

## ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER'S MIRROR: THE WILL, THE SUFFERING, THE COMPASSION AS PHILOSOPHICAL CHALLENGES

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**ABSTRACT.** *Arthur Schopenhauer's Mirror: the Will, the Suffering, the Compassion as Philosophical Challenges.* In philosophy, the celebration of Arthur Schopenhauer has already ended. Only the last year was anniversary (of his birth and of the publication of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*), but the importance of this non-conformist creator is never superfluous to highlight.

In this article, there is, certainly, a very limited/selective focus on the thinking of Schopenhauer, and no biographical approach: the goal is only to stress two aspects of his philosophy in their logic. Schopenhauer was an enthusiastic Kantian: first of all, by taking over his maestro's seminal paradigm, the *constructivism* (that does not pertain only to the 'theory of knowledge', but marks the entire existence analysed at different philosophical levels). Secondly, by the *ethical* focus and accent, continuing Kant's exceptional emphasis of the ultimate reason of the tableau of the world, the *human reason* and its power to treat *the others in moral manner*. And certainly, Schopenhauer was not an epigone, but a creator, using and at the same time giving *other* content to the Kantian form of ethical revolution.

Schopenhauer had, obviously, contradictory ideas – as that between his *constructivism* and his metaphysical treatment of the *will*, i. e. as the only principle explaining the world – and also with disputable significance, including for the actual life and thinking. But he had a “bad publicity” from the dominant philosophy – namely, some of his ideas (as that of the moral of *compassion*) were, and still are, absolutely ignored, while other ones were simplified or transformed in the “conception of Schopenhauer”, reducing this one to some ideas out of context – and even nowadays this tradition is dominant. And it's pity, because Schopenhauer's philosophy was and represented a dramatic moment in the history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century thinking and culture: as it is a strange mirror for the present much graver situation.

In order to critique the present it's not necessary to do it from Schopenhauer's perspective. However, just his contradictory ideas and pathetic accent on compassion

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show better than ever that neither philosophy – as theoretical position – nor the urging for moral activism are more than *vox clamantis in deserto*: if the historical facts, which include this urging and the spring of thinking but are not confined to them, are missing.

**Keywords:** Schopenhauer, Kant, German idealism, constructivism, will, living force, suffering, compassion, philosophical reception, the present.

**RÉSUMÉ . Le miroir d'Arthur Schopenhauer : la volonté, la souffrance, la compassion comme défis philosophiques.** En philosophie, la célébration d'Arthur Schopenhauer est déjà terminée. L'année dernière seulement était l'anniversaire (de sa naissance et de la publication du premier volume de *Le monde comme volonté et comme représentation*), mais l'importance de ce créateur non-conformiste n'est jamais superflue à souligner.

Dans cet article, il y a certainement une focalisation très limitée / sélective sur la pensée de Schopenhauer, et aucune approche biographique: le but est seulement de souligner deux aspects de sa philosophie dans leur logique. Schopenhauer était un Kantien enthousiaste: d'abord, en reprenant le paradigme fondateur de son maestro, le constructivisme (qui ne s'applique pas à la «théorie de la connaissance», mais marque toute l'existence analysée à différents niveaux philosophiques). Deuxièmement, par son accent éthique, en continuant l'accent de Kant sur la raison ultime du tableau du monde, la *raison* humaine et son pouvoir de traiter les autres de manière *morale*. Schopenhauer n'était certes pas un épigone, mais un créateur, utilisant et donnant en même temps un autre contenu à la forme de révolution éthique kantienne.

Schopenhauer avait évidemment des idées contradictoires - comme celle entre son constructivisme et son traitement métaphysique de la volonté, i. e. en tant que seul principe expliquant le monde - et aussi avec une signification discutable, y compris pour la vie réelle et la pensée. Mais il avait une "mauvaise publicité" de la part de la philosophie dominante - à savoir, certaines de ses idées (comme celle de la morale de la compassion) étaient et sont toujours absolument ignorées, tandis que d'autres ont été simplifiées ou transformées dans la "conception de Schopenhauer", réduisant celle-ci à quelques idées hors contexte - et même de nos jours cette tradition est dominante. Et c'est dommage, car la philosophie de Schopenhauer a été et a représenté un moment dramatique dans l'histoire de la pensée et de la culture du XIXe siècle: comme c'est un miroir étrange pour la situation actuelle beaucoup plus grave.

Pour critiquer le présent, il n'est pas nécessaire de le faire du point de vue de Schopenhauer. Cependant justement ses idées contradictoires et son accent pathétique sur la compassion montrent mieux que jamais que ni la philosophie - en tant que position théorique - ni l'appel à un activisme moral ne sont plus que des *vox clamantis in deserto* : si les faits historiques, qui incluent ce besoin pressant et le ressort de la pensée mais ne s'y limitent pas, manquent.

**Mots clés :** Schopenhauer, Kant, l'idéalisme allemand, constructivisme, volonté, force vitale, souffrance, compassion, réception philosophique, le présent.

## 1. Schopenhauer's constructivism as a basis of his ontology

Schopenhauer was a *constructivist*. Let see – for our *Anschauung* of the world – what did this epistemological paradigm signify for our philosopher: and for us.

The world *is* as it *is understood* by us, as it appears to us: man/his capacity to grasping (reflecting, restoring) is the lens through which the world exists *for him*, namely has *meanings*. (Even the untouchable principles of thinking – as the principle of contradiction and the one of sufficient reason – are constructions, has Schopenhauer observed ironically).

The world is *objective*, but we know it only as experienced *phenomena* – the sense organs transmit information from this objective world to the brain where the representations do appear: this is the mechanism of experience. But the representations rely too on the *feelings* related to the *inner* experiences of our whole being, including the *body*, and consequently, the representations are not only *ideas*, rationally unifying constructions, showing themselves as unities of *different/discrete* parts, so which may be decomposed in these parts, but also global or unitary insights/*intuitions* resulted from the felt experiences/ from the feeling of experiences. (We remember that Kant has used this origin – intuitions/sensibility – and the two “storey” building of the human reason: but he spoke about *sensible intuitions* only as perceptions of the totality of objects interesting for man, (and certainly, about the pure intuitions/ i.e. only *in mente*, without any sensible origin, of space and time), but not yet being *knowledge*, since this one means unity of these sensible intuitions *and* concepts/ means intellectual processing). But for Schopenhauer, the intuitions were knowledge too.

It's not important here to give justice to one or the other: on the one hand, their discussion was historical in the sense that it reflected the level of philosophy, obviously, but rather of science; on the other hand, they insisted in fact on *different* aspects, even though intertwined: Kant – as a rationalist – emphasised the model of *articulated knowledge* which is always (in a multiple manner) *mediated* and, ultimately, the result of *judicative* forms relating (comparing, manipulating) the representations to different concepts/ideas of different levels of understanding; Schopenhauer – as an empiricist for whom only the experience of phenomena may be known (and as a phenomenologist too, like Hegel hated by him so much) – showed the *direct* images/representations, in fact the perceptions able to unite the disparate sensations and to generate a coherent image of an object that may persist and function as a cognisance; this direct representation is common to man and at least the mammals, but certainly it must be further decomposed and recomposed,

processed in judicative forms in order to be an articulated human knowledge; Schopenhauer showed a certain community/*continuity* mammals-man, but Kant kept attention on the human *discontinuity*; Schopenhauer made the mistake to equate the pre-judicative with the judicative forms, but at the same time was important by revealing the role of the former.

But Schopenhauer's focus on the power of intuitions is related to his intention to search for (and find) something which was not of main interest for Kant (who worked on the forms/transcendental conditions of knowledge, thus, these (pure) forms being the conditions of even the empirical intuitions and concepts): actually, *what is at the basis of any sort of representations – and revealed especially in/by intuitions (sudden perceptions of the whole) – is that which explain the world*, said Schopenhauer. Constructivism does not lead to the impossibility to understanding the world as it is. The mediation of ideas – between the world and our knowledge – is certainly a crucial explanation, but only half of it. The other half is the *inner force* of a) the *non-living*, b) the *living being*, and more precisely, of the *human* to feel the existence – to feel itself/himself, and inherently, to feel *in* the world, in relations with the world –; briefly, the *inner force is that which is pushing to existence as such*: and thus, just this inner force – called by Schopenhauer the *will* – has created, as necessary *aid* to resist, the ability to *represent* all those relations of man/consciousness with the world and with himself/itself.

## 2. The will (I): the intellectual origin of the living force

We have to retain some necessary elements emphasised by a complex archaeology of the Schopenhauer's concept of *will*.

First, this concept is the offspring of the many philosophical theories – generating the psychological research – related to understanding, decision, choice, ends, consciousness, motivation, emotion. But here is important that, by inquiring the peculiarity of the human will towards the intentions of animals – thus the *discontinuity* that puts into evidence the *continuity* too – the thinkers have focused on a specific feature of the common volitional tendency of living beings. This was the *living force*.

As we know, the concepts were constructed and debated firstly in philosophy. But with the advent of modernity, the scientific research began its glorious march and, *inter alia*, it has focused on the explanation of life. Thus, the *epistemological* problem – causal explanation versus teleological explanation – and the *ontological* one, the constitution itself of living beings and life, have intertwined, as habitually.

For example, with the experiments and clinical observations of the encyclopaedist physicians Albrecht von Haller (1708–1777), Jean-Jacques Ménéret de Chambaud (1733–1815), and Théophile de Bordeu (1722–1776) (Boury 2008), two theories were offered to the professionals: that of “*mechanism*”/material causal relations between stimuli and organs, and that of *organism* as both the result of the life of its parts and the unitary system explaining the functions and lives of the parts. (We do not ignore that the second theory was a re-actualisation of Aristotle’s organicism). For the modern physicians and thinkers, it was no longer possible to explain life – and the existence in general – outside the material relations: the framework given by Kepler, Galileo and Newton has generated the quest for the matching of the behaviour of living organs with the physical laws, grasped through mathematical measurements and calculus. But at the same time, the coherent functions of organs within the organism – so, the *functional* approach was added to the *structural* one (Buess 1970) – the problem of the force realising the coherence of functions and the integrity of the organism, were solved by the “*living force*”.

Therefore, the difference between the inorganic – respecting the laws of physics – and the organic, as well as the not at all fully explicable coherence of the organism assuring life, have led to a concept necessary to the scientific explanation but not substantiated scientifically. Rather the *living force* was the name of a yet missing scientific explanation: but nevertheless, it was very useful and it was not an illusion, because life itself was that which proved it.

Since this was the function of the living force, it appeared as a *pre-formative* force, thus *teleological*, where the *reason to be* explains the *form* of the living being. The scientists of the Enlightenment did no longer oppose the teleological to the causal, materialist explanations: they simply have *deduced* (as necessary) the teleological from the causal and united them. Their image was thus that of a *materialist vitalism*: as neither the force of gravitation, *nor the vital force existed for them outside the material structure and relations* (Lenoir 1982, p. 154), and thus, once more, the problem was not for them teleology as an end but causality, the causal explanation all the way. But this explanation could not yet be given. For the time being, *teleology* – that really suggested the complexity of causal chains, the fact that there is not only one causal chain and that in the causal complexity one must consider also the functions and forms – had a *heuristic* power. This is the reason of Kant’s emphasis that the biological explanation supposes both teleology and mechanism/causal determinations.

Because Kant was mentioned, it is worth to note that the idea of pre-formation – originated in theology and the idealistic paradigms, including those of the *in statu nascendi* science – was ridiculed by him in the critical period. As in the

idealistic ontology the objects were given *in toto* by a divine horologer, as in the naïve philosophy – be it idealist or materialist – the objects are given, instead of being discovered as constructions of mind in relation with the real world, has Kant thought. For example, Leibniz's pre-stabilized harmony was called "pre-determined" "by a third cause" (Kant 1998, p. 374), instead of being a concept constructed in accordance with the real world.

To the physicians and biologists, the biological organisation of the organism seemed to precede the physical-material causes, *as if* this primary reason to be would have pre-formed their existence in the given appearance.

Anyway, contemporary with the above-mentioned scientists' debate was philosophy. Leibniz spoke about the vital force, and before him, Spinoza, because they have considered that this concept "taken over" from science/having the endorsement of science does serve also as a general metaphysical principle.

But, and this is the second, more applied origin/frame of Schopenhauer's principle, the above discussion about the living force which makes the difference between the inorganic and the organic, had a broader meaning. On the one hand, this meaning was related to the discussion of physicists and mathematicians – so, scientists – about the movement of beings/the *conservation of movement in the world*, and not only of the living beings. The confusion and then, separation of *work*, *momentum* and *energy* – but using the same word, *force* – was a pure problem of physics (Terrall 2004) (of the inorganic material bodies), and even though it has appeared to some ones as mere a dispute on words<sup>2</sup>, in fact it gave rise to the theory of (philosophically expressed) *conatus*.

Therefore, we may remember Aristotle's *impetus* – the continued action of a force, explaining the continuation of a motion – taken over by different medieval thinkers, and then by Galileo Galilei; also, we do not forget the concept of *force* in Descartes, Newton and Leibniz, explaining motion of an inorganic body both quantitatively and qualitatively; it is important to notice that Leibniz spoke firstly about a *motive force* – that explained the conservation of force in nature – equated, from 1695, with *vis viva*. But this one was not related to the living beings, but to the *inner power* of material things to last and keep their potency (Ilitis 1971): as first Spinoza said, "Everything, in so far as it is in itself, endeavours to persist in its own being" (Spinoza, III, VI). Leibniz (influenced by Spinoza) wrote: "active force includes a sort of act or *εντελέχειον*, which is midway between the faculty of acting and the action itself and involves an effort, and thus of itself passes into operation; not does it need aid other than the removal of impediments", this

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<sup>2</sup> Ibidem: T. Besterman (ed.), *Les lettres de la Marquise de Châtelet*, Genève, 1958: Mme de Châtelet à Maupertuis, février 1738, « je crois, comme vous, que ce n'est qu'une dispute de mots ».

force being “energy or virtue, called by the Germans *kraft*, and by the French *la force*” (Leibniz 1694/1890, pp. 69-70). See also *The Monadology*, where he insisted: “11. The natural changes of the monads arise from an internal principle” and “15. The action of the internal principle which causes the change or the passage from... (“a transient state” to another, a transient state of reaction/*conatus*) (Leibniz 1714/1890, pp. 219-220).

Only later, *conatus* has become the principle of the living beings – *l'élan vital*, as Bergson called it.

Finally, though this conative force – to persist – was specific to every material body, another *differentia specifica* had its own history, though related to the problem of *conatus*: that of the *will* – of God – as primary principle towards the principle of God's *reason* (Iltis 1973). Leibniz, an intellectualist, considered that even though the power and model of God's endeavour would be the best of all possible worlds, in reality this model does not exist, and what is real (so contradictory as it would be) is only according to the principle of *sufficient reason*. And, more, the world is formed by *monads*, i.e. every being/object has its own relative autonomy: therefore, on the one hand, in Leibniz the world was left on its own – with the existing quantity of reason and unreasonableness – and on the other hand, the monads, although reflecting God's reason, had a mere unforeseeable behaviour.

There were also voluntarist thinkers – from the tradition of Augustine of Hippo – but Schopenhauer had a deeper appreciation of Leibniz than of the early Christian theologian and philosopher.

Consequently, for Schopenhauer, everything in the world had its own *will*, since everything had its own (*material*) *body*. The body was the objectification of the will, while this one – as his name for the old *conatus* – was the *subjectivity of the body*.

### **3. Kant's critique of metaphysics through the difference between phenomena, thing-in-itself and *noumenon* and Schopenhauer's ontology**

The *epistemological* paradigm of constructivism was thus related by Schopenhauer to *ontology*. As we know, Kant has criticised ontology as being *metaphysics* deducing the world from some abstract principles and, ultimately, reducing it to these abstract principles which in fact do not bring knowledge in the absence of concrete and experienced cognisance. When – obviously, in his critical period – he erected his epistemology (and ethics), he had no time/the will to review the ontological problem from a critical standpoint: or, more correctly, he

has insisted on the constructed feature of ontological descriptions (Banham 2011). It was Schopenhauer who (only) introduced this new type of ontological reflection: he adopted the critical position, did away with speculations about existence, subsistence and Being, and has summarised both the empirical facts and the information given by the natural sciences: the inner force of things lays at *the basis* of every manifestation in the world.

Let see once again the epistemological frame and counterpart of ontology. The world *is* for the living being/for man as it appears to it/him: through the sudden global insights or through a process of development of the rational abilities. We see the world as a painting we have painted and we paint. Once more, this does not mean that there is no objective world, but only that *our* world is the world reproduced in/by our mind, and only that our *understanding* is the result of the mental processes in the frame of the *forms* of cognition, obviously processing the data of the world received through the sense organs. The *understanding* of the world cannot be reduced to “ultimate” physical and chemical reactions, has Schopenhauer sneered, *as it cannot be reduced to abstract ideas*. The world is for us as it is represented by us.

Kant said that *what cannot be experienced/known as unity of sensible intuitions (arising from reality, via the sense organs) and concepts is a thing-in-itself*; one may imagine and construct *abstract* things – rationally coherent or absurd – but these things are only constructions of mind (and to take these constructions as objective things is only an inherent illusion of the reason); so unavoidable and even necessary in the process of human knowledge these abstract things are, they cannot be experienced (as unity of sensible intuitions *and* concepts/in the necessary (*a priori*) forms of cognition (of space and time)): they are only our intellectual *means* to know the world, but not applying directly to the objects, but only to/inwards the cognitive conditions of experience. Without the sensible conditions “transmitting” the objects in a way or another, there is no knowledge of these objects. (Even the mathematical objects are ultimately expressed *in mente* through some sensible intuitions – of figures, signs, symbols). The *thing-in-itself* is thus the mysterious Unknown/The Great Anonymous – as later on the Romanian Lucian Blaga said –, so the objective something that is not knowable/always remains beyond the known objects, but the reference to the *thing-in-itself* emphasises its role as *limit/pole/beacon*, or *criterion* in the process of knowing. In other words, Kant used both the *thing-in-itself* and the *noumenon*, as very close but different: the first is reality (because the abstract things belong to our reality (Rauer et al. 2018), and reality is always richer than the knowledge about it, while the *noumenon* is reality as *object of the human knowledge, but known only through its*



*sensible manifestations/phenomena*; a kind of never attained essence. The *a priori* categories of understanding are intended to understand the real world, but they apply to (real) *phenomena*. The reason can transcend the experience of phenomena, relating, classifying and understanding them: but even this understanding is never just the *noumenon*, it is only its approximation. For this reason, for Kant, the *thing-in-itself* and the *noumenon* were *epistemological* tools: certainly, having meanings for the image about the world too, but essentially epistemological tools.

In his turn, Schopenhauer – who praised Kant's distinction between *appearance* and *thing-in-itself* as the core of the constructivist paradigm, at the same time criticising him because the difference between the *thing-in-itself* and *noumenon* was not clear enough – made the clear distinction between the *thing-in-itself* as the objective reality and the *noumenon* as thought thing. Actually, Schopenhauer said, the true distinction is only between the *representation* and the *thing-in-itself*.

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#### **4. The will in Schopenhauer (II): the will to live of man in the framework of the intellectual history of *conatus***

But, as mentioned above, Schopenhauer went farther: he tried to give *content* to Kant's negative definition of the *thing-in-itself*. *The will to live* as such as the *inner force of the existence* is not experienced (it is not a phenomenon, but a *noumenon*), thus it is only represented – we would say today –, created by and manifesting only through blind physical and chemical inertia or coherence recurring (Rauer et al. 2018), or as mechanical reactions of the living force as such – (and, in man, also imagined, discussed, because only man becomes aware of his will). This inner force is thus the *thing-in-itself*, the unknown force (and never fully knowable, as it was mentioned above, is also a *noumenon*, an approximated essence arrived at by thinkers), *immanent* to the world/inwards it (so not transcendent), the reason to be of the world as such and, thus, the ultimate reason to be of both the process of knowing – and, concretely, of the ideas – and of the world as such, of ontology. At the same time, the inner force in living beings and man is the *unconscious*.

Therefore, the world is objective, it is outside us. But all its colours and meanings depend on us<sup>3</sup>.

Then, the most important is to see what *man (Dasein, as called Schopenhauer him)* is: behind all his feelings, discourses, experiences, manifestations. Well, the

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<sup>3</sup> This is why the majority of words in the natural languages – including the word *meaning* – are fuzzy; see Zadeh 1971.

peculiarity of man is just his *will* – ultimately, *his will to live* – and his *knowledge/ideas* (the latter is the “world 3”, as later on Popper said). The dual character of man was grasped from the most ancient times: man as both matter/flesh and spirit. And first, philosophy, later on the sciences, too, have tried to understand these two features *separately*; only more lately, after surpassing – but as an *Aufhebung*, an annulling and maintaining, a real ado, isn’t it? – the dramatic analysis of different types and levels of contradictions in and between man’s body and spirit, philosophy has arrived – or better, came nearer – to a coherent and unitary view about man. We obviously heard that the ancient popular cultures comprised this view about man as *unitary* being, but there is a big difference between them and the *modern/present* theory about man: this latter one is *demonstrated*, put to the test/falsified in many and different verifiable manners.

The *will to live* is the most powerful, is unconscious and, as a *thing-in-itself* of the existence, “remains” beyond the individual transience in the phenomenon of life. But this will to live is pertaining not only to humans, but to every animate being, and even to the inanimate matter. It is the tendency to exist/persist, called from old as *conatus*. Without correlating his theory to the tradition of *conatus* (post-Platonists, Spinoza, Leibniz), and thus without calling the phenomenon *conatus*, but *will*, Schopenhauer was a glorious representative of this neglected but great theory, a chain link in the series continued at least with Nietzsche and Bergson (or a chain link in *Lebensphilosophie* – that does not contains Nietzsche and Bergson –) and, though this philosophical school seemed to be a reaction against the positivist reductionism, the presumptions of *conatus* and the vital forces were/are rather inquired by the modern chemistry, biochemistry, molecular biology and neurophysiology. The mysterious force of life/even of the existence is used from this time forward only as a *metaphor*. But in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to *question this force* – not only in science, certainly decomposing with the order and discipline of science the components of the living beings – but in philosophy too, *was necessary and beneficial*. Actually, philosophy was (and is, of course) interested to understand not only the reasons of the composition of man but also his reason to be and, especially, to be in the ways he is. As a *noumenon*, the will manifests through “Platonic forms or Platonic ideas”, cognising them only through particular (real and created in art, for example) embodiments.

As a disciple of Kant, Schopenhauer probably knew his teacher’s first published paper, *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces* (1747/1749), where the young Kant has assumed Leibniz’s viewpoint about an inner force of bodies even if these ones are at rest and not in motion (opposed to Descartes’ “Newtonian” mechanism) (Banham 2006). And later, Kant too has used the concept of living force,

but in passing/even rather as a metaphor, without focusing on it. Thus, Schopenhauer has taken over this idea that was not new but that had to be suited to the modern sciences and to a “non-metaphysical” ontology.

## 5. Historical attitudes towards Schopenhauer

Philosophy, as every system (of thinking), has its relative autonomy towards the conditions within which it arises. So was the situation of Schopenhauer's philosophy and also its posthumous fashion, in the 70s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the one hand, Schopenhauer has continued Kant – by criticising his contemporary post-Kantians from the standpoint of their inconsistency towards Kant's constructivism (because of their metaphysical stance) – and thus his philosophy was only a response to the play of this type of philosophical solutions. On the other hand, Schopenhauer became in fashion rather in the 70s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and this fact is difficult to explain without taking into account the *Zeitgeist* of the period. Before 1848, the *optimism* of Hegel (who certainly was a greater philosopher, and whom Schopenhauer held in derision) was – with the whole systematising of contradictions, dramas of negations, and of contradictory coexistence of phenomena being in different stages of affirmation and negation – in tone with both the scientific spirit of the first half of the century and the political worldviews (again, of both the revolutionary moods and the legalist “party of order”).

So, the problem is not so much why was Hegel considered as a landmark philosopher, but why were the Schopenhauer's *ideas not assumed by the official philosophy: because of their pessimism, but also because of their radical constructivism, and their vitalist, atheistic and ethicist non-conformism*. Consequently, after the inherent defeat of the 1848 revolutions, a *counter-revolutionary* politics became dominant in the whole Europe (Mayer 1971; 1981), where the bloody defeat of the Paris Commune was but the proof of the unavoidable rule of the open reactionaries leading their counter-revolutionary/“passive revolutions” of modernisation: now, though Hegel was not rejected<sup>4</sup>, the philosophical floor became occupied – though rather not officially but “underground” – by Schopenhauer; because: 1) the dominant philosophy continued to be the idealism<sup>5</sup> that did not accept a breaking in its body; and 2) his philosophy was a mixture of the demanded remedies by a youth inherently losing its illusions and willing to legitimate its own pessimism (including with the ancient Indian wisdom, cherished by Schopenhauer), and at

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<sup>4</sup> He could not be rejected, because he was the great thinker legitimating the real as rational.

<sup>5</sup> See Beiser 2016, p. 1: “the persistence of German idealist tradition long after Hegel's death”.

the same time to foster its illusions with the only pure – but at the same time the only officially accepted – ethical solution, the compassionate attitude.

Concretely, Schopenhauer did not assume – with all his deviation to metaphysics, i.e. to the metaphysical treatment of the will – the German idealism, but he harshly criticised it. And though he was contemporary – at least during his first works, including the first edition of *The world as will...* – with the German romanticism, being the student of Schleiermacher and being close to Goethe, Schopenhauer was not at all a Romantic, and he was not anti-modern – neither in a reactionary anti-modernity stance and nor in an emancipatory one – and his analysis of the genius constructed only a *model* and *pole* of humanity. From a structural standpoint, his ethical solution, the *compassion*, was weaker than the maximal solution of Kant, the *categorical imperative*. Only from a concrete viewpoint – developed later by Peter Kropotkin (*Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, 1902) – was the substantiation of compassion useful for the scientific theories demonstrating that the development of the humans was not based only on wild competition and struggle for the survival of the fittest.

#### **6. In the human, the blind force of the will becomes aware of its own activity: Schopenhauer's existentialism and atheism**

So, the whole existence emphasises the tendency to persist, but to play with words, to explain the world with/from some categories (as: “I am the one who I point out”, “existence”, “subsistence”, “ek-sistence”, “Being”) does say nothing.

Why and how? The internal *forces* of the world (firstly, of matter, of chemical and physical relationships, Schopenhauer was convinced of these, as Kant was and, generally, no philosopher could – in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century – ignore the material basis of the world), so, the internal *forces* of the world are more important than some metaphysical tautologies: and more dignified to be theorised. And in philosophy, the *striving to last*, irrespective of the forms manifested along this striving, or even as a tendency to keep the form as long as it's possible, are more important than the metaphysical tenet that the world would arise from the architecture of categories. Like Kant, Schopenhauer considered that the categories, concepts, principles of understanding are only *forms* of thought/*ideas* which must be related to the empirical world in order to give knowledge of this world. This despise of speculation not related to real facts (of the “speculative theology” of the “well-paid professional philosophy”, as he said in the preface of the second edition, in 1844, of his *magnum opus*) has been concretised in a *contradictory philosophy*, with both a metaphysical

flavour and concepts, and theories which not only start from and are based on those real facts, but which are open and fruitful for further research in philosophy and science.

Therefore, the above tendency is experienced by man: the fact that this tendency is real is the result of man's ability to grasping the existence *and* to mentally/at ideal level processing its multi-facets given in the human experience. This is because *in man the blind force of the will becomes conscious of its own activity*. Everything, for man, begins with the human experience, thus everything begins with the concrete existence given in experience. So, on the one hand, Schopenhauer was an existentialist *avant la lettre*. Man is able to grasping the essences – which, do not forget, are concepts, theories, human constructions – but, because of so many and different experiences, the essences, and the whole knowledge, are relative. (But this doesn't mean that from this a moral relativity arises, or that there are no human criteria to discern the evil from the good: above and beyond all the different appreciations of the good and the evil, *these criteria exist*. But let's not hurry).

Man's concrete existence is that which is important in order to understand how one does arrive to the essences and what the essence of man is. The legitimacy of essences (of that which man sustains) is created by man according to his all encompassing experience. No extra-mundane being – that in fact does not exist – does support this legitimacy. *It is only man's responsibility to conceive of and declare some or other essences*.

Schopenhauer was described in a negative tone because of his radical *atheism*. This "negative advertisement" was just opposite to that of and for the other, traditional post-Kantian idealists.

(We have to stop a moment on this last word. They were "idealists" in *epistemological* sense, as somehow Schopenhauer too was, because they focused on the *mediation of ideas* between the human consciousness and the world, i.e. they started from and considered the ideas as more important for the explanation of the world than this one's features and "bricks". But Schopenhauer was not idealist in *ontological* sense, or not a pure/banal idealist: for him, the origin of both the inorganic and the living was matter in its chemical and physical relations; for him, the ideas were not "epiphenomena" of matter, but only a world of different nature than the material one; but *the origin is not tantamount to the nature of things*; only the classical German idealists of the first phase he was contemporary with have criticised the inherently naïve materialism of their time that transformed the ideas in "epiphenomena" of matter, and only they have considered that reality is the embodiment of the ideal sphere. From his side, Schopenhauer was a follower of Descartes' dualism).

So, Schopenhauer's atheism joined to his *existentialism* – actually, they formed a *unitary system* of thinking – and thus the philosopher had offered new motives for his ostracism by the mainstream philosophy.

I do not speak here about his competition with Hegel – repeating that the latter offered much more to philosophy – nor about his contemporariness with both the German idealism and the German materialist reaction which were, though in opposite ways, pendant with the revolutionary atmosphere of the beginning and the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and thus the pessimism of his philosophy not being suitable in that moment. But he became popular, for example, in the 1860s-1870s: once more, the Paris Commune's defeat clearly being the sign of the *end of every illusion* related to a beneficial change of a society marked by an intolerable polarisation and characterised by the post-1848 conservatory reaction. Mostly the students were influenced by Schopenhauer: as the great Romanian poet Eminescu, already reading Schopenhauer at home and more deeply in his studentship in Vienna and Berlin.

But I speak about the “superficial” attitude of the official philosophy towards Schopenhauer: his pessimism and the connexion he made with the Asian/Indian thinking, his apparently Romanticist insistence on the genius, his “metaphysics”<sup>6</sup> (that was considered by the official philosophy in a “mechanistic” manner) were the only elements retained in the old official history of philosophy. *His ethics, his early existentialist suggestions, his atheism, the whole logic of his pessimism (and yes, his critique towards the modern university and philosophy) were passed under silence.*

Yes, Schopenhauer's Romantic focus on the genius was not at all despised by the students of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Why, what is a genius? It is a *prominent personality*, both in thought and deeds, one aspect being insignificant without the other: a *daring* person. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when all the illusions have vanished, the *dominant model of man offered to the youth was, on the contrary, that of aligned, conformist, prudent individual, never tending to more reason and sentiment in problems related to “anonymous” others.* The model of man carrying a torch for the others could certainly attract Eminescu: the more so, to create did not mean to be outside science and the disciplined effort of creation. The only problem here is to not oppose now, in modernity, the model of the genius to that of a disciplined hard-working person: this was Eminescu's standpoint and he was really a hard-working person. But *the dominant ideology has seen the genius and the common man as mutually excluding themselves*<sup>7</sup>: for this reason, for many the

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<sup>6</sup> Constructivism is not metaphysics, it is just opposite to metaphysics: irrespective of the historical difficulty its creation has shown.

<sup>7</sup> Since we have defined the genius as a prominent and daring person, it is clear that its difference from an ordinary person is only historical/historically constituted.

model of the genius was more comprising than that of the man subordinated to his duty (as in Kant).

Therefore, the legitimacy of the essences is according to man's existence. But this existence is determined and marked by the will to live *and* knowledge. Over time, ordinary people and philosophers have observed both the coexistence and contradictions of the inner feelings and propensities and, on the other hand, the human reason. And obviously – and this was *philosophy's* main preoccupation over time – the legitimacy of the human existence was thought to be given by different essences (the most important being the trans-mundane deity). Schopenhauer has showed that man's existence depends not only on his will to live but *also* on every individual's ability – and luck – to behave in a human/*moral* manner rather than simply not hurting his own will to live. Schopenhauer certainly read Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), with its famous final remarks – and whoever reads them arrives to the same conclusions –: the human life is finite, and in order to avoid irreversible actions leading to unnatural sufferings and untimely death one must behave in the moral manner dictated, said Kant, by man's reason and possible through his unique peculiarity.

It is obvious that the humans' existence depends on the concrete various social conditions. Schopenhauer could not yet explain man's existence from *both* these conditions and the animal and spiritual aspects of man; nor could he – and was not interested to – explain that these aspects are/manifest only according to the concrete existential conditions, so these conditions should be questioned firstly, before the theoretical concepts explaining man. But he offered the *premises* to begin this questioning: from him onward, man's existence and moral were to be not simple concretisations of the (indeed) subtle dialectics of the consciousness in the frame of/leading to the modern society where au fond everyone has a definite place and so, it's not convenient to discuss the sufferings determined by the social places (since *alles was ist, ist vernünftig*), even if Hegel has considered that the model of the "possessor" would be universal; no, *the ethical life* – that for Hegel meant integration within the modern society where the "abstraction of ideality" and "universality" was only the individual possessor recognised by the others as property and property right, and no "ideality of others" was more important than this<sup>8</sup> – *was to be* neither a marvellous prescription of moral duties as the only

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<sup>8</sup> Hegel 1802: "iii): The subject is not simply determined as a possessor, but is taken up into the form of universality; he is a single individual with a bearing on others and universally negative as a possessor recognised as such by others. For recognition is singular being, it is negation, in such a way that it remains fixed as such (though ideally) in others, in short the abstraction of ideality, not ideality in the others. In this respect possession is *property*; but the abstraction of universality in property is *legal right*".

countering force of the deep egoism of the modern society (Kant); but *just that which remains* after the questioning of the social conditions of egotism and of the removal from the rational principles.

On the other hand, the existentialism of Schopenhauer was *limited* by his (inherent because inherited, though consciously intended to be limited) *metaphysical* approach of the will: as the *only/ the determinant principle of the existence/life* and the half determinant principle of man. Here Schopenhauer emphasised the *contradiction* between *constructivism* and *metaphysics*: as we know, Hegel has warned that the truth is the whole, thus always the whole concrete, but as we also know, Schopenhauer had a very bad impression about Hegel (who, in fact, has continued – letting here aside the objective idealist presumptions – Kant’s interest to disclose the intellectual conditions of the human experience). As in the *rationalist metaphysics* of all the post-Kantians of his generation, Schopenhauer too has considered a *principle* – the will – as ontologically *a priori* and governing the world and its strife for life: this principle was not a metaphor for moral (Safranski 2010, p. 12), but formed a “metaphysics without the heaven” (idem, p. 313).

## 7. Will, idea and moral

Well, since the world is according to the knowing subject, it’s obvious that the will is not only the force from within every material/inorganic, and pre-human body, but especially the force/principle of the knowing subject. And as the conative force is blind in every material thing, so it is in the humans. (We remember the tradition of the psychology of instincts, do we?<sup>9</sup>)

But *man is not only a material body, he is also consciousness, reason*. He may surpass his proclivities and propensities through the exercise of reason (contemplation and continence of instincts). The *ideas* are “the highest degree of objectification of the will, the representation of man in the connected series of his endeavours and actions” (Schopenhauer 1818/1844/1909, I, p. 319).

Nevertheless, *the will* – that is free, and thus cannot be limited by precepts, education and duties (idem, p. 351), a subtle critique of Kant’s principle of duty – *is that explains the world*. The will is only an *impulse*, it is without knowledge and self-knowledge, thus it is not a phenomenon, but it is the *thing-in-itself*, the *content* or *essence* of life. Obviously, we must not find our refuge in empty words, the real world of experience is both the raw material *and* the limits of our thoughts: but

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<sup>9</sup> But see also the influence of Schopenhauer – the will as the unconscious – on the psychology and psychiatry of the unconscious (Paul Janet preceding Freud), (Vial 2009).



this real world is that of *phenomena which mirror the will*. The human individual – that is the result of *principium individuationis*, as every living being is, and at the same time the embodiment of the will as *thing-in-itself* – is only phenomenon, but in order to understand this world mirroring the will we have the *idea* (idem, p. 355).

What is the difference between the will – transfigured in the human world – and the idea? “We must distinctly recognise that the form of the phenomenon of the will, the form of life or reality, is really only the *present*, not the future nor the past” (idem, p. 359); only *the idea is trans-temporal*. And though the knowledge is added to the original will, the human – as a special phenomenon of life/will – is his own work, just and only because he is guided by knowledge (idem, p. 377). The will is always the same/identical with itself, but knowledge varies: obviously, according to the ever changing human experience (idem, p. 379). But if so, *only knowledge generates that which differentiates man from any other living – or even non-living – beings*: the *moral*, the discernment of evil and good, of wrong and right. Man acts because originally he is a being with will (and the will is unconscious (Schopenhauer 1818/1844/1909, II, p. 399), but he acts in a way or another according to concrete *motives* which are *cultural* – resulted not only from concrete circumstances, but from *knowledge* – and like tyres for the will: consequently, knowledge balance the will, it is like a “quieter” for the will, and functions not only as a transitory companionship of the will, thus pertaining only to the present moment (as the will does), but along *all the dimensions of reality*.

For this reason, the repentance – based on knowledge – is possible (Schopenhauer 1818/1844/1909, I, p. 381): showing that man is able of an infinite power of anticipation, self-control and altruism. The only impediment is that the *majority of humanity is separated from the intellectual pleasures* (idem, p. 404) (the only ones substantiating a high self-awareness necessary for a moral life) and thus, on the one hand, what remains for them is the want, and the struggle to annul it (because the shortage is so painful!). And just because the want is so painful, all satisfactions/happiness are negative – as joy for the lack of suffering/as pain of not having (idem, p. 410) – *as if* man would be only will, and his reason would be an accident; or, on the other hand, when existence is materially secured, people “are killing” their time in order to get rid of boredom (“*ennui*”); but this involves *excesses*, and the excessive result is that people may kill themselves from boredom, or their “normal” solution is their aim not only for *panem*, but also for *circenses* (idem, pp. 402-403). It’s very interesting this up-to-date air of a philosophy written in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century! (Of course, we all know why: because, on the one hand, the above description emphasises the historical *continuity* of a pattern of social relations where a part of humanity strove in want and “lack of

time” to fulfil the human needs and the other part bored in idleness and “too much time” to experience the emptiness generated by the lack of human purposes; and on the other hand, Schopenhauer points that which he has already directly experienced: the modern times, announced and desired as absolutely *discontinuous* towards the old ones, arrived in fact to demonstrate at a higher level that high inequality of time).

There are two phenomena which are landmarks of and ways out from that observable contradiction between the will and the ideas created by the human reason. They are *death* and *moral*. People are afraid from their death as individual beings, they want to be permanent as individuals; but what is permanent is trans-individual, is the will to live and the knowledge that alone tempers that will. It seems that knowledge would deny the will to live (idem, p. 366): actually, it only quiets it, because they both are trans-individual.

On the other hand, the big problem is not death – that is, ultimately, inevitable – but the *living of life in a human manner*. The only criterion and tool of this type of living is the *moral*. Schopenhauer said that every philosophy is theoretical, and not practical, because even ethics ought to not prescribe but to investigate (idem, p. 350) the concrete conditions and manners people act within these conditions in order to fulfil both their will to live and their knowledge/ideal world. For this reason, there is no absolute evil or absolute good, but only relative: as *responses to/against* the effort of the will to impose any selfish good.

### **8. Moral as sympathy or compassion: the possible optimism**

Therefore, the goodness is the *knowledge of others’ sufferings* and the actions according to this knowledge. All these actions reflect and arise from *sympathy* – in the time of Schopenhauer the word *empathy* was not yet in fashion, but sympathy much more emphasises the inner potentiality to recognise and feel the others’ sentiments, and also the outward orientation of the superabundance of the human feelings – and not from the sense of duty (he has criticised Kant): and this sympathy, manifesting in different degrees (as pure love for the others, *ἀγάπη* or, in Latin, *caritas*; or as true love for the others, *pietà*), is experienced by all of us as being opposed to selfishness (idem, p. 481).

Concretely, sympathy is *compassion*, rejection of others’ sufferings. Since every one has the same will of life, every one must consider this *conatus* of all the others. To not take this into account means selfishness. (Thus, asceticism – that is the denial of the will to live – is not a recommendation only for the others). Every

human is egoistic from his/her will to live, but in order to respect the will to live of the others, every one must exceed an irrational selfishness and manifest in a compassionate manner. This is *structurally possible*: because the humans have *consciousness*, arising from knowledge (Schopenhauer 1818/1844/1909, II, p. 400), in fact from the intellect which is a function of the brain. And though the will is the nature of man, the intellect being only an “accident” (idem, p. 399) of evolution, man is able to transcend the selfishness of the will. The *model* of the genius – where the will is deeply silent, so that the awareness of the individuality disappears and only the idea remains (idem, p. 421), or where the intellect is 2/3 and the will 1/3 (Schopenhauer 1818/1844/1909, III, p. 138) – shows that the transition of man towards a behaviour based on sympathy is possible (idem, p. 159: in a sense, every child is a genius (and every genius is a child)).

This possibility is an optimistic conclusion: indeed, Schopenhauer is not (only) the philosopher of the unconscious irrational will to live, surpassing the accidental intellect; on the contrary, by both the *optimism of the will to live* praising itself (though in an unmerited manner), and the *optimism of the possibility of more knowledge* and tasting of ideas, and the *optimism of the feeling of others' feelings*, Schopenhauer brought out in the light of day the reason of the optimistic attitude towards the human life. He was not only a sceptic. *He explained not only the contradictions between the will to live and reason, but also the possible peace between them*: because both the will to live and reason may coexist in man, since man has both of them. (On the contrary, the Christian religion is irreconcilably opposed to optimism, since the will of God, and not of man, imposes even cruel and irreversible catastrophes – as the Lisbon earthquake, analysed by Voltaire –) (idem, p. 387).

The cause of the human suffering is the well-known *homo homini lupus* (idem, p. 378), the general avarice, and compassion is the only means to overcome the so generalised social sufferings.

## **9. Pessimism and the moral of compassion as objective potentiality to transcend it**

Nevertheless, Schopenhauer has considered that the will to live – being the same with the vital force/ life/ the subject with its emotions – is so opposed to reason, and has so disturbing influences on the intellect (through the different feelings related to this will: hope, fear, love, hate) that the power of reason is shrinking in front of it (Schopenhauer 1818/1844/1909, II, p. 418). And there are so many and different human beings with their different wills to live, that it is

impossible to accommodate them with reason. Consequently, the result is the *suffering*, and since life is a constant suffering, the clinging on life seems absurd: and it is not generated by reason, certainly, but only by the will to live (idem, p. 447).

The first message here is his deep *pessimism*: no faith and no hope in the modern life – that however has brought about science and rationalism – have real basis, because the spectacle of the world is not at all encouraging. The cause of this situation is – let put it briefly again – the *homo homini lupus* type relations (Schopenhauer 1818/1844/1909, III, p. 378). Sure, at the same time, neither man is able to feel the absence of suffering (or in a paler tone, the satisfaction), but only/more vividly the suffering as such (idem, p. 374): but the problem is that of *social relations which construct the permanent feeling of suffering*. (Actually, neither Kant was absolutely optimistic: the process of Enlightenment was an anchor (as the idea of the immortality of soul<sup>10</sup>), but both the cosmological structuring and the European relations seemed to deny or attack the idea of their progress, with all the rhetoric related to modernization) (Philonenko 1997, p. 406). As a result, even the idea that we are born for being happy is erroneous: no, it's just the suffering – and the feeling of suffering (through the form of heavy personal suffering and the exceptional form of holiness) – which may save us (Schopenhauer 1818/1844/1909, III, chapter XLIX): we have to resign. Giving up here, Schopenhauer was a mirror of his epoch, where the irresolvable contradictions

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<sup>10</sup>Kant has considered three postulates of the pure practical reason: the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God. (We have to remember: a postulate is an evident fundamental truth that has no need to be demonstrated). They are rational presuppositions of the moral law – and of the essence of man as this essence was emphasised by reason and the moral law that aimed the highest good conceived of in a rational manner –: without these presuppositions the moral law as such would be powerless, because the condition of its influence/more, of its capacity to frame and rule the human will is just its “harmony” with the human mind. Or, the problem is not only that Kant has showed that morality is that which led to religion – although it cannot be founded on it, but only on reason – but also that the moral law as such, as if it would be independent of the rational arguments it is based on, requires stanchions exterior to reason, two metaphysical assertions. Concretely, Kant said that *virtue* – as one of the highest good's elements – can be attained only in infinite time, thus the soul must be immortal/outside the time; while the existence of God was postulated because *happiness*, the other element of the highest good, would be possible and resulting from the exercise and progress of virtue, only if God is the guarantor of this permanent strife of man toward moral perfection. See (Kant 2002, pp. 6-7) (the two presuppositions discussed here are “not conditions of the moral law”, but of the end of a will determined by this law; AB, *as if* this end, the moral perfection – virtue + the happiness resulted from the exercise of virtue –, would not be possible without the reference of a human mind to a transcendent being; these presuppositions are “a subjective necessity”), pp. 155-178 etc.

seemed to illustrate an irrational *telos* of the world: but at the same time, he invited his fellow thinkers to continue, to look for exits from this situation.

The second message is the *amendment of pessimism* through the moral of *compassion*. Schopenhauer has conceived of his ethics on the same constructionist presumptions: not the essences as conceptualisations of different aspects of the real existence of man are those which explain this existence, and in order to realise the desired morals we prescribe in vain even the most soul-uplifting rational laws; all the sanctified concepts are constructed by people and thus, we have to start from the lesser and the surer real condition.

This condition is *compassion*: it's paradoxical, because it seems to be very complicated.

In man, the will is accompanied by reason, i.e. the awareness of a representation/idea. This awareness generates the motives (causes of/in the human behaviour): of physical movement of the body and, at the same time, of the legitimising of desires related to different objects. Thus, firstly, man *feels* his states of desires, of satisfied or unsatisfied desires. The experience of suffering because of unsatisfied desires is almost the most fundamental experience. In this respect, the human will has two poles: the wellbeing/weal and the woe. "Hence every motive must have a connection with weal and woe" (Schopenhauer 1903, p. 166).

But man has also the *objective potentiality to feel the others*: we can say today that there are neuro-physiological apparatuses in the brain which mirror the feelings, even intentions of the others (Iacoboni et al. 2005; Schmelz, Call and Tomasello 2010; de Waal and Ferrari 2010; Stamenov and Gallese 2002); as we may refer to the later on coined concept of *empathy*<sup>11</sup>, actually not only a psychological feature/relation, but lighting a certain "entanglement" of the above apparatuses (Schliesser (Ed.) 2015; Decety and Svetlova 2012, (showing developmental changes in perceiving the pains of the others). But Schopenhauer has explained this potentiality philosophically: we certainly do not live in the

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<sup>11</sup>It is very interesting that those who have constructed the word empathy (*Einfühlung*) did never refer to the original idea they based on. It's true that they needed this concept in aesthetics (where the problem was both to grasp the object and the attitude of the subject in front of the object), but Schopenhauer's idea that we can feel the others' feelings could have been mentioned by Hermann Lotze – actually, that who coined the *Einfühlung* in his *Geschichte der Aesthetik in Deutschland*, 1868 – because this philosopher, a post-Kantian idealist, has insisted on ethics. But he never did mention: because of both a removal from an "excessive" confrere in his language towards other philosophers as Hegel and the other German idealists and in his finding of the model of man in the genius, and a removal from the *inter-human relationships as criterion of morality*, founded by Schopenhauer. Per contra, Lotze has advanced as moral criterion the free choice between values on a scale limited to one end by the supreme Good personified by God. The difference between the two thinkers appears clearly now.

(For the history of aesthetic meanings of empathy, see Depew 2011; Nowak 2011).

others' skin, so we cannot really feel their feelings; however, we may *imagine* these ones – because we already have our experiences related to similar facts. “Now, since I do not live in his skin, there remains only the knowledge, that is, the mental picture, I have of him, as the possible means whereby I can so far identify myself with him, that my action declares the difference to be practically effaced” (Schopenhauer 1841, p. 170).

Schopenhauer has insisted on the imagined – thus, transposed through reason – character of the feelings of others' feelings. He criticised the psychologist Ubaldo Cassina – (1736-1824), *Saggio analitico su la Compassione*, Parma, Nella Stamperia Reale, 1772, translated into German in 1790 – who considered that we can transpose into the others; no, said Schopenhauer, we cannot, but even the contradiction between our own wellbeing and the suffering of the other drives to our compassion; we suffer for the suffering of the others; why? It's not psychology, smiled Schopenhauer in a sardonic manner, it's metaphysics that which says why. Certainly, Schopenhauer's smile was wrong. It's psychology, too, and also neurophysiology/neurosciences (Helmuth 2001; Moll, de Oliveira-Souza, Eslinger 2003; Moll et al. 2007; Moll and Schulkin 2009; Decety 2011; Gonzalez-Liencre, Shamay-Tsoory, Brüne 2013; Jankowski and Takahashi 2014), unknown back then. However, not this historical position is important here, but only the core and arguments of his theory of compassion.

Schopenhauer brought about something new towards the theory of *recognition* (Hegel): the big achievement is not only to recognise the individuality of the other as legitimate and objective as my individuality is, but to *feel* the other and, concretely, his sufferings; to *help* the other in order to minimise or even prevent his sufferings. “I directly desire weal, and not woe, for him, just as habitually, I do for myself” (Schopenhauer 1841, p. 169). *Because of our reason, we can imagine the feelings of the other, the causal mechanisms of the will of the other*: when he is ill, we put his pillow in a more comfortable position for him etc. *as if* we would be in his situation.

This special relation is *compassion*: even the Latin etymology of this word suggests this communion of feelings. Thus, not the knowledge as such, not the reason – that may lead to more egotistic attitudes – are which give the particularity of morals: they are only instruments, means. Compassion is a *felt* knowledge and at the same time an *active* knowledge. It is not contemplation.

Concretely, compassion means “feel his woe, exactly as in most cases I feel only mine, and herefore desire his weal as immediately as in other times I desire only my own” (ibidem). In this attitude, I depart from egotism and things are *as if* my being would be in every other person (idem, p. 268).

Therefore, if “the moral significance of our conduct can only lie in the effect produced upon others”, i.e. “centred in the weal and woe of some one else”, only altruism/compassion has moral worth” (idem, pp. 167-168). Compassion is not a dream, is real and perfectly possible: the direct participation, independent of all ulterior considerations, in the sufferings of another, leading to sympathetic assistance in the effort to prevent or remove them; whereon in the last resort all satisfaction and all well-being and happiness depend. It is this Compassion alone which is the real basis of all *voluntary* justice and all *genuine* loving-kindness” (idem, p. 170).

Well, here is the contradiction: on the one hand, there is no hope against pessimism, on the other hand, there is. But – and letting aside the reality represented by Schopenhauer with accuracy – *things are just in this way, contradictory*. What is important is to recognise the contradictions. This recognition was an open gate for further inquiries.

## 10. The revolutionary Schopenhauer

As it already has appeared, Schopenhauer has treated compassion in a contradictory way. However, no contradiction annuls the intention to shake the conscience of his contemporary fellows by *departing from different abstract regulative principles in the moral behaviour* and by *signalling the main social condition that obstructs the moral life of humans*. As the ancient Greeks who thought that justice is the main moral value, Schopenhauer too considered that *justice* (as equity, *Billigkeit*) and *loving-kindness* (*Menschenliebe*) are the cardinal values which might successfully substitute Kant’s duties (idem, p. 177). These values evolve from *compassion*, i.e. from the structural ability of man to feel the suffering of others. Namely, this ability is not induced from outside<sup>12</sup>, though the education of rationality and human emotions augments it. This feeling – as orientation toward the others, in fact toward the species in its concrete manifestations – is not a simple unconscious, blind and inevitable tendency, but doubly oriented: from man’s nature (concretely, from his heart) and from reason. The result is the *altruist* person: who feels that his own being – humanity – is in every other human, treated as a person, just opposite to the egotist who considers all the other humans as strangers and whose maxim is *pereat mundus, dum ego salvus sim* (Schopenhauer 1841, pp. 264, 279). (This maxim is interesting in present: we are no longer safe in any corner of the world, so the old *pereat* ought to be changed, ought not it?).

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<sup>12</sup>This aspect of the inner origin of man’s ability to feel (also the others) has a long history: in Aristotle, the centre of the soul was the heart (as in Plato, the centre of the courage and will was the heart, too).

Compassion is the most important value. The duty passes too much through reason, it is practically the result of reason. But man is not only reason *and* sentiment – interdependent, each of them supplementing with the other, pulling their sap from the other – but, as the society shows, moving *rather* from sentiments and not from reason. It's clear that the sentiments represent, become ideas in logical scaffolding. But beyond all of these, they mobilise, unfortunately, more than the reason. Is it not logical Schopenhauer's theory?

As wills, the humans have freedom. But they are determined in their life by causal lines which do not let them alternatives. Then, their freedom consists in, more than renunciation/restraining oneself, only in choosing to behave as morally as possible: *for the other human fellows*. *Compassion*, the availability for the others, is the sign of this freedom. This is the only thing men may do, considered Schopenhauer desperately: because he saw his contemporary society in a way undeformed by illusions and high principles, as offering to the broad masses deep suffering. This conclusion led him to say that in front of *this life* it is better to not live at all, and – without promoting the idea of suicide, on the contrary – to observe that the philosophers did not supply a reason of the banning of the suicide.

Schopenhauer was not the philosopher of the suicide: because he knew that the human life is only one. He could not ignore that which his master – Kant – has underlined: “as an *animal creature* (...) after having for a short time been provided (...) with vital force, must give back again to the planet (a mere dot in the universe) the matter from which it came” (Kant 2002, p. 162). And because the human life is accompanied by consciousness, it is the highest level of life, thus of the will of life. For this reason, the life is much more valuable than the non-life: the suicide is destroying the individual, but not the will that is the principle of life.

But concretely, the sufferings which do not seem to shorten through the exercise of reason make that the life be worthless. Schopenhauer saw the limits of the Enlightenment, of the trust that the rise of the general level of knowledge will lead to a more human society. Only in this sense of amplification of suffering, “it's better to not live”: this formula was like that of the poor tormented people who, in their exasperation, remind us the same alternative of non-existence; but they know that it is not a real alternative. The raise of the number of suicides from the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards – we have to not forget Durkheim's *Le suicide* (1897) – shows only the *social deterioration of the life of the many to the level that it becomes unbearable*: but no self-murderer thinks that the non-life in general is better than life; only his/her life is worse than the non-life.



The focus on suffering in this modern moment of philosophy ought to have been the theoretical threshold from which philosophy ought to re-think its tenets. But, because of the historical conditions of *persistence* and *reinforcement* of the power relations, this aspect was ignored by the whole dominant thinking.

Schopenhauer spoke only from the standpoint of the individual *qua* individual. However, this individual *can understand* – as it has appeared above – *the will to live of the others*. But just, and only through this quality, *the individual human shows his appurtenance to the human species*: and only through this quality this individual and this species are superior to the animate beings which have only their will to live. But if, however visible is compassion in society, the cruelty is more frequent, what remains is the suffering: and the *waste of the unique human life*.

With this implicit conclusion – that, in the frame of the philosopher's pessimism (which is lesser a naïve and vulgar pessimism, but rather a warning), had a big influence on Eminescu – Schopenhauer has opened up the way to go further<sup>13</sup>. If the *differentia specifica* of man is not the will to live, common to all the things and beings, but the sentiment – and ability to understand the sentiments, and especially the suffering, of the others – and if morality consists just in the

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<sup>13</sup>It's interesting that later, (Albert Schweitzer 1949) – has criticised Schopenhauer, though there was a strong affiliation between them. Both have drawn their core concepts from *Lebensphilosophie* (will-to-live, sacredness of life) and in fact, though we are more used to the concept of responsibility that Schweitzer has promoted, Schopenhauer offered a finer picture – actually, he made philosophy, Schweitzer has expressed only philosophical opinions –; he made a philosophical demonstration of the necessity of compassion and its concrete – active – contents. While Schweitzer – “Ethics are responsibility without limits towards all that lives...Compassion is too narrow to rank as the total essence of the ethical”, p. 244 – has considered that an absolute and uncompromising respect for life would be enough to derive from this efficient actions, Schopenhauer has shown that, the actions deriving from sentiments, too, and not only from reason, the concrete respect for all life must have a deeper origin than a humanistic education. Respect for life and responsibility were prescriptions, but compassion was an inscription found in the deep down psychological constitution of man.

Schweitzer has written in a different epoch from that of Schopenhauer's, but neither at the end of WWI did he surpass the full but simple benevolence, so as to say something more than exhortations. “The recognition that we evidently have so little power over economic relations does not discourage us”, p. 272. As we saw, an ethics of simple urging for the respect of life was not enough at all in the following years, and people felt discouraged in front of a so weak intellectual production in front of the real interwar life. And the latter result, after the 60s, of this situation has manifested through the cynical promotion of moral relativism subordinated to the individual material consumption and forgetting any social ideal and psychology of humanist predispositions. For this reason – and here is an example of that not always the latter theory is better than the previous – and obviously, neither Schopenhauer understanding the economic relations, his form of the philosophy of life, the compassion, was more convincing and more related to the concrete situations.

development of the sentiment of compassion (of care for the others), and again if this specific difference does not seem to decrease the quantity of suffering in the world, would the blind will to live be the only cause? Does the higher level of the human will to live mean nothing? If we must think to the others – because it is known that the difference between humans and the other beings and things is not the simple impulse to persist – how ought we to do this? Morality means thinking of the others. How? History, already in Schopenhauer's lifetime and after, has showed that only compassion did not fill the entire social space. The dominant layers – especially after Schopenhauer, but not the first time in history – took over the idea of compassion: intermittently, in compassion campaigns (Bazac 2013) and all kinds of beneficial social and ecologist programmes, but nevertheless the whole world appears to be crueller than ever, or far worse than ever in history: because now the humans know more than ever in history. However, the suffering itself was integrated in the restrictive private profit system. Schopenhauer's ethical message was silenced and passed into oblivion; the transformation of the humble other into an instrument was put in its place, in the name of the comfortable individual transformed into metaphysical principle.

### 11. Instead of conclusions

First, we must not forget that Schopenhauer was marginalised by the official philosophy. He did not pertain to the metaphysical idealism, neither to the metaphysical materialism: for him, the objective physical-chemical relations explaining the material constitution of the world existed and were sure, as well as was the consciousness, arisen from the material brain, a *specific* domain of the existence and thus not reducible to its material origin. *The material origin is not tantamount to the peculiarity of the consciousness.* More: the world as we know it is the result of the processing of the information coming from the external world within the unique mediation of the consciousness. The world exists, of course, but our awareness of it depends on the representations/ideas we arrive to them in our mental activities. Schopenhauer's intention to underline this constructionist method and paradigm and to ridicule the German idealists who assumed this Kantian achievement and at the same time contradicted it with their metaphysical idealist imagination did not make him attractive for them; even though he himself erred toward metaphysical approaches.

Nevertheless, Schopenhauer remains in philosophy with three memorable theories: that of the methodologically and ontologically *privileged place of life* – as

an organic level of existence and, at the same time, the model<sup>14</sup> for it – that of *the personal experience of life as the origin of the recognition of others' life and of the knowledge of others' feelings, especially of suffering, and that of compassion*.

Nowadays, all three theories are capital in philosophy and equally “dignified” in the explanation of the human beings and their mobilisation to a multi-layer creativity. (Actually: not in the whole philosophy, and lesser in the common thinking framed by the dominant ideology. The problem of the philosophical reception of Schopenhauer is that the idealist and individualist paradigms were *dominant* not only during his life but until today). However, both philosophy and science took over the first two theories, though they are not (yet) dominant in philosophy. More, a new holistic science tackles life and the human according to Schopenhauer's paradigm, even though it does not mention him (only Hans Jonas, for example, see Schwartz and Wiggins 2010). Anyway, the first theory was essential in the *general theory of systems* of Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968) who, however, did not account for the origin of this first theory in Schopenhauer.

Our philosopher has criticised the German idealism and opposed it a simple and, au fond, true philosophy. The explanation of existence takes place, obviously, through *Dasein*/man. The explanation of man/man's life is not the result of the twisting of sophisticated concepts like existence and being, but of the knowledge of his life. And this life is full of suffering. Not the play of concepts is important for life, but the real existence, its *content*, and since the knowledge of this content emphasises the suffering (mostly as a consequence of social relations, Schopenhauer underscores), the only way for extinguishing it is not at all to abstracting from this problem, but to confronting it. The only solution found during this confrontation – a solution that is at the same time rational, moral and issued from our genuine experience of our life – is compassion.

By explaining man in the common dominant pattern of *methodological individualism* – an historical *reductionism* determined by the historical separation between the physical and intellectual labour and by the inherent confiscation of the lighting theory by those who spoke only from the standpoint of the dominant layers – Schopenhauer has nevertheless suggested that man should be explained in a way opposed to this reductionism. (Because, as later on Marx pointed out, man is *both* individual and member of the human species/ i.e. a social being). If the individual from whose viewpoint one speaks is allowed to doing everything in order to fulfil his interests, even being wrapping in a group legitimating, but accepting with serenity the suffering of other fellow individuals, what is the result? However,

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<sup>14</sup>The model of life as the model for the understanding of systems as such came, in the European tradition, from Aristotle.

compassion is real, has insisted Schopenhauer, so on the other hand, things are tragic, but on the other hand, there would be a hope.

Thus, Schopenhauer was the necessary philosophical moment between idealism (and certainly, between the naïve/mechanist materialism) and the sketch of a *constructivist materialism* – so, where the humans/their conscience is *active*, not passive<sup>15</sup> – and *social existentialism*, at the same time. Irrespective if the intermediary link to Schopenhauer was or not noticed by Marx, this link's constructivism and half existentialism was the necessary alternative showing that it is naïve too, and thus its critique is needed, certainly not going backward again, but forward. The real existence of the concrete human beings, their thoughts, ideas and beliefs – which, obviously, are formed in the mental processes, but these processes do not construct absolutely from their inner entity, because mind is not a “spider” (to use Bacon's famous comparison) but a “bee”, if we continue the great English philosopher's model – are thus determined by the concrete conditions they live in.

And the human experience shows that compassion, though it is a *sine qua non* ontological premise, is not enough: neither as explanation nor as practical tool. The more so the human *individual*, unique and unrepeatable, has only one life.

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<sup>15</sup>See Marx's First *Thesis on Feuerbach*, 1845: “The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism -- that of Feuerbach included -- is that the thing [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object [*Objekt*] or of intuition [*Anschauung*], but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism -- but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such...”.

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