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On Schopenhauer

An attempt to explain the world by an accepted factor.
The thing in itself becomes one of its possible forms.
The attempt fails.
Schopenhauer did not consider it an attempt.
His thing in itself was opened up by him.
That he did not see this failure can be explained, in that he did not want to feel the dark contradictoriness in the region where individuality ceases to be.
He did not trust his judgment.
Places.
The dark drive brought about through a representation mechanism reveals itself as world. This drive is not included under the *principium individuationis*.

I

The title page of *The World as Will and Representation* already discloses to us what Schopenhauer claims to have performed for mankind through this work.

The most longed after question of all metaphysicians as Goethe said it, the “if not” – was daringly answered by him with Yes: and so that the new knowledge be noticed far and wide like a temple inscription, he wrote the redeeming formula for the oldest and most important riddle of the world as a title on the brow of his book, *The World as Will and Representation*.

The so-called solution then:

In order to comfortably get ahold of in what the redeeming and explanatory elements of this formula are to be found, it is recommended that they be transposed partly into images:

The groundless, unknowing will reveals itself, through a representation mechanism, as world.

When we subtract from this sentence, what passed to Schopenhauer as the legacy of the great Kant, a legacy which he always, in his grand manner, regarded with the most proper respect: there remains the one word “will” along with its predicates. It

is a clumsily coined, very encompassing word, when with it such an important thought, going well beyond Kant, is to be labelled differently. A thought so important that its discoverer could say of it that he considered it to be that “which has been sought for a very long time under the name of philosophy, and that whose discovery is for this very reason regarded by those versed in history as just as impossible as the discovery of the philosophers’ stone.”

In light of this, we remember that to Kant as well, a no less questionable discovery appeared as a great, as the greatest, most fruitful deed of his life, achieved by means of the old-fashioned table of categories, even though with the important difference that with the conclusion of “the most difficult thing that could be undertaken on behalf of metaphysics”, Kant admired himself as a force of nature powerfully bursting forth and received consecration to appear “as reformer of philosophy”, in contrast to which Schopenhauer at all times thanks the inspired thoughtfulness and power of clarity of his intellect for his supposed find.

The errors of great men are worth honoring because they are more fruitful than the truths of small men.

If we now turn to the above quoted sentence, to dissect and probe the essence of the Schopenhauerian system, no thought remains farther from us than to attack Schopenhauer himself, to triumphantly parade before his eyes the individual pieces of his proofs and, at the end, to raise the question how in the world a man can reach such a level of pretension with a system so full of holes.

II

In fact it is not to be denied, that the clause which we offered above as the essence of the Schopenhauerian system, can be attacked very successfully from four sides.

1. The first, and most general – aimed at Schopenhauer only in so far as he did not here, where it was necessary, go beyond Kant – aims at the concept of the thing in itself and sees in it, to speak with Überweg, “only a hidden category”.

2. Although one should give Schopenhauer the right to follow that dangerous Kantian path, yet that which he puts in place of the Kantian x , the will, is only born with the help of a poetic intuition, while the attempted logical proofs cannot satisfy either Schopenhauer or us. (See *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (WWV)*, pp. 125, 131; *WWR* 1, pp. 103, 109.)

3. Thirdly, we are compelled to guard against the predicates which Schopenhauer ascribes to his will, which for something simply unthinkable sound much too certain and all stem from the contradiction to the world of representation: while between the thing in itself and its appearance not even the concept of this opposition has any meaning.

4. Nevertheless one could posit, to the credit of Schopenhauer, against all three objections a possibility of threefold power: There may be a thing in itself, however, only in the sense that in the subject area of transcendence all is possible which at some-time was hatched in a philosopher's brain. This possible thing in itself can be the will: a possibility, which because it arises out of the joining of two possibilities, is nothing more than the negative power of the first possibility, in other words, already a good step toward the other pole, which signifies impossibility. We heighten this concept of an always decreasing possibility once again, in that we admit the predicates of the will, which Schopenhauer took to belong to it: just because an opposition is unprovable between thing in itself and appearance but can still be thought. Against such a knot of possibilities every ethical thought could explain itself: but even against this ethical pretext one could still object that the thinker who stands before the riddle of the world, has no other means than to guess in the hope that a moment of heightened awareness will place the word upon his lips. A word which offers the key to that text lying before all eyes still unread, which we call world. Whether this world is will? – Here is the point at which we must make our fourth attack. The Schopenhauerian warp and weft gets tangled in his hands: in the smallest part as a result of a certain tactical clumsiness of its author, but mostly because the world does not let itself be so easily fastened into the system as Schopenhauer had hoped in the first inspiration of discovery. In his old age he complained that the most difficult problem of philosophy had not been solved in his own. He meant the question concerning the borders of individuation.

III

Further, a certain species of that contradiction with which the Schopenhauerian system is perforated, will occupy us on occasion; a species of extremely important and hardly avoidable contradictions, which to a certain extent while still resting under their mother's heart arm themselves and, scarcely born, do their first deed by killing her. They concern themselves collectively with the borders of individuation and have their *πρωτόν ψ(εὔδος)*⁵ in the point considered under 3. above. "The will as thing in itself" said Schopenhauer (*WWV* 1, p. 134), "is quite different from its phenomenon, and is entirely free from all the forms of the phenomenon into which it first passes when it appears, and which therefore concern only its objectivity, and are foreign to the will itself. Even the most universal form of all representation, that of object for subject, does not concern it, still less the forms that are subordinate to this and collectively have their common expression in the principle of sufficient reason. As we know, time and space belong to this principle, and consequently plurality as well, which exists and has become possible only through them. In this last respect I shall call time and space the *principium individuationis*, an expression borrowed from the old scholasticism" (*WWR* 1, p. 112). In this description, which we meet in countless variations in

Schopenhauer's writings, what surprises is its dictatorial tone, which asserts a number of *negative* characteristics of the thing in itself which lies completely outside the sphere of knowledge, and which does not remain in accord with the assertion that it is not subject to the most universal form of knowledge, namely, to be object for a subject. Schopenhauer expresses this himself: *WWV* 1, p. 131: "this thing in itself (. . .), which as such is never object, since all object is its mere appearance or phenomenon, and not it itself, *is to be thought of objectively*, then we must *borrow its name and concept* from an object, from something in some way objectively given, and therefore from one of its phenomena" (*WWR* 1, p. 110). Schopenhauer demands that something, which can never be an object, nevertheless should be thought of objectively: a path which can only lead to an apparent objectivity, in so far as a completely dark and ungraspable *x* is draped with predicates, as with colorful clothes, which are taken from the world of phenomena, a world foreign to it. The demand follows, that we take the draped clothes, namely the predicates for the thing in itself: for that is what the sentence means: "if it is to be thought objectively, it must borrow its name and concept from an object." The concept "the thing in itself" is then removed, "because it should be so", and another is secretly pressed into our hands.

The borrowed name and concept is the will, "because it is the clearest and most developed appearance of the thing in itself, which is most directly illuminated by knowledge." But that does not concern us here: more important for us is that all the predicates of the will are also borrowed from the world of appearance. True, Schopenhauer makes here and there the attempt to describe the sense of these predicates as completely ungraspable and transcendent, for example, *WWV* 2, p. 368: "The unity of that will . . . in which we have recognized the inner being of the phenomenal world, is a metaphysical unity. Consequently, knowledge of it is transcendent; that is to say, it does not rest on the functions of our intellect, and is therefore not to be really grasped with them" (*WWR* 2, p. 323). Compare *WWV* 1, p. 134, 132, *WWR* 1, pp. 110–12. On the basis of the whole Schopenhauerian system, in particular because of the first description of it in the first book of *WWV* we persuade ourselves, however, that where he wishes, he allows himself the human and completely non-transcendental use of unity of the will, and really only then goes back to that transcendence where the holes in the system present themselves as obvious to him. It is then with this "unity" as it is with the "will", they are predicates of things in themselves taken from the world of appearance under which the actual essence, that transcendent evaporates. What is valid even of the three predicates of unity, eternity (that means timelessness), freedom (that means causelessness), is valid for the thing in itself: they are all indivisibly knotted together with our organization, so that it is completely doubtful whether they have any meaning outside of the human sphere of knowledge. That they should belong to the thing in itself, while their opposites dominate the world of appearances, that neither Kant nor Schopenhauer will prove for us, yes, not even make plausible for us, the latter because his thing in itself, the will, with those three predicates, cannot get along and manage, rather it is continually required to borrow from the world of appearance, that is, to transfer the concepts of multiplicity, temporality, and causality to itself.

In contrast he is fully correct when he says that (*WWV* 1, p. 118) "from outside one can never come close to the essence of things: no matter how one searches one wins only images and names" (*WWR* 1, p. 99).

IV

The will appears; how could it appear? Or to ask it another way: where does the representation mechanism come from through which the will appears? Schopenhauer answers with a curious turn of expression, in that he indicates the intellect as the *μηχανή* of the will: *WWV* 2, p. 315: “The growth of the development of the brain has come about by the ever increasing and more complicated need of the corresponding appearances of the will” (*WWR* 2, p. 279). “Knowledge and the conscious ego are at basis tertiary, in that they presuppose the organism, but the organism presupposes the will” (*WWV* 2, p. 314; *WWR* 2, p. 278). Schopenhauer posits then a hierarchical progression of representations of the will with ever increasing needs of existence: in order to satisfy these, nature uses a matching progression of tools among which the intellect, from its first dawning feelings to its extreme clarity, has a place. From such a point of view a world of appearance is placed before the world of appearance: if we wish to hold fast to the Schopenhauerian *termini* concerning the thing in itself. Even before the appearance of intellect we see the *principium individuationis*, the law of causality in full effect. The will grasps life in haste and searches everywhere for ways to appear; it begins modestly with the lowest steps and rises to a certain extent from the ranks. In this region of the Schopenhauerian system everything is already dissolved in words and images: from the primal determination of things in themselves, almost all, except the memory is lost. And where memory takes root, it serves only to place the completed contradiction in full light of day. Par. II. p. 150 “That all life on earth did not exist in any consciousness at all, either in their own because they had none or in the consciousness of another because no such consciousness existed . . . that is, they did not exist at all; but then what does their having existed signify? At bottom, it is merely *hypothetical*, namely, *if* a consciousness had existed in those primeval times, then such events would have appeared in it; thus far does the *regressus* of phenomena lead us. And so it lay in the very nature of the thing in itself to manifest itself in such events.” (PP 2: 140). They are, as Schopenhauer says on the same page, only “translations into the language of our observing intellect.”

But, if we ask after these prudent considerations, how was it once possible that the intellect arose? The existence of the last step before the appearance of the intellect is certainly as hypothetical as that of earlier ones, that means it was not in existence because consciousness was not in existence. With the next step, consciousness is supposed to appear, that means out of a non-existing world the flower of knowledge is to suddenly and directly break forth. This is also to have happened in a sphere of timelessness and spacelessness without the mediation of causality: what stems out of such an otherworldly world, however, must itself – after Schopenhauer’s reasoning – be thing in itself: either the intellect must rest as a new predicate eternally joined with the thing in itself; or there can be no intellect because at no time could an intellect have become.

But one exists: it follows that it could not be a tool of the world of appearance, as Schopenhauer would have it, but rather thing in itself, that is, will.

The Schopenhauerian thing in itself would therefore become simultaneously the *principium individuationis* and basis of necessitation: in other words: the present world. Schopenhauer wanted to find an equation for the x: and it revealed itself out of his calculation that it = x, that means that he did not find it.

5. Ideas
6. Character
7. Teleology and its opposite
- 8.

One should take note with what caution Schopenhauer avoided the question of the origin of intellect: as soon as we come into the region of this question and secretly hope, that it will now come, he hides himself to some extent behind clouds: although it is apparent that the intellect in the Schopenhauerian sense already presupposes a world caught in the *principium individuationis* and the laws of causality. Once, as far as I can see, this admission lay upon his tongue: but he swallows it again in such a curious manner, that we need to look at it closer. *WWV* 2, p. 310. “Now if in the objective comprehension of the intellect we go back as far as we can, we shall find that the necessity or need of *knowledge in general* arises from the plurality and *separate* existence of beings, from individuation. For let us imagine that there exists only a *single* being, then such a being needs no knowledge, because there would not then exist anything different from that being itself, – anything whose existence such a being would therefore have to take up into itself only indirectly through knowledge, in other words, nothing foreign that could be apprehended as object. On the other hand, with the plurality of beings, every individual finds itself in a state of isolation from all the rest, and from this arises the necessity for knowledge. The nervous system, by means of which the animal individual first of all becomes conscious of itself, is bounded by a skin; yet in the brain raised to intellect, it crosses this boundary by means of its form of knowledge, causality, and in this way perception arises for it as a consciousness of *other* things, as a picture or image of beings in space and time, which change in accordance with causality.” (*WWR* 2, p. 274).