to live apart. In their house at Weimar where they lived for many years there occurred many stormy scenes between mother and son until finally he left her never to see her or hear from her again.

His system was conceived early in life, and his chief work—The World as Will and as Ideas—was published in 1819. The cold reception which it received was a severe blow to his vanity, which was considerable; and it increased his disgust with the reigning philosophy. He was thoroughly convinced that there was a conspiracy among the school philosophers against him, and he could find nothing too disparaging to say of them in turn, especially Hegel. He had come into contact with Hegel at Berlin, where he was appointed private docent in 1820. He apparently led cherished hopes that he could easily triumph over the great philosopher, whose popularity was then at its height; and he deliberately set himself in rivalry, by choosing the same hour for his lectures when, consequently he found his own lectures unattended, and Hegel's class room crowded, he was

greatly disappointed, and embittered but finally was led to give up all thought of an academic career. The rest of his disappointed life was spent in quiet at Frankfort-on-the-Main. Toward the close of his life, the recognition he had failed of in his youth seemed on the point of coming to him. His book began to be talked about, and especially in its pessimism, to find converts, if not among the technical philosopher, at least among the laity. This growing fame soothed him his last days. He died in 1860.

Why was Schopenhauer a pessimist? His one sided fundamental construction of Kant would as well have furnished the basis for optimism as pessimism. Why he came to prefer the latter course must be sought in his education, his temper and his surroundings of his life. His parents were eccentric; his father, gifted venturesome - a suicide; his mother, talented, imaginative, worldly. His moral culture was utterly neglected. His early experiences were disappointing and sad. In this atmosphere he constructed his misanthropic system. The unwelcome world which it met and the unsuccess of his attempt to win adherents to his views at the University strongly tended to

confirm him in the eccentric views with which he had started out. He simply spoke out that which was in him.

His Sources.

The philosophy of Kant and Plato and the early systems of India were the intellectual product of the past which Schopenhauer considered special deference to be due. The first of these he had not profess to follow throughout. He disagreed with prominent the Kantian ethics, and had no sympathy at all with Kantian partiality for the theistic conception but his formal estimate of Kant was high, and he believed that he stood in substantial agreement with the Kantian teaching on a number of topics, notably on the contrast between the real and the ideal, one the thing-in-itself, and the a priori form of the understanding, one the opposition between the intelligible and the empirical character, and the coexistence of freedom and necessity.

The Platonic teaching which especially appealed to Schopenhauer was the doctrine of Ideas. These he construed as the immediate and only adequate objectification of ultimate reality, the true universal which science names in its reference to species sub-

sisting above the limitations of space and time, always existing and never becoming. and thus standing in wide contrast with the sense world which is ever becoming but never attains to real being. As related to things of the phenomenal sphere, the ideas are the perfect patterns full conformity to which is no where realized.

Many more of his ideas can be easily traced to the philosophical speculations and religious ideas of India toward which he had an attitude of warm appreciation. When 1803 he came to Weimar he fell in with a learned Orientalist F.Majer and through him attained an insight into the pantheistic lore of the Indian which was indeed a turning point in his life. He spoke of the Hindu as the "wisest of all mythologies" and characterized the Vedas as "the fruit of the highest human knowledge and wisdom." He described the publication of the Upanishads as "the greatest gift of the century." He confessed that if the outcome of his own philosophy were to be taken as a measure, Buddhism must be given the preference among religions, and maintain that the consideration for the welfare of animal characteristics of both Buddhism and Brahmanism showed them to be nearer perfection than either Judaism or

or Christianity. He saw in the kinship between certain Christian ideas and the doctrine of Hinduism evidence that the former were shaped in some way by the latter. His ethics is but a repetition of the pantheistic spirit and the sages of India. The following quotations contain its substance almost entire: "It is simply by the defective forms of Maya (delusion) that the intelligent principle appears clothed in such varied form; but contemplation is the sword by which wise men strike asunder the bond of action which enthralls consciousness." In open advertisement of his affiliation with Oriental systems he named his dog Otman and kept a statuette of Buddha.

He interpreted his relations to Hindu philosophy and religion to be one of simple agreement rather than one of dependence. It is not improbable that the tone and content of his thinking received some positive impressions from that quarter, some time before writing his principle work he had begun to make acquaintance with the ancient Literature of India. What is certain is that in his system, elements like those found in the Vedanta philosophy, or the orthodox philosophy of Brahmanism, are blended with points of view that are essentially Buddhistic. In common

with Vedanta philosophy he affirmed one sole substance, the all-one. He agreed also with that philosophy in regarding this one substance as impersonal. He agreed likewise with it in following out these pantheistic notions to a denial of the proper conception of individuals souls but on the other hand, he diverged from the Vedanta system in emphasizing will, rather than intellect or reason, as a thing of supreme theoretical and practical interest. At this point he approached Buddhism with the Buddhistic pessimism, which represents the world's system as interwoven with misery he was in full accord. He also approved the Buddhistic conception of salvation as consisting essentially in a negation of the will and a recession into an absolute quietism. So with approximate fidelity to the facts his system can be described as a combination of these two Eastern systems. Professor Hecker says "The Philosophy of Schopenhauer is emphatically a synthesis of Brahmanism, in a form of the Vedanta, and Buddhism.....his metaphysics is a pantheistic Vedanta doctrine of identity ; his ethics the annihilation of desire taught by Buddha."

His System.

The objective world is not merely, as Berkeley and Kant had said, an idea or presentation (vorstellung) this is but the secondary subjective aspect of the world as an object of cognition; and here it is the principle of sufficient reason, and of causal connection, which forms the basis of all forces of presentation and cognition. The world is rather a manifestation of will. Just as the idea of will is the key to my own personal existence, so also is it will which explains the outer world. The same interpretation which applies to ourselves will apply also to objective realities. While however, will is generally used to signify a conscious choice, identifying it with what we more commonly know as force, Schopenhauer regards it as essentially unconscious, and only conscious by accident. For Schopenhauer all that exists whether it be a physical phenomena or a mental fact is but a manifestation and emanation of will. Will is the real thing-in-itself, and ding-an-sich which Kant had pointed out but had not explained. Thus the universe appears to us in its totality as a progressive objectification of Will, an objectification in which, from the universal

force of nature and the phenomena of inorganic existence we pass through those of vegetable and animal life to the ideal creation of literature and art. These progressive stages in the objectification of will Schopenhauer identifies with the ideas of Plato, it is such ideas, such universal pre-existent types of developing existence that art realizes.

In the human brain the Will attains the highest development of its own nature. Simultaneously man learns that reality is an illusion, and life a succession of sorrows. To interpret then into a realm of morality, we must recognize the identity of all beings as different manifestations of one common will, and acknowledge that the individual self is a delusion; we must curb that eager affirmation of the wish for life on which all egoisms rest. The basis of morality must be sympathy, humanity, and the love not only of the human race but of all animal creation, - vivisection Schopenhauer earnestly condemns. All selfish pleasure therefore must be crushed, and in particular the joys of love. Love is delusion of delusions, the vanity of vanities. It rests simply on the fact that will has not yet given up its determination to externalize itself and enjoy

more of life - an end for which it employs an array of romance. The real end of love, is never anything but the procreation of a new individual though the directing will glazes its immediate object and persuades the lovers that their union is based on other higher considerations. Love is a passion of the race, the individual is but its instrument. The lovers may believe that they are pressing their own interests in reality, it is the advantage of the kind they are securing. The advantage, from the point of view of will which has not yet exhausted its desire to live. But in actual truth, marriage is the greatest of all crimes the continually recurring "fall of man" because in perpetuating life its simply perpetuates misery. Happiness is but a dream - this world is the worst of all possible worlds. "The basis of all mans being is want defect and pain. While the most complete objectification of will man is by that same fact the most defective of all beings. His life is only a continual struggle for existence, with the certainty of being beaten." Pleasure so called is altogether negative; it is pain which is positive and the state that we call pleasure is simply the absence of pain. So Schopenhauer draws some conclus-

sion as Byron,

"Count o'er the joys thine hours have seen,
 Count o'er thy days from anguish free;
 And know, whatever thou hast been,
 'tis something better,-- not to be."

But the result is not to be attained thru suicide for suicide rests on a decided egoism. The suicide really wishes life; the only thing he does not wish is pain. His action merely affects the individual, it brings no solution for a race. Whence, then, is deliverance to come? And the answer is, in knowing that the world is radically and necessarily bad. Such knowledge leaves no ground for that old affirmation of the Will to live; it leads to a regulation of will, to a renunciation of desire, which completed by means of asceticism and mortification, must attain that perfect freedom of the will, that true "Nirvana", in which there is no more will, and therefore no longer an ideal presentation or a real world. Religion Schopenhauer views as philosophy and metaphysics for the million; and a disciple will find his religious need in the "four sublime verities" of Buddhism. (1. Existence is pain; 2 The cause of pain is desire; 3 pain may cease by Nirvana; 4 Nirvana is attained by contemplation, and finally by ecstasy.

Schopenhauer's Idea of the Christian System.

When the church that in the dogma's of religion, reason is totally incompetent and blind and its use to be reprehended it is in reality attesting the fact that these dogmas are allegorical in their nature and are not to be judged by the standard which reason taking all things sensu proprio can alone apply. Now the absurdities of a dogma are just the mark and sign of what is allegorical and mystical in it. In the case under consideration, however, the absurdities spring from the fact that two such heterogeneous doctrines as those of the Old and New Testament had to be combined. The great allegory was of gradual growth. It was finally completed by Augustine, who penetrated deepest into its meaning and so was able to conceive it as a systematic whole and hence supply its defects. Hence the Augustinian doctrine, confirmed by Luther, is the complete form of Christianity; and the Protestants of today, who take revelation sensu proprio and confine it to a single individual are in error in looking upon the first beginnings of Christianity as its most perfect expression. But the bad thing— instead of confessing their

allegorical nature they have to conceal it. The difficulty is to teach the multitude that something can be true and untrue at the same time.

Combination of the Old and New Testament equals absurdity-viz Christian doctrine of Predestination and Grace as formulated by Augustine and adopted by Luther; according to which one man is endowed with grace and another is not. Grace then comes to be a privilege received at birth, brought ready into the world; a privilege too, in a matter second to none in importance what is obnoxious and absurd in this doctrine may be traced to the idea contained in the Old Testament, that man is the creation of an eternal will, which called him into existence out of nothing. The meaning of the Christian doctrine is expressed by theory of metempsychosis common to Brahmans and Buddhaists.

(Schopenhauer objects to eternal punishment - must have been seen by Creator, so a trap is set for them.) It looks as if the Blessed Lord had created the world for the benefit of the Devil - taken sensu proprio. But look at it sensu allegorico - explain it. To overcome denial of metempsychosis etc. Pope Gregory I introduced the doctrine of

Purgatory. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. B. 12, Chap. 21. God creates out of nothing a being forbids him somethings and enjoins others upon Him and because these commands are not obeyed he tortures him to all eternity with every conceivable anguish; and for this purpose, builds soul and body inseparable together so that instead of the torment destroying this being by splitting him up into his elements, and so setting him free, he may live to eternal pain. Augustine adds, all this predestined to happen.

In Christian system the Devil, - a personage of greater importance. God-- absolutely good, wise and powerful. Schopenhauer says Jehovah is the transformation of Ormidz and Satan of the Obriman and Ormiad is the transformation of Ndra.

Christianity is not a peace system of doctrine but a history, a series of events, a collection of facts. He says the historical constitution of Christianity makes Chinese laugh at missionaries as story-tellers. Another fundamental error the natural distinction Christianity makes between man and the animal world to which he really belongs. The Hindu religions recognize that man is related to the whole of nature. The New Testament must be

traceable to an Indian source; its ascetic view of morality, its ethical systems are all Indian. Everything which is true in Christianity may also be found in Brahminism and Buddhism. All this further proves the deep influence of Indian ideas on the thinking and work of Schopenhauer.

The whole throng of pessimism with its practical consequences stands or falls with the three fundamental propositions, (1) that reality is to be found only in the universal; (2) that pain is the necessary accompaniment of will, pleasure being mere negation; (3) and that intellect is completely subordinated to will.

Is it true even on Schopenhauer's principle that realities rely in the universal, that this world is but a fleeting vision, a mere ruffle on the surface of the infinite sea? The will in itself is eternal and permanent, because it lies beyond time; but as we have been so often told, the cognitive subject is equally beyond the sphere of time, equally eternal. With the universal will co-exists the noumenal subject. Subject and object, however, we also know, are inseparably connected; the one involves the other. Where there is a cognitive subject, there must be cognized objects. The world of objects must be eternal and real. The same results may be reached in another way. The will to live manifests itself in the world as we know it. But it is an eternal striving force; from its very nature its realization cannot begin at any point of time. Consequently the world as we know it is just as real and permanent as the will from which it springs; and we

have again the result that in place of blind force there is at the root of existence the synthesis of intelligence and its objects of thought realizing itself.

The doctrine of pain and pleasure is not original as old as Plato from whom it seems to be taken. And its reputation is as old as Aristotle. After all it is but a hasty generalization and includes all pleasure under the title *ἡ ἀπὸ τῆς ἰσχύος* satisfaction of want and so removal of pain. Man is not more an accumulation of wants than a system of powers and faculties from the exercise of which he may derive pleasure. One instance of such pleasure comes forward prominently in Schopenhauer's doctrine of ascetic emotion which he admits to be free from pain.

He does not however ground his pessimism so much on the negative nature of pleasure as on the positive and permanent character of pain. The will is an incessant craving, and undying want. But is this on his own theory possible? The will is to-pan, the all. How can that which comprehends everything be in want? Want implies defect, need of something outside of self; but what is outside of the absolute? If the within itself desires anything it is not universal:

if it is truly universal it can desire nothing. from this dilemma Schopenhauer's philosophy can hardly extricate itself. Moreover, the will is a will to manifest itself; and its manifestation is this world. It has therefore attained its desire its want is filled up. What more can it possibly desire?

In truth Schopenhauer's pessimism springs not from any logical basis, but partly from the discontented character of the man, and partly from the felt imperfection of individual life, of which the true explanation is far other than what he has given. There is always in life an inner discord, a want of harmony between the reality and the ideal of reason. Emerson says, "Each man sees his own life defaced and disfigured as the life of man is not, to his imagination..... Everything is beautiful seen from the point of the intellect or as truth but all is not true if seen as experience." We are never what we might be; and had we not within us the potentiality of something higher we should not feel the failures of what we actually attain. All prayer is but approximation to the fuller realization of the true idea of humanity which forms the nature of each one. The world is doubtless full of suffering and wrong but

it does not become our duty to withdraw from it or to spend our lives in vain attempts to eradicate our own humanity. It is a world for noble effort in which alone true pleasure can be found.

This is the crowning inconsistency of Schopenhauer's philosophy. No proposition is more strongly insisted upon than that of the subordination of intellect to will. It is the very key stone of his system. The Will is real, the intellect phenomenal; The intellect and the servant of will; in fact to use his own illustration, the one stands to the other as the hammer stands to the smith. Now would it not be considered a remarkable hammer that should have in itself the power to annihilate the smith, and in so doing annihilate itself? Yet this is precisely the action of the intellect upon the will. The intellectual conviction of the wretchedness of life acts as a motive upon the will and determines it to deny the desire to life, i.e. to deny or destroy itself. But pessimism was a deduction from the fact that the will to live was eternal. The will, we now find is not eternal, and consequently pessimism has no foundation. Not only is individuality destroyed

by this negation of the will., the very essence of the universe is suppressed, there is absolute nothingness. Suicide is the veritable climax of Schopenhauer's system, for his philosophy ends by destroying itself.

The fundamental conception of a mighty will, pulsing through all existence, and throwing off infinite forms again to absorb them into its own nothingness, has shown itself to be free of inconsistency and contradiction, and has landed at last in a gigantic paradox. Instead of blind, unconscious Force, we have seen him invariably compelled to postulate active creative thought divina intelligentia of the great Italian thinker Bruno.