

Princeton Theological Review

THE

PRINCETON
REVIEW.

By Whom, all things; for Whom, all things.

FIFTY-FOURTH YEAR.

JANUARY—JUNE.

NEW YORK
1878.

GERMAN THOUGHT AND SCHOPENHAUER'S PESSIMISM.

IT has become quite generally the fashion, especially in America, to assume one of two extreme attitudes with regard to German thought. There is a small class of thinkers who have applied themselves to the study of German theories since the time of Kant. The strenuous effort necessary for a mastery of these post-Kantian systems often produces an intellectual pride where a knowledge of them has been acquired. This accounts frequently for the devoted sympathy that is occasionally to be seen in American and English students for the philosophy of men like Schelling and Hegel. The series of English Hegelians who have come from Merton College, Oxford, is one example of this. The colony of American Hegelians at St. Louis is another.

We find, however, another class of students of German philosophy who have a less thorough acquaintance with the subject; who, trained in the more common-sense school of England or Scotland, look with disfavor, if not with contempt, upon the speculations of thinkers across the Rhine. German philosophy is described by them as "cloud-born," as "a web of the individual fancy," as "mystical," and by a variety of other expressions that convey only a partially correct idea. This class is largely represented in the chairs of our colleges. The attitude assumed by such men gives expression to the arguments so often urged against the special treatment of German systems before classes of philosophy. Young men are frequently warned against being led into wasting too much of their energy over these theories, that time has exploded or is certain finally to explode:

they are cautioned against losing themselves in the cloud fancies of Fichte and Schelling, against becoming entangled in the web of Hegel's Dialectic.

It may be fairly asked whether both of these positions are not dangerous. Both err in not betraying a more critical spirit. That the system of Hegel is logically symmetrical, is no good reason why it should be embraced as true. That the system of Hegel is rapidly falling into contempt in Germany, and is unpractical and false, is no good reason why it should not be studied, and thoroughly studied. Without entering into the question how far are the post-Kantian theories true and useful, it seems to me that the study of these theories should command more attention. It is not necessary that the mastery of a phase of philosophic thought should bring with it a conviction that this thought is true or useful. The teaching of a certain philosophy is different from the teaching of the history of philosophy. There are few who would uphold to-day the doctrines of the Pythagoreans, and yet every conscientious teacher of the history of philosophy takes pains to instruct very fully those under him in the Pythagorean doctrines. When, on the other hand, one of the later German theories is to be expounded, we find it often contemptuously treated, criticised without being fully explained. The same defect was noticeable until very lately in the German universities. When a professor had occasion to speak of English or Scottish philosophy, he set aside the discussion of almost all these "insular" philosophies, except the doctrines of Berkeley and Hume, with perhaps a few remarks on the "Empiricism" of Locke. This is no longer the case. The best exposition of Bacon in any language we owe to Kuno Fischer, of Heidelberg; and the effect of Positivism in Germany was to turn attention very particularly to the Sensationalism of England. I would not advocate the study of German philosophy as a mental gymnastic. Such is not a proper spirit in either historical or scientific inquiry. The question is simply this: Are we to ignore the thorough mastery of systems that have swayed Germany during the last century as no philosophy has ever swayed a country, simply because these systems are "cloud-born" or "fanciful," or even wholly false? The same cause that urges us to understand the doctrines of Plato or the

Old Academy, should urge us to pay careful attention to systems of thought at the present time, whether these systems be fanciful, false, or dangerous. The more influential they have been, the greater the reason why we should investigate them. The greater the destruction, the more considerable the importance of understanding the machinery of the destructive engine. The system of Hegel is dying, but are its effects obliterated? Materialism is no longer taught in the philosophical chairs of German universities, but are there no German materialists? So far, then, from ignoring German philosophy, it should be made an object of study, of academic study. However fanciful it may seem to our Anglo-Saxon minds, it is powerful in the Fatherland. The danger and the uselessness of warning young men against systems, without explaining what has made these systems powerful, is grounded on a serious fallacy. The chances are, that if they are cautioned against the "dreamy idealism" of Fichte, they will be apt to fall into that idealism when they discover that it is not at all dreamy, but a logical deduction, which cannot be blown away by a mere breath of contemptuous language. It is not so much for the discovery of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good that we should study the systems of modern Germany, as for the sake of understanding the cause of the powerful effects produced by these systems. In the January number of this Review, Dr. McCosh says, "Of late years, German students have been wandering after Schopenhauer and Hartmann; and American and British youths, seeing the crowd, have joined them and been gazing with them." It is to be hoped that this gaze is intelligent and critical, and not altogether sympathetic. We are indebted to men like Professor Bowen, of Harvard, who has taken pains to explain the systems of post-Kantian philosophy to the American public, and the remarks just made as to the importance of a familiarity with German philosophy apply especially to the systems of Schopenhauer and Von Hartmann. They are worthy of study, not because their metaphysics are sound, nor their ethics pure. It is because the "Pessimism" that these men represent is beginning to move like a dark cloud across the firmament of German thought. At first it was but a speck in the far-off horizon, scarcely visible in the brilliant day of the Absolute

Philosophy. It has been gradually rising and increasing. It is overshadowing the popular mind. It threatens to descend, and envelop a part of the national thought in its dark embrace. The warfare that Schopenhauer waged against the university chairs when Hegel ruled supreme, has excluded his followers from the German lecture-room; but he has of late years been largely read by the people as well as by the professors, and his strange doctrines seem to take a powerful hold, if not upon the thought, at least upon the feeling of the land. Pessimism is taught but by one man in the whole of Germany, and he is a *privat-docent* at Heidelberg. Dr. Dühring, who has been lately expelled from the University of Berlin, sympathized with this doctrine, lectured on Pessimism, and declared the theory of Schopenhauer to be "the most sober philosophy of the century." Von Hartmann, from his seclusion in Berlin, produced the "Philosophy of the Unconscious," in which he adheres to the main points of Schopenhauer's doctrine, modified in some respects, but essentially the same. The publication of that work was the signal for a philosophic controversy of remarkable brilliancy. But wherever in Germany philosophy is the theme of discussion or conversation, the question put invariably is this: "Have you read Schopenhauer?" If the inquiry be, Has all this a significance for us Americans? the answer seems to me clear. It has for us a profound significance. There is not only an emigration of people from Europe to America. There is a deep invisible emigration of thought. Materialism, which was once the rising doctrine in Germany, is now growing around us here. The Positivism of France came westward, and the Sensationalism of England. Transcendentalism, too, has drifted westward. To quote once more from Dr. McCosh: "Not sustained in its native land, Hegelianism has emigrated to the country of Hutcheson, Reid, Stewart, and Hamilton, and has there found a settlement for a little while. The ablest expounders of the Hegelian philosophy are to be found, not in Germany, nor even in Glasgow, but on the banks of the Mississippi." It seems to me not unlikely that the Pessimism that is pervading Germany and invading France may reach us here. When it comes, it should meet us, not as a new and terrible foe, but as a well-known form that we shall

recognize, with which we shall, if necessary, be prepared to fight.

Pessimism, sad and unpalatable as its doctrines may seem, is singularly attractive to men in certain states of thought and feeling. Never has it been so well presented as in the peculiar rhetoric of Arthur Schopenhauer. As a system, Pessimism is almost as old as philosophy, but as a system it is new to the thought of Europe. In German Pessimism we find something more than the bitter misanthropy of a Byron, the scornful attitude of Voltaire toward humanity, and the gloomy view of the world that appears darkly in Greek thought. From Schopenhauer we have a system of Pessimism founded on a metaphysical theory, deduced from certain principles, and elaborated in its most extreme form.

Schopenhauer belongs to a series of philosophers who represent a reaction opposed to the Absolute systems of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Each of these reactionists is entirely independent of the others, but they are united at one common point—antagonism to the "Absolute Philosophy." This series is represented by Schleiermacher, Herbart, and Schopenhauer. It is, however, worthy of remark, that while the opposition of all three to the Absolute philosophy is at the outset plainly marked, there is a tendency in all three to revert to the principles of the school which they profess to discard. This is especially the case with Schopenhauer.

The problem of all post-Kantian metaphysics is the problem of the system of Schopenhauer. In his *critique* of the Kantian philosophy, he declares that the greatest service of Immanuel Kant was the distinction of things as they appear, from things as they are, of the phenomenon from the noumenon, of the *Erscheinung* from the *Ding an sich*. To answer the question, "What is the thing in itself?" (*das Ding an sich*), is what Kant failed to do. This is what all German metaphysics since Kant has had as its problem. This weakness in Kant's position was exposed by Schultze, by Maimon, and the Critical Sceptics. Fichte solved the problem in one way. The ground of the phenomenon, the *Ding an sich*, said he, is the Ego itself. Whatever appears is an appearance of the Ego. Schelling found the *Ding an sich* in Absolute Nature; Hegel in the Absolute Idea. The

difficulty appears in the first proposition of Schopenhauer's philosophy.

The world is my presentation (*Der Wille ist meine Vorstellung*¹).—But a presentation involves two things. It involves a something that is presented; it involves that to which the presentation is made. That to which the presentation is made is the Ego. The world is *my* presentation. But a presentation of what? What is presented? What is the noumenon of which the presentation is the phenomenon? What is the *Ding an sich*? This inquiry is answered in the second main proposition of Schopenhauer.

The world is my will.—The will is the *Ding an sich*, the thing in itself, the appearance of which is presented to the Ego. Although Schopenhauer says, "The world is *my* presentation," yet he denies the existence of subject separate from object, and of object separate from subject; both subject and object are thus parts of the presentation. The extremes of realism and idealism are confounded in this remarkable inconsistency.

The will objectifies itself. It makes an object of itself. This object is the world. *Will* implies the willing of something. The something that is willed is the world. The will to live and the world are identical.

Schopenhauer's ethics, if so they may be called, are contained in the fourth book of his "Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung."

"The world is my presentation." The presentation is the expression of the will to live. The will, as we have seen, is "thing in itself." It is the unchanging and the constant, underlying the phenomenal and the fleeting. The birth and death of the individual are simply phenomenal changes of this will. The individual is born; the individual dies. The will, of which both birth and death are the expression, remains. Although the world is will, although we are a part of the world, although our birth and death do not affect the will in itself, still we are

¹ This word *Vorstellung* has no equivalent in our philosophical English. It means whatever is present to the mind. The word "idea" is too vague. *Vorstellung* is not simply "intuition." The "intuition" is a species of *Vorstellung*. "Notion" is another species. The *Vorstellung* need not have been previously before the mind, so that it is not simply representation. It is a presentation.

ever in fear of death; not merely in fear of the pain of death, but of death itself. This is because the will to live finds expression in us. The present alone is really ours; but we are always looking back into the past, which is a dreamy nothing, and forward into the future, where we discern only the dim outlines of the form of death. Before considering this view of the world, we must fix our attention on Schopenhauer's view of man as a moral being. The fundamental idea of his ethics may be discovered in the Third Antinomy of Kant's Transcendental Dialectic. The thesis of this Antinomy states that in the world there is freedom, apart from the fact that every thing happens according to causation. The antithesis shows that there is no freedom, and we are brought in the face of two separate and opposite conclusions. So we find in Schopenhauer's philosophy that absolute necessity results from the fact that the world is will. The universe in all its variety is an expression of the one will. That is the antithesis of the Kantian Antinomy brought out in another form. The phenomena of the will, then, are under the law of necessity. The will as thing in itself is free. Kant solves the problem of the Third Antinomy by showing that the phenomena are under a law of necessity, that the thing in itself is free. The solution of Schopenhauer is therefore the same. This necessity excludes the idea of obligation. "No one," says Schopenhauer, "need expect 'commandments' from me, nor a law of duty, still less a general moral principle equivalent to a universal *recipe* for producing every virtue. Nor shall we speak of any 'absolute must,' . . . nor of a law of freedom, for it is a contradiction to speak of a free will and yet prescribe laws to it." "Must will! wooden iron!" he exclaims.

Schopenhauer's view of the world shows us where to look for his principles of action. We must revert once more to the second proposition of his system, "The world is my will." But that which is willed is never obtained. The will has no goal. As in the great ethical doctrine of Fichte, we have an eternal evolution, an eternal progression toward a goal that is never reached. This *willing* is expressed in all nature. It begins to be prominent in sensible nature. It finds its highest expression in humanity. Humanity is an individualization of

this will. It is essential to man to will. A will for something implies the lack of something. This lack of something is the cause of pain. The will to live is a cause of pain. According to Schopenhauer, we are to picture the whole world as in want, as willing to have something. *Is this want supplied?* Here is the fundamental doctrine of Pessimism. This want is never supplied. So soon as the will for any thing is supplied, the longing begins once more. To satisfy a want is to create a new one. Perfect satisfaction is *ennui* and weariness. "Life," says Schopenhauer in a celebrated passage, "is like a pendulum swinging to and fro between want and *ennui*." In one of his bitter paragraphs he exclaims: "If all our pains and wants were banished to hell, we should have nothing left for heaven but eternal weariness!" Man is the centre of a thousand needs. He is the highest expression of the will; he is the most needy of all creatures. The will to live is not satisfied, for it ends in death. "The life of most men is a struggle for existence, with a certainty of eventually losing it." The motive of this struggle is the fear of death. The desire is pain. The satisfaction of the desire is weariness. So when we attempt to banish evil, we only change its form. "If this want be satisfied, it arises in other forms, according to age and circumstances—sexual desire, passionate love, jealousy, hatred, envy, anxiety, ambition, avarice, disease." When these are allayed, comes once more the weariness; and if we endeavor to remove the weariness, the ghosts of the former evils return to torment us. "We begin the dance once more." Human life is but the alternation of pain and weariness.

What is true of man as an individual is true of men collectively, and the doctrine as above stated finds its logical application in history. The whole panorama of the past loses its changing color, and becomes a picture of gloom. The splendors of national growth, the glories of scientific progress, fade away, and before the sight arises only the troubled dream of humanity—of humanity ever changing, the form of the evil never attaining to the good. Humanity is bad, totally bad. Humanity is totally impotent. And so we hear only the monotony of a dreary poetry, we see only the unmeaning array of a helpless creative art. Our ears are filled with the harmonies of a music

that tells only of the ceaseless woes of man. The inexorable *must* of the blind will decrees the life of man, and man in agreement with that *must* cries, "I will live." The same inexorable decree hastens his death. He passes out of sight, and the will begins its work anew. The whole stream of the race flows on in the channels marked out by this will.

The individual not rising to the view of the world as will, appreciates only the fact, "the world is my presentation." The result of this is an egoism. This is a great source of the evil in man. He lives in a state of egoism. He injures others. He attempts to satisfy himself, and fails. This, Schopenhauer condemns. Although he denies the law of obligation, he maintains that the gratification of self is not the true motive of action. His moral maxims are not formulated, yet he is willing to suggest a "quietive" for unsatisfied man. The result of this "quietive" is virtue. It is not the "affirmation," but the "denial" of the will. We must rise from the consideration of the world as presentation to the conception of will as the *causa essendi* and *causa fendi* of the world. This gives us a kind of freedom. The fundamental motive that sways us is sympathy. I see men in misery, harassed by volitions, by desires, that go out into a chaos of disappointments. I see in myself, as in others, only an expression of the ever-acting will. The result is sympathy. When one reaches this state of sympathy, this appreciation of one's own sorrow as a sorrow common to the whole race, he is under the influence of a "quietive." He resigns himself to the action of the will. He gives himself up to the fate which is his in common with humanity. This is, according to Schopenhauer, the ideal end of all moral, religious, philosophic endeavor. This is the dissipation of all the woes of finite being. It will be seen that the doctrine of Schopenhauer is at this point taken from the Vedas, and from the theory of the Buddhists—the resignation to the will of Brahma, the resorption in the *Nirvana*. This is the Pessimism of Schopenhauer.

The history of philosophy shows us many optimists but few pessimists. "Optimism," according to the author of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, "is not only an absurd but a truly wicked way of thinking—a bitter mockery of the nameless

woes of humanity." Strange as the doctrine is as a whole, its sources are to be found in past systems; first in the philosophy of the Vedas, in a purer form in ancient Stoicism. A striking comparison may be drawn between the *ἀπάθεια* of the Stoics and the *Verneinung des Willens*. If we would see some of the metaphysical antecedents of the doctrine, we have only to look back at the Pantheism of Spinoza, at the Idealism of Fichte and of Schelling. If we would examine some of its ethical antecedents, we have but to glance through French literature in the time of Voltaire.

My design has been rather to state than to criticise the Pessimism of Schopenhauer. But the question arises, "How is this doctrine to be met?" I may briefly indicate certain weaknesses, and inconsistencies that lie within the system considered by itself. The exposure of such weaknesses and inconsistencies opens the way for an attack upon the philosophy upon its own ground.

Schopenhauer's metaphysics embody an absurd and fatal paradox. "The world is my presentation." Presentation of what? "The world is my will." The will is the thing in itself—the *Ding an sich*. Yet the thing itself is also phenomenon. It is presented (*vorge stellt*). Its expression is the universe. If it be asserted that the will to live is "thing in itself," and yet that it is presented, that it appears in the presentation, it becomes impossible to regard it any longer as "thing in itself." It is phenomenon as well. Either the "thing in itself" is presented, or it is not presented. If the former, it appears and ceases to be "thing *in itself*." If the latter, it cannot be known. The difficulty remains. German philosophy has not yet solved the problem left open by Kant.

Another point may be briefly noticed where Schopenhauer errs. To deny the claims of duty because "must will" is paradoxical, is not warranted. The conscious freedom of the will is the ground for the obligation. The more emphatic the will, the greater the emphasis of the must. The categorical imperative of Kant contains no paradox. "Thou canst, *therefore* thou must."

We find the distinction badly drawn between will and desire. Will and desire are radically different. Into will there enters the

element of choice. I may desire to do many things where my will is not called into action. Desiring and willing are confused in our everyday language. Psychologically they must be carefully distinguished. In fact, desire and will are often directly opposed. In order to satisfy a desire I must often perform an act of volition, but I may will not to do what is in the highest degree my desire to do. The will is the executive power of the mind. It may in some cases control or excite the desires.

The metaphysical and ethical inconsistencies of the theory of Schopenhauer, to some of which I have just alluded, may not prove effective to many who may be misled by the plausibility of Pessimism, to many whose minds are not turned to the metaphysical and ethical discussions of current philosophy. A simple question must be asked regarding all moral theories, and must be asked here, with unusual significance: "Is this theory in agreement with the *facts* of human life?" To this question the experience of a great body of mankind will return an emphatic negative. Pleasure may end in delusion, but is there therefore nothing pleasant? The efforts to bring about good in the world may be futile, but is there no good? There must, even admitting Schopenhauer's premises, be a relative good, for are not some things better than others? Are all evils equal? The "quietive" suggested by Schopenhauer is by no means adequate to atone for the evil that he claims to have discovered in the world. The practical man who accepts the pessimistic view of the world will be apt to look around him for some other "quietive," and it is to be feared that the quietive will often be sought in sensual indulgence, where no high hope of amelioration is set up.

However hideous the doctrine of Pessimism may be, there are strong reasons why it should be influential. The literary talent of Schopenhauer is sufficient to make it attractive, his vast learning and suggestive thoughts on almost every subject. But there are other reasons lying still deeper than these. Pessimism is only an exaggeration of the great fact that there is evil in the world. What the morals of Sensualism are to the man of pleasure, the morals of Pessimism are to the man in distress. The ethics of the period before the French Revolution

are not the expression of Voltaire, of Helvetius, or of d'Holbach. They are the expression of the age. The ethics of Schopenhauer are not the expression of the ascetic who wrote thirty years ago in his garret at Frankfort. They are the expression of a tendency in the social development of Europe. The aspect of modern Germany indicates that a pessimistic germ may have there, at least, a favorable growth. The whole state of the empire, particularly of Prussia, is one of uneasiness. The roll of Austrian, French, and Russian drums may be heard on almost every frontier. The great standing army is preying upon the industry as well as upon the capital of the nation. Financial and political distrust is expressed in many quarters. The broad plains of Prussia are badly cultivated. The few material resources seem to lie almost untouched. The Germans of that region are cynical in their nature. The weather in the long winters is gloomy. The whole effect on the mind is cheerless. As a matter of fact, we find distress in many parts of the empire. We hear it in occasional murmurs of discontent from the south; we saw it exemplified last summer in the bread riots at Berlin. There is but a step from the despondency of the nation to that of the individual.

Men in trouble sometimes go to religion for consolation. This is what Germany has not done. Statistics show, for example, that the attendance on the churches at Berlin is far less than when the town was one half its present size. Attempts have been lately made to banish the Apostles' Creed from the Evangelical Church. To such a people the theory of Schopenhauer is coming to mock at their ills, but at the same time to attempt an explanation. There is something in the German mind that makes all impressions of thought deep and lasting in their effects. The traces of Materialism are still apparent among the people.

But all prophecy as to the advance of Pessimism is to a large extent uncertain. No one can tell whether it will sweep across society as Materialism has done, or whether some illumination may not arise to turn so many weary eyes from the false lights that throw their glare upon the dark, unfathomed sea of sorrow.

But the evil in the world is not to be remedied by a resigned stupor, like the denial of the will to live. An inductive investigation of the facts of human life, a laying aside of the "idols of the den" which arise from special affliction or from the fancies of a morbid life, a look backward at the advance of the race in the face of many difficulties, a look forward at the dawn of a not far distant future, may turn men from Pessimism, if it does not lead them to Optimism.

ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER.