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978-0-521-87034-4 — Schopenhauer: The World as Will and Representation

Arthur Schopenhauer , Edited and translated by Judith Norman , Alistair Welchman , Christopher

Janaway

Excerpt

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The World as Will and Representation

Arthur Schopenhauer

Volume 2

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Supplements to the First Book

‘Warum willst du dich von uns Allen
Und unsrer Meinung entfernen?’ –
Ich schreibe nicht euch zu gefallen,
Ihr sollt was lernen.

Goethe

[‘Why do you turn and walk away
From all of us and what we say?’
To gratify is not my aim,
You might learn something all the same.

(*Zahme Xenien* [*Tame Invectives*]), I, 2]

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*First Half**The Doctrine of Intuitive Representation*
(Concerning §§ 1–7 of the First Volume)

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CHAPTER I

On the Fundamental View of Idealism

- In endless space countless luminous spheres, around each of which there revolve some dozen smaller, luminous spheres that are hot inside and covered by a hard, cold crust on top of which a film of mildew has generated living beings with cognition – this is the empirical truth, the real, the world. Nonetheless, it is a precarious position for a thinking being to be in, to stand on one of these countless spheres that float freely in boundless space without knowing where it has come from or where it is going; to be only one of innumerable, similar beings who throng, drive and struggle, coming rapidly and ceaselessly into existence and passing away in a time that has neither beginning nor end: nothing is permanent here except matter and the return, by means of particular paths and channels, of the same diversity of organic forms that exist once and for all. All that the empirical sciences can teach is only the more precise nature and rules of these processes. – But recent philosophy, and *Berkeley* and *Kant* in particular, has finally realized^a that all this is really only a *phenomenon of the brain* and is burdened^b with so many and such extensive and diverse *subjective* conditions that its supposed absolute reality disappears, making way for a completely different world order, one that would underlie this phenomenon, i.e. would be to it as the thing in itself is to mere appearance.

‘The world is my representation’ – is, like Euclid’s axioms, a claim^c that everyone must recognize as true as soon as he understands it, even if it is not the sort of thing that everyone does understand as soon as he hears. – To have brought this claim to consciousness and to have connected it to the problem of the relation of the ideal to the real, i.e. the relation of the world in one’s head to the world outside of it, this, along with the problem of moral freedom, is the distinguishing characteristic of modern philosophy. Only after people had tried for thousands of years to philosophize in a merely

^a *sich darauf besonnen*^b *behaftet*^c *Satz*

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objective way did they discover that first and foremost among the many things that make the world so puzzling and precarious^a is the fact that, as massive and immeasurable as it may be, its existence nonetheless hangs by a single thread: and that thread comprises the consciousnesses in which it severally exists. This condition with which the existence of the world is irrevocably burdened^b marks it, in spite of all *empirical* reality, with the stamp of *ideality* and thus of mere *appearance* so that, at least from one side, the world must be recognized as related to dreams, indeed as belonging in the same class as dreams. This is because the same brain function that conjures up a completely objective, intuitive^c and even tangible world when we are asleep must have just as great a role in the presentation of the objective world when we are awake. Although they have different content, both worlds are clearly poured from a single mould.^d This mould is the intellect, the functioning of the brain. – *Descartes* is probably the first to have achieved the degree of awareness^e that this fundamental truth requires, and he therefore made it the starting point of his philosophy, albeit only provisionally, in the form of sceptical doubt. Because he took the *cogito ergo sum* as the sole certainty while provisionally treating the existence of the world as problematic, the one correct and essential starting point, and at the same time the *true* foundation^f of all philosophy, was discovered. Essentially and unavoidably, this foundation is *the subjective*,^g *one's own consciousness*, because only this is and remains immediate: everything else, whatever it might be, is first mediated and conditioned by it, and hence dependent on it. That is why modern philosophy is rightly said to begin with *Descartes* as its father. Not long afterwards, *Berkeley* travelled further along this path and reached the point of genuine *idealism*, i.e. the recognition that what is extended in space, and hence the objective, material world in general, exists as such only in our *representation*, and that it is false, even absurd to attribute to it *as such* an existence outside all representation and independent of the cognizing subject, and thus to assume a matter that is absolutely present and that exists in itself.^h But this entirely accurate and profound insight in fact constitutes the whole of *Berkeley's* philosophy: there was nothing more to him than this.

^a *bedenklich*^b *behaftet*^c *anschaulich*^d *Form*^e *Besinnung*^f *Stützpunkt*^g *das Subjektive*^h *eine schlechthin vorhandene an sich seiende Materie*

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Accordingly, the true philosophy must in every case be *idealistic*: indeed simple honesty requires this of it, because nothing is more certain than that nobody can ever climb out of himself and identify himself directly with things that are distinct from him: rather, everything he is certain of and therefore has immediate information about lies within his consciousness. This is why there cannot be *immediate* certainty over and above this; but the first fundamental propositions of a science must possess immediate certainty. It is entirely appropriate for the empirical standpoint of other sciences to accept the objective world as simply present: not so for philosophy, which must go back to what is first and primordial. *Consciousness* alone is immediately given and so the foundation of *philosophy* is limited to facts of consciousness: i.e. it is essentially *idealistic*. – Realism recommends itself to crude minds^a by giving the impression that it is factual, but it proceeds straight from an arbitrary assumption and is thus an unstable castle in the air, since it skips over or denies the very first fact: everything we are acquainted with lies within consciousness. The fact that the *objective existence* of things is conditioned by something representing them, and consequently that the objective world exists only *as representation*, is not a hypothesis, much less a decree, and certainly not a paradox put forward for debate; it is rather the simplest and most certain truth; it is difficult to recognize only because it is really too simple and not everyone has enough insight^b to return to the primary elements of their consciousness of things. There can never be an existence^c that is absolutely objective in itself; such a thing is in fact frankly unthinkable because what is objective has its existence^d always and essentially in the consciousness of a subject, and is thus its representation, and is consequently conditioned by it as well as by the subject's forms of representation, which are attached to the subject, not to the object. –^t

That the *objective world would exist* even in the absence of a cognizing being^e seems at first glance to be certain, because it can be thought in the abstract^f without revealing its inner contradiction. – Only when we try to *realize* this abstract thought, i.e. to trace it back to intuitive representations which alone give it (and everything abstract) content and truth, and accordingly when we try to imagine *an objective world without a cognizing subject* – only then do we become aware that what we are imagining is in

^a *Verstande*^b *Besonnenheit genug haben*^c *Daseyn*^d *hat seine Existenz*^e *erkennendes Wesen*^f *in abstracto*

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fact the opposite of what we intended, for what we are imagining is nothing other than a process in the intellect of an agent of cognition^a who intuits an objective world, and thus precisely what we had wanted to exclude. For this intuitive and real world is clearly a phenomenon of the brain: and so there is a contradiction in the assumption that it might exist, as such as world, independently of all brains.

The main objection to the unavoidable and essential *ideality of all objects*, the objection that occurs to everyone, whether clearly or obscurely, is just this: even my own person is an object for another, and is thus their representation; and yet I know with certainty that I would exist^b even if there was nobody to represent me. But all other objects stand in the same relation to that person's intellect as I do: hence they too would exist without that other person to represent them. – And here is the response: this other, whose object I now regard my person as being, is not simply *the subject* as such,^c but is instead in the first instance an individual with cognition. Hence, even if he did not exist, or if there existed no other being with cognition apart from I myself, this would in no way abolish the *subject* in whose representation alone all objects exist. This is because I myself am also precisely this *subject*, as is every being with cognition. Consequently, in the case at issue, my person would certainly still exist, but again as representation, namely in my own cognition. This is because cognition of my person, even my cognition of my person, is only ever indirect and never direct, and this is because all being-represented^d is something indirect. In fact it is only in the intuition of my brain that I have cognition of my own body as an *object*, i.e. as extended, occupying space, and causally efficacious, and this intuition is mediated by the senses: the intuitive understanding uses data from the senses to perform its function of going from effect to cause, and in so doing, by the eyes seeing the body or the hands feeling it, constructs the spatial figure that presents itself in space as my body. But there is no extension, shape and causality given to me immediately (in the general feeling^e of the body for instance, or in inner self-consciousness) in a way that would then coincide with my being^f itself, so that it could exist without presenting itself in the cognition of another. Rather, this general feeling, as well as this self-consciousness, has immediate existence only in relation to the *will*, namely as pleasing or

^a *der Vorgang im Intellekt eines Erkennenden*^b *da wäre*^c *schlechthin*^d *Vorstellungseyn*^e *Gemeingefühl*^f *Wesen*

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- unpleasing, and as active in the acts of will that present themselves for outer intuition as actions of the body. It now follows from this that the existence of my person or my body *as something extended and causally efficacious* always presupposes something separate from itself that cognizes it, because it is essentially an existence within apprehension, within representation, and thus an existence *for another*. In fact it is a brain phenomenon, regardless of whether the brain it presents itself in is one's own or that of another person. In the first case, one's own person divides into the cognizer and the cognized, into object and subject, which confront each other here (as everywhere) as inseparable and irreconcilable. – So if my own person always requires some agent of cognition in order to exist as such, this is equally true of other objects, whose claim to an existence *independent* of cognition and its subject was the aim of the objection stated above.

Meanwhile, it is clear that existence conditioned by an agent of cognition is only ever existence in *space* and hence the existence of something extended and causally efficacious: only this existence is always cognized, and hence *for another*. And yet everything that exists like this might still have an existence *for itself*, without needing a subject. Yet this existence for itself cannot be extended and causally efficacious (which taken together constitute the filling of space); rather it is necessarily another sort of existence, namely that of a *thing in itself*, which, precisely as such, can never be an *object*. – This would thus be the response to the objection stated above which, accordingly, does not overturn the fundamental truth that the objectively present world can exist only in representation, and thus only for a subject.

Here we might also note that even *Kant*, to the extent that he remained consistent, cannot have thought of his things in themselves as *objects*. This already follows from the fact that he proved that space as well as time are mere forms of our intuition and consequently do not belong to the things in themselves. What is in neither space nor time cannot be an *object* either: thus the existence^a of the *things in themselves* can no longer be *objective*, but can only be of a very different sort, a metaphysical existence. Consequently Kant's claim already contains the proposition that the *objective* world exists^b only as *representation*.

- Nothing is as persistently misunderstood again and again, no matter what one says, as *idealism*, since it is always being interpreted as a denial of the *empirical* reality^c of the external world. This is what inspires the constant

^a *Seyn*^b *existiert*^c *Realität*