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## Schopenhauer's Way of Salvation.

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Speaking from the standpoint of philosophy itself, one must say that modern philosophers are for the most part conceiving their task entirely too narrow. Far from embracing the vast field of human thought and desires, hopes and perplexities, they are limiting themselves to a few isolated problems. Thus the movement recently launched known as Critical Realism<sup>1)</sup> has chosen as its sole province epistemology: the problem of knowledge. Prof. J. B. Pratt, who is one of this school, writes:—

“Critical Realism does not pretend to metaphysics. It is perfectly possible to the critical realist to be a panpsychist, a metaphysical dualist, a Platonist, or an ontological idealist of some other type. Only so much of the metaphysical problem need critical realists be agreed upon as is required by the epistemological doctrine which they hold in common.”<sup>2)</sup>

Philosophers of other schools and times have seen larger problems. They have dealt with the origin of things, the relation of the finite and the Infinite, the cause and cure of human sorrows and ills, the whence and why and whither of life. The greatness of Christianity lies also in this, that it alone possesses the key to these fundamental human problems. Philosophers of many climes and times have undertaken to find an answer. Among these was also Arthur Schopenhauer. What problems the world presented to Schopenhauer and how he endeavored to solve them shall be the subject of this paper.

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1) Critical Realism is a very recent movement represented by Profs. D. Drake of Vassar College, A. O. Lovejoy of Johns Hopkins U., J. B. Pratt of Williams College, A. K. Rogers of Yale U., Geo. Santayana of Harvard U., R. W. Sellars of Michigan U., and C. A. Strong of Columbia U. They have joined in publishing a volume which they call *Essays in Critical Realism*. 1920.

2) *Essays in Critical Realism*, p. 109.

Schopenhauer and Pessimism are terms that are married to each other in the minds of reading people. And rightly so. For Schopenhauer<sup>3)</sup> this is a world all wrong and evil. This evil is not merely accidental, but essential. The heart of the world is evil. A few quotations<sup>4)</sup> will bear this out:—

"To the palpably sophistical proofs of Leibnitz that this is the best of all possible worlds, we may seriously and honestly oppose the proof that this is the worst of all possible worlds."<sup>5)</sup>

"Whence did Dante take the materials for his hell but from this our actual world? And yet he made a very proper hell of it. And when, on the other hand, he came to the task of describing heaven and its delights, he had an insurmountable difficulty before him, for our world affords no material at all for this."<sup>6)</sup>

"The chief source of the serious evils which affect man is man himself: *homo homini lupus*. Whoever keeps this last fact clearly in view beholds the world as a hell, which surpasses that of Dante in this respect that one man must be the devil of another."<sup>7)</sup>

"If life were in itself a blessing to be prized, and decidedly to be preferred to non-existence, the exit from it would not need to be guarded by such fearful sentinels as death and its terrors. But who would continue in life as it is if death were less terrible? And again, who could even endure the thought of death if life were a pleasure? But thus the former has still always this good, that it is the end of life, and we console ourselves with regard to the suffering of life with death, and with regard to death with the suffering of life."<sup>8)</sup>

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3) Arthur Schopenhauer, 1788—1860. It is not necessary to enter into the family history of Schopenhauer. It would lead us too far afield. Suffice it to say that the paternal grandmother was declared insane, his uncles were idiots or neurotics, his father was often deranged, and probably died in insane suicide. The philosopher was afflicted with the family trouble especially in his youth. The bearing of this condition on his philosophy is a problem often dealt with. Lombroso, the famous Italian psychologist, has catalogued Schopenhauer as a pathological genius. To infer from this that Schopenhauer's Pessimism was a mere matter of temperament, a *Stimmungspessimismus*, is utterly wrong.

4) The great work of Schopenhauer is *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, translated into English by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp: *The World as Will and Idea*. 3 volumes. All references in this paper are to this translation. Jean Paul has characterized this work as follows: "A book of philosophical genius, bold, many-sided, full of skill and depth,—but of a depth often hopeless and bottomless, akin to that melancholy lake in Norway in whose deep waters, beneath the steep rock-walls, one never sees the sun, but only the stars reflected; and no bird and no wave ever flies over its surface."

5) Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*. III, p. 395.

6) *Op. cit.* I, p. 416.

7) *Op. cit.* III, p. 388 f.

8) *Op. cit.* III, p. 389.

He tells of

"the Thracians, mentioned by Herodotus, who welcomed a new-born child with lamentations, and recounting all the evils which now lie before it; and, on the other hand, burying the dead with mirth and jesting, because they are no longer exposed to so many and great sufferings." 9)

He recounts the story of the Mexicans, welcoming the new-born babe with the words: "My child, thou art born to endure; therefore endure, suffer, and keep silence." He reminds us that Swift early kept his birthday as a day of mourning, reading the laments of Job.<sup>10)</sup> His favorite authors are these "black friars," these "black-birds," in whom he finds a true insight into life.

But why this Pessimism? Why is "*le jeu ne vaut la chandelle*"? <sup>11)</sup> The reason for this is the control of the world of nature and of man by a relentless, unintelligent, capricious Will.<sup>12)</sup> The world and human life are not fundamentally rational nor controlled by Intelligence as Hegel saw them, but they are at bottom an inexplicable caprice. We want, we long, we desire, we strive, we yearn, we love, we hate, we act, we feel, we move. Behind all of this there is no Reason, no Intelligence, but merely a capricious Will. This Will has no object but to live. We cannot find rest in these things; they do not bring us satisfaction, yet we cannot cease from them, because this is the inmost nature of us all. The world and human life are held as in a vise by this Will, uncontrolled by Reason. That is the cause of its evil.

Is there nowhere a way of escape? Does no path lead out of this jungle and gloom? Is there no surcease of sorrow for this life or for the next (if, indeed, there be such a thing)? Yes, there is a way of salvation. So gloomy a Pessimist might well be considered as a preacher of suicide. Not so. Suicide is the affirmation, not the suppression, of the will to live. "The suicide goes to work the wrong way. Instead of denying the will, he gives up living just because he cannot give up willing." <sup>13)</sup>

The road to deliverance is first through Art. He includes all arts: music, literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, etc. Now

9) *Op. cit.* III, p. 398.

10) *Op. cit.* III, p. 399.

11) "The game not worth the candle." *Op. cit.* III, p. 116.

12) There is evident confusion of ideas in Schopenhauer as to the exact meaning and content of the word "Will." That it is an Absolute, a *Ding an sich*, objective and almost personified, seems clear. But the lines are not drawn between *Wille* and *Trieb*. Will always knows its goal and seeks to reach it. Impulse or instinct (*Trieb*) does not necessarily.

13) A. K. Rogers, *Student's History of Philosophy*, p. 477.

this does not mean that Schopenhauer has suddenly turned to be an Epicurean, who would have us be a bit higher than Dante's accomplished glutton Ciaccio in the mud of Inferno. He does not study and advise the cultivation of the fine arts for the pleasure and joy they will give, but rather for the forgetfulness of life which they foster. The ultimate types, the Platonic Ideas of things, are all best expressed in the arts. These we should contemplate, and in this contemplation break free from the service of the will, lose ourselves in the object, and thus become the pure, will-less, painless, timeless subjects of knowledge. Music in its universality and many-sidedness shows this best. In the words of Prof. Josiah Royce:—

"Music shows us just what the will is,—eternally moving, striving, changing, flying, struggling, wandering, returning to itself, and then beginning afresh,—all with no deeper purpose than just life in all its endlessness, motion, onward-flying, conflict, fulness of power, even though that shall mean fulness of sorrow and anguish. Music never rests, never is content; repeats its conflicts and wanderings over and over; leads them up, indeed, to mighty climaxes, but is great and strong never by virtue of abstract ideas, but only by the might of the will which it embodies. Listen to these cries and strivings, to this infinite wealth of flowing passion, to this infinite restlessness, and then reflect,—that art thou; just that unreposing vigor, longing, majesty, and—caprice." 14)

What is true of music, is true of all the arts. In them we have a perfect picture of life, and in their contemplation we drink for a time of the pure waters of Lethe.<sup>15)</sup>

"So near us lies a sphere in which we escape from all our misery; but who has the strength to continue long in it?" 16) That is the great fault to be found with Art as the catholicon of all ills incident to humanity. Man thus cured will not stay cured. The evil is driven under cover for a time, only to break forth again with increased violence. The good "doctor" devises new remedies. If Art is no panacea, perhaps Ethics are. Ethics, for him, do not find their sanction in the commands of Deity, nor in the natural rights of man, nor in convention. Ethics, for Schopenhauer, rest upon, and derive from, the oneness of the world in its inmost life.

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14) Jos. Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*, p. 256.

15) See also such chapters in Vol. III of Schopenhauer's *opus magnum* as "Isolated Remarks on Natural Beauty"; "On the Inner Nature of Art"; "On the Esthetics of Architecture"; "Isolated Remarks on the Esthetics of the Plastic and Pictorial Arts"; "On the Esthetics of Poetry"; "On the Metaphysics of Music."

16) Schopenhauer, *op. cit.* I, 256.

"The inmost life of things is one, and that life art thou." Hindoo philosophy influenced him largely in these ideas. He writes:—

"In consequence of this egoism our fundamental error of all is this, that with reference to each other we are reciprocally not I. On the other hand, to be just, noble, and benevolent is nothing else than to translate my metaphysics into actions. To say that time and space are mere forms of our knowledge, not conditions of things in themselves, is the same as to say that the doctrine of metempsychosis, 'Thou shalt one day be born as him whom thou injurest, and in thy turn shalt suffer like injury,' is identical with the formula of the Brahmans, which has frequently been mentioned, *Tat twam asi*, This thou art. All true virtue proceeds from the immediate and intuitive knowledge of the metaphysical identity of all beings, which I have frequently shown." 17)

The fundamental thing, then, in Ethics is *sympathy*, and this in the original sense of the word.<sup>18)</sup> Once we have embedded that metaphysics into our minds, that all life is one, that we are part of others and their life part of ours, then shall we carefully guard ourselves against all wrongs against them, because we would be harming only ourselves; then, too, would we do all in our power to alleviate suffering wherever found, to establish justice, to do unto others as we would have others do unto us. This system of Ethics, in which the sense of unity of life predominates and rules, consistently followed, will bring forgetfulness of life, the suppression of the will to live. The positive thing in life is always pain; happiness is a negative thing: the absence of pain. The unit losing itself in the whole will find this negative happiness.

Having graduated, as it were, from the schools of Art and Ethics, the disciple enters upon the highest tasks for the achievement of his salvation. Here the way is through Self-renunciation. Schopenhauer came by these ideas through a study of Buddhism, which was a fad in his day. If life was fundamentally and essentially evil, then must there be found some way in life to escape from life. If willing to live was the great evil, then the suppression of this will to live was the great deliverance. Nowhere could he find a better teacher for this way of salvation than in the philosophy of Buddhism. Here Schopenhauer has learned the doctrine of self-renunciation:—

"If we now consider the will to live as a whole and objectively, we have, in accordance with what has been said, to think of it as involved in an illusion; to escape from which, thus to deny its whole existing endeavors,

17) *Op. cit.* III, 417.

18) *Sym-pascho*, to feel together with; not in the first sense, to suffer together with.

is what all religions denote by self-renunciation, *abnegatio sui ipsius*; for the true self is the will to live." 19)

We must crush out all our desires, wishes, impulses. We must live a life of ascetic starvation. We must lead a monastic life without the love of woman, without the joys of the senses, without anything that would affirm the will to live. We must mortify the deeds of the body. And what remains? A state of Passivity, of Negativity, of Quietism. It is the Buddhist Nirvana<sup>20)</sup> of which he speaks so often. He writes:—

"The Buddhists . . . only indicate the matter negatively, by Nirvana, which is the negation of this world, or of Sansara. If Nirvana is defined as nothing, this only means that the Sansara [world of sensation] contains no single element which could assist the definition or construction of Nirvana." 21)

19) *Op. cit.* III, 423.

20) Just what is Nirvana? The answer is best taken from Buddhism. Buddhists are divided on the question. Opinions differ as to whether it is a conscious or unconscious state, whether it is attainable in this life or not. The Buddhist Catechism by Subhadra Bhikshu makes the distinction between the Nirvana and the Parinirvana. The first is attained in this life, the second upon the death of one who has attained Nirvana. The Catechism describes Nirvana as follows: "Nirvana is a state of mind and heart in which all desire for life or annihilation, all egoistic craving has become extinct, and with it every passion, every grasping desire, every fear, all ill will, and every sorrow. It is a state of perfect inward peace, accompanied by the imperturbable certainty of having attained deliverance, a state words cannot describe, and which the imagination of the worldling tries in vain to picture to himself. Only one who has himself experienced it knows what Nirvana is." Colonel Olcott of the Theosophical Society, who has worked for long years in Ceylon, gives the following definition in his *Catechism*: "Nirvana is a condition of total cessation of changes; of perfect rest; of the absence of desire and illusion and sorrow; of the total obliteration of everything that goes to make up the physical man." Buddha himself has given but a vague description of it by calling it "the extinction of illusion." See J. B. Pratt, *India and Its Faiths*, pp. 362 f.; 377 ff.; W. A. P. Martin, *The Lore of Cathay*, p. 185 f.; G. H. Rittner, *Impressions of Japan*, p. 185 f. — Finally, in Sir Edwin Arnold's long poem dealing with the life and teachings of Gautama (*The Light of Asia*) we have the following: —

Seeking nothing, he gains all;  
Foregoing self, the Universe grows "I";  
If any teach *Nirvana* is to cease,  
Say unto such they lie.

If any teach *Nirvana* is to live,  
Say unto such they err; not knowing this,  
Nor what light shines beyond their broken lamps,  
Nor lifeless, timeless bliss.

21) *Op. cit.* III, 427.

Further this description of Nirvana:—

"Then nothing can trouble a man more, nothing can move him, for he has cut all the thousand cords of will, which hold us bound to the world, and as desire, fear, envy, anger, drag us hither and thither in constant pain. He now looks back smiling and at rest on the delusions of this world, which once were able to move and agonize his spirit also, but which now stand before him as utterly indifferent to him as the chessmen when the game is ended, or as in the morning the cast-off masquerading dress, which worried and disquieted us in the night in carnival. Life and its forms now pass before him as a fleeting illusion, as a light morning dream before half-waking eyes, the real world already shining through it, so that it can no longer deceive; and like this morning dream, they finally vanish altogether without any violent transition." 22)

Finally also this:—

"We do freely acknowledge that what remains after the entire abolition of the will is for all those who are still full of will certainly nothing; but conversely, to those in whom the will has turned and has denied itself, this our world which is so real with all its suns and milky ways, is—nothing." 23)

Here, then, is the perfect way of salvation for the saint that will walk it. "The whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, the pangs of despised love," the terrors of Nature,—all these things are before him as a shadow, dimly, indefinitely, growing ever fainter. In Art he calmly contemplates the caprice of will as in a mirror. Ethics teaches him that life is one in its inmost being, and he has therefore sympathy with all his kind. And in the fulness of time he will advance so far in "holiness" that he will enter into the mystic realms of Nirvana.

What shall we say about Schopenhauer and Christianity? To some, reading casually, his sermons on the evil of the world, his exhortations to sympathy and brotherly love, his pictures of the perfect saint living in the abnegation of self and self-will, might easily appear as a species under the general head of the genus Christianity. Schopenhauer himself lends reason to this thought. He often speaks of the Bible and Christianity, especially of the New Testament. He quotes many teachers of Christianity, especially those with a mystical tinge. Thus we find him citing Scotus Erigena, Jacob Boehme, Angelus Silesius, Meister Eckhard, Francis of Assisi, Tauler, Bunyan, Pascal, Chateaubriand, not to mention the great leaders of the Church, such as Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Augustine, Luther, etc. What, then, is Christian in Schopenhauer's philosophy? He agrees with Christianity in this,

22) *Op. cit.* I, 504.

23) *Op. cit.* I, 532.

that the world is evil. He is not blindfolded; nor does he wear any iris-hued glasses to color his vision. He sees all evils realistically as they are: the evils of nature, the corruption of man and his works and institutions. He cites Luther's powerful language in his Commentary on Galatians:—

"Sumus autem nos omnes corporibus et rebus subjecti diabolo et hospites sumus in mundo, cujus ipse princeps et deus est. Ideo panis, quem edimus, potus, quem bibimus, vestes, quibus utimur, imo aer et totum, quo vivimus in carne, sub ipsius imperio est." 24)

Yet Schopenhauer's evil is different from that of Christianity's. For the philosopher it is the rule of capricious will; for the Christian it is the total corruption of an erstwhile state of perfect holiness. Schopenhauer expresses this himself:—

"The inmost kernel and spirit of Christianity is identical with that of Brahmanism and Buddhism; they all teach a great guilt of the human race through its existence itself, only that Christianity does not proceed directly and frankly like these more ancient religions; thus does it not make guilt simply the result of existence itself, but makes it arise through the act of the first pair." 25)

What, then, as to his Ethics and his doctrine of Self-renunciation? Both of these have been mistaken for Christian features or at least as having a parallel in the Christian system. But this can only be done by an analogy of modern preachers, who call their teaching Christianity, although they have not the least connection with Christianity, neither on its historical nor on its doctrinal nor on its ethical side. Christian Ethics are orientated in God; Schopenhauer's Ethics, in man. Christian self-renunciation is to the glory of God; Schopenhauer's, to the glory of man and Nothingness. Schopenhauer's Nirvana is not the Christian heaven.<sup>26)</sup>

Deep truths there are in this philosopher's Pessimism. He is not affected by the sickly sentimentalism of the eighteenth century, prattling about the goodness of the world, of human nature, and of human life. Every philosophy that is empirical and realistic, that can be squared up against the facts of life, is deeply pessimistic. And that must be the end of it so long as it rejects the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Schopenhauer has left his Pilgrim in the Slough of Despond.

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24) *Op. cit.* III, 392.

25) *Op. cit.* III, 421.

26) Prof. Pratt, in *India and Its Faiths*, p. 378, tells of a Buddhist boy comparing the Christian heaven and the Buddhist Nirvana and exclaiming: "Christianity is certainly very much more comforting than Buddhism, and if I only could believe it true, I would be glad to accept it. But the question is, *Is it true?*"