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SCHOPENHAUER AND ANCIENT INDIA

When during the 18-th century the East Indian Company set up in business in India, its employees intended to make profitable business with the Indian merchants. In order to make profitable business with others, it is unavoidable to communicate with these people; and in order to understand them faultless, it is necessary to gain some knowledge about their thinking and feeling.

In becoming acquaint with the others' thinking and feeling, this sometimes may develop to feeling at home at their cities. Exactly this happened to many of the employees of the East Indian Company, at the beginning at least, as long as this company was not taken over by the British government.

These employees, moreover, also tried to convey their impressions of Indian culture to the European people, wherever their sailing ships dropped anchor in order to sell Indian merchandises like silk and spices. And some of them even tried to translate Sanskrit texts into English. Therefore -- that's what I am concluding here -- Indian philosophy was not completely unknown among European philosophers like Berkeley and Kant, how ever these traded Indian philosophies were simplified and perhaps even distorted by these employees during the weeks they were sailing on sea.

But, quite astonishing, none of the great European philosophers but Schopenhauer confessed to having been influenced in their philosophizing by Indian philosophies, neither Berkeley nor Kant, and neither Nietzsche nor Wittgenstein. And, still more astonishing, none of the interpreters of those great European philosophers seemed to just having considered the possibility of such influences. I confess that I am unable to explain this meta-philosophical phenomenon.

Kant maintained a very high opinion of English oversea merchants and simultaneously a very low opinion of their Dutch colleagues. His high opinion of the English oversea merchants was justified by him in referring to their precious reports of the states of oversea countries; but his low opinion of the Dutch oversea merchants was left unexplained by him. It may be that those Dutch merchants, who sailed to Koenigsberg, were only interested in money-making and were therefore unable to satisfy Kant's curiosity concerning the states and the cultures of oversea countries. This throughout mercantile thinking, which at that time governed over Amsterdam, was lateron also governing over New Amsterdam and is still governing over New York. In this sense, the former English behaviour lost a cultural was against the former Dutch behaviour.

But that one philosopher, who in every aspect of his philosophizing swam against the tide, was Arthur Schopenhauer. He developed his philosophy out of two sources, as he freely confessed, namely: out of the philosophy of Kant, and out of Indian philosophies in general and Buddhist philosophy in particular.

According to his own view, at his time he was the only professional philosopher who understood Kant's epistemology; and, according to my view, he therein was completely right: He clearly understood the advantages of this epistemology as well as its shortcomings, mainly concerning Kant's tendency to fundamentalistic views therein.

Among Ancient Greek philosophers, not all of them but at least some of them combined philosophy and soteriology, these two doctrines thereby understood as: doctrine of gaining wisdom of man and of the world, and as doctrine of gaining healing by this wisdom. Lateron, during the period of Christian philosophy, these two doctrines were strictly separated: The doctrine of healing became an inner part of theology, and the doctrine of wisdom became a servant of theology.

Schopenhauer was, of course, not the first philosopher of modern times, who tried to overcome this unhealthy duality; but he was the first among them, who found the key to open the door which separated these two doctrines until then. And this key was discovered by him in reading Ancient Indian philosophical texts: He thereby obviously became aware that and how philosophy has to be combined with soteriology.

Contrary to Wittgenstein, he did not steal ideas from Eastern philosophers; but he discovered among their teachings perfect descriptions of what he up to then had conceived already; and he thereby nevertheless followed his own way to arrive at wisdom. Because of that sovereignty of mind, he was not compelled to conceal his sources, both Kant's philosophy and Indian philosophies.

The central terms of his own philosophy are "Wille" and "Vorstellung". I will use them here without translating them into English. For in his philosophy, they already are used not in a vague everyday sense but as termini technici, i.e. as genuine terms of his philosophy to be used according to that doctrine; and they therefore must not be confused with the English nowadays concepts "will" and "conception".

Schopenhauer was a master concerning the German language; and he nowhere used expressions mindless and without having clearly investigated their meanings. Therefore, in my view, he certainly used the concept "Vorstellung" according to its etymological content, saying: "(etwas) vor (sich) stellen", i.e.: "putting (something) before (oneself, i.e. one's mind)". It is a decisive point to regard this usage of "Vorstellung", namely to its original and deep epistemological meaning.

Four roots of sufficient reason govern over the domain of these Vorstellungen without going beyond it. Insofar as these Vorstellungen do not consist of mere dreams, they arose by and are therefore somehow related to -- in using Kant's terminology -- the Dinge an sich selbst, i.e. the things in themselves, the things without all the attributes of the domain of the Vorstellungen. But since -- according to Kant as well as to Schopenhauer -- the rules of sufficient reason do not reach beyond the domain of Vorstellungen, there is no way of concluding from the attributes of the Vorstellungen to the attributes of the Dinge an sich selbst: The Vorstellungen are subject to knowledge; but neither the Dinge an sich selbst nor the relations are subject to knowledge. Here we are facing, so to speak in terms of arithmetics, an equation containing two unknown variables, this equation being therefore unsolvable by solely rational argumentation.

But -- that's what Schopenhauer is going further -- one of the two variables may be found by guessing. Whether or not the result of this guessing is correct, this will turn out by its consequences, namely: whether or not it is leading to arrange the parts of that puzzle of human existing to a convincing picture of it. And what he guessed is:

These Dinge an sich selbst are nothing but outer and inner immediate actions and reactions, all these kinds of acting to and reacting against something without considering and even without being able to consider whether or not such kinds of acting and reacting are desirable, whether or not they are wanted according to sound considerations.¹ The name he used to describe these Dinge an sich selbst, which our Vorstellungen are referring to, is: "Wille", "will"; its meaning may be found within the field of meaning of the concepts "Drang", "urge", and "Trieb", "drive, impetus, instinct", and "Getriebensein", "being driven", all in all: of "being not free", of "being inhibited". In my view, a correct translation of "Wille" into Sanskrit has to be "mara", this term thereby used in the sense in which it was used by Buddha Shakyamuni, i.e.: in the sense of "murder, death-bringer".

This Wille is completely blind, without any wanting and willing, therefore without any spot of freedom. Therefore it may happen that the impulses of this Wille are leading to constellations of it containing the means to overcome that being enslaved by the Wille. Constellations of this kind arose indeed on this earth, consisting of the different kinds of brain of the different sentient beings. As soon as they are -- of course, not by wanting and willing of someone, but by chance, by accident -- established somewhere, these brains firstly and mainly are used and directed by the Wille as means and instruments to distinguish the manifestations of the Wille. For also one's own body is nothing but a Vorstellung, i.e. a product of one's own brain, and in this sense a manifestation of the Wille.²

But since these Vorstellungen are subdue to space and time, they are separating me from otherones and are separating you from otherones. And the Wille, which is acting permanently in everybody, is trying everywhere everytime to become superiour to other separated manifestations of this underlying Wille; it is manifesting itself thereby as causality in space and time, but being in itself nothing but Wille, i.e. urge, thirst, drive.

In even this sense, even the luck of the businessmen of Amsterdam and of New amsterdam is nothing but being driven by the Wille, by mara. For this luck is gained and afterwards lost in the sequence of causal events, oneself thereby acting without inner freedom, but completely subdue to one's own tendencies, being therefore enslaved even at the sunside of slavehood. And Schopenhauer here -- as well as at related points --, untiringly hints to the doctrines and lifes of Ancient Indian sages and saints. And in accordance with them, his soteriology is established seamless out of his philosophy:

In reflecting one's own situation, one will finally recognize this prior dependency of the Vorstellungen from the Wille as well as oneself being separated from other manifestations of the Wille by one's own urge and drive to be superior to the other ones.

Therefore, a road with two combined traces -- of the traces of the pairs of wheels of cars --

¹See e.g.: WWV 1, p. 139ff., 150 ff., 228f.

² See e.g.:WWV p.219f.

is leading out of slavehood, is leading out of the domain of the Wille, is leading out of the domain of mara: The one trace consists in living the life of a sage, of a wise one; and the other trace, being completely parallel to and close to and connected with the first one, consists in living the life of a saint, of a holy one.

The holiness of the saint consists in his overwhelming every separation to other sentient beings. And this holiness is the result of his having destroyed his former conceit of being superior to other sentient beings and which then is the source of his acting consciously and carefully in the sense of compassion.³ But in an ultimate sense, this holiness needs sageship, namely the knowing of how the Wille may enslave oneself, and how to escape of that slavery in using this knowledge.

Every Vorstellung is something, which some subject vor sich gestellt hat, which some subject put in front of itself; in this sense, every Vorstellung entails an object of this subject. Therefore, this object does not exist independently from every subject but is connected with and related to some subject. But as long as this subject is driven by the Wille, this subject is separating itself from its object, saying then: "*I myself saw this*". But as soon as the subject – in regarding this up to then being driven -- succeeds to abandon this being driven concerning its Vorstellungen, it becomes the clean subject of all knowledge, i.e. the clean eye of seeing, therefore the ewige Weltauge, the eye of the world being unchangeable and therefore undisturbable by the Wille.⁴ This subject of this ultimate Vorstellung is, of course, still an *I*, but an *I without myself*. And in maintaining this view and in establishing this view as the source of all inner and outer acting, the sage becomes a saint.

The crucial point of one's life is the period of dying. For then the course will be set for either continuing that way of being driven by the Wille, by mara, or for no longer being driven by it. But it is impossible to describe this state of being no longer driven by the Wille in using any positive terms; for they all arose from manifestations of the Wille in order to represent other manifestations of the Wille. This is said by Schopenhauer:⁵

"In der Stunde des Todes entscheidet sich, ob der Mensch in den Schoß der Natur zurückfällt, oder aber dieser nicht mehr angehört, sondern -- -- --: für diesen Gegensatz fehlt uns Bild, Begriff und Wort, eben weil diese sämtlich aus der Objektivation des Willens genommen sind, daher dieser angehören, folglich das absolute Gegenteil desselben auf keine Weise ausdrücken können, welches demnach für uns als bloße Negation stehen bleibt."

For the state of being completely liberated is not expressible in terms of slavehood.

³ See WWV 2p. 717 f.: "Schon die Heiligkeit, welche jeder rein moralischen Handlung anhängt, beruht darauf, dass eine solche, im letzten Grunde, aus der unmittelbaren Erkenntnis der numerischen Identität des inneren Wesens alles Lebenden entspringt. Diese Identität ist aber eigentlich nur im Zustande der Verneinung des Willens (Nirwana) vorhanden, da seine Bejahung (Sansara) die Erscheinung desselben in der Vielheit der Form hat."

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⁵ See WWV 2, p. 717 f.