

# ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER – BERGSONIAN INTUITIONISM FORERUNNER

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**Abstract:** *Our article discusses the kinship of two thinkers of reference in the universal philosophical landscape, who lived in different eras and belonged to emblematic cultures for European philosophy. Both philosophers analyse intuition, but each understands something different by it and relate differently to it, from the perspective of their own systems of thought.*

*Nevertheless, in the view of both thinkers neither reason, nor intelligence is paramount, but intuition - both seeing in it a wonderful process by which we understand our essence, and the essence of the universe. We find this approach particularly interesting and of great significance to contemporary philosophical research, and for the contemporary man obsessed with the intellect, intuition may be a chance of rescue.*

**Keywords:** *will to live, thing-in-itself, metaphysics, intuition, the vital drive, intuitionism, voluntarism.*

1. Among the great modern thinkers who are representative for what was called postkantian "German idealism", but also for the turn towards postmodernism, there is Arthur Schopenhauer. Born in Danzig (Gdansk) on February the 22nd, 1788 and dead on September the 21st, 1860 in Frankfurt a. Main, where he lived after finishing his short teaching activity (carried out, with some interruptions, in Berlin between 1820-1832), Arthur Schopenhauer remains one of the most influential modern philosophers, an active presence not only in philosophical thinking, but also in romantic and postromantic poetic creation.

Recognized studies drew a more nuanced attention on Schopenhauer's role and effect of thought: it is essentially "a new realization of the metaphysical intention of productive philosophizing (philosophieren). Despite the impasses that appear in Schopenhauer's conception, research should dwell on the irreplaceable value of the Schopenhauer-ian system. Just the fact that Schopenhauer, like no other thinker before him, recognized the extrarational origin of metaphysics and also revealed the invincible force of philosophical reason, fully justifies the attempt to bring his thinking in the current context of philosophical reflection"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Malter, Ah. Schopenhauer, *Transzendentalphilosophie und Metaphysik de Willens*, Stuttgart-Bad Constantt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991, p. 16.

2. As noted, "if today we try to bring his spiritual picture into present, we'll find, to our surprise, that the story of Schopenhauer's action is not yet written"; "today we find ideas Schopenhauer thought for the first time and which are rediscovered in our time, everywhere."<sup>1</sup>

Schopenhauer himself had guessed it: "Mankind has learned something from me, something it will not forget."<sup>2</sup>

In the same style, the famous philosopher added: "My time and I don't match each other: this is entirely clear. But which of us will win the trial in the court of posterity?"

Known mainly for his work „*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*” (The World as Will and Representation) a title-program announcing his distancing from Kant and a proactive conception, Schopenhauer remains the author of a philosophical system which includes, in addition to the fundamental work mentioned (published in volume 1 in 1819, and in two volumes in 1844), the works: *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (1813); *On the Will in Nature* (1836); *Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics* (2 volumes 1837, 1838); *Parerga and Paralipomena* (Appendices and Omissions, 2 volumes, 1851), containing mainly: *Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life* (translated in 1890 by Titu Maiorescu).

In addition, as an integral part of his work (published in six volumes in 1891-1896, later a complete edition in 13 volumes, 1937-1941, 1957) and varied from a thematic standpoint, Schopenhauer also left an extensive correspondence, as well as a considerable inheritance in manuscripts.

Schopenhauer's sources are many and various. There are several doorways to Schopenhauer's philosophical system: Some call four of them and they are: Plato, Buddha, Kant, Fichte. Schopenhauer himself said that his system had one hundred doorways, like the old Thebes. Others see so many they compare his system to a mosaic....

This large number of possibilities to enter the philosophical system of A. Schopenhauer would be of no importance if one could enter through only one. We would choose one, whichever it may be. The big surprise is that you cannot enter through one alone, but must enter through all at once. Otherwise, you do not enter or you enter and exit as a mouse which cannot find the hole. This oddity of composition "has its explanation in Schopenhauer's orchestral or astronomical way of thinking", who "thinks and writes looking upon the world simultaneously from all sides".<sup>3</sup> It is something superhuman. Somehow, his way of composing can compare "only the most advanced products of modern music and the planetary system."<sup>4</sup> Schopenhauer linked his thoughts as God linked the planets.

The thrilled skill of this wonderful composition is the sine qua non condition for understanding Schopenhauer.

One of Schopenhauer's many commentators tried some kind of measurement of the study of his work: "1/5 Kant (*The World as Representation*), 1/5 Schelling's

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<sup>1</sup> A. Hübscher, *Von Hegel zu Heidegger*, Reclam Jun., Stuttgart, 1961, p. 49- 52.

<sup>2</sup> A. Schopenhauer, *Der handschriftlichen Nachlass*, hrgs.von A. Hübscher, Bd. 4, I, dtv., p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> S. Pavel, Ah. Schopenhauer, in: „*The History of Modern Philosophy, An Homage to Professor Ion Petrovici*”, Bucharest, The Romanian Philossophy Society, vol. II, 1938, p. 359.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 360.

romance (*The World as Will*), 1/5 ancient Indian wisdom of the Vedas and Upanishads (*Denial of the World*), 1/5 English empiricism (*Challenging the Old Metaphysics*) and 1/5 Platonism."<sup>1</sup>

Mainly, however, Schopenhauer continues the Platonic and Kantian tradition, rethinking them against a background of assimilation of Buddhist philosophy and of criticism of rationalism and the intellectualism of modern conceptions on man and culture. True, in his program-statement (which opens *The World as Will and Representation*), namely "*the world is my representation*", and also in the idea that "*the thing-in-itself*" is "*the will*" (a metaphysical one, also present in nature) that reveals itself in the arts (especially music), Schopenhauer unites in a proactive idealism the Platonic concept of the idea as prototype and the Kantian requirement of "*metaphysical foundation*" (i.e.: the autonomous affirmation of philosophy) and the romantic mentality on the exemplary value of art as a form of knowledge.

The most typical phrases in Schopenhauer's philosophy are: "*the world is my representation: this is a truth valid with reference to every living and knowing being*"; "*it then becomes clear and certain to man that he does not know a sun and an earth, but only an eye that sees a sun, a hand that feels an earth; that the world around him is there only as representation*"<sup>2</sup>.

This "*world as representation*" is based on "*The World as Will*" and justifies "*the need for metaphysics*".

Schopenhauer's philosophy is above all metaphysical, an overall concept that seeks to reveal the ultimate essence of reality. "Physics - he says - can not keep standing on its own forces; it needs a metaphysics on which to rely, no matter how much contempt it would show for it. The physical explanation as such needs the concurrence of a metaphysical explanation that comes to give it the key to all assumptions and that, consequently, must follow a different path. The absolutely inexplicable side that can be found below any phenomenon shows us that there is deep within the natural order of things something, of a different nature, which is what Kant calls "*the order of the thing-in-itself*" and which is the object of metaphysics."<sup>3</sup>

Schopenhauer is so convinced of the human soul's need for metaphysics that he defines man as a "*metaphysical animal*." Man would have as purpose, as fundamental tendency, to find and uncover the supreme secrets of existence.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of the world "*as Will and Representation*" goes hand in hand with a sustained plea for the need, for the justification of "*metaphysics*" (philosophy). Although not in a traditional sense: "*At the end of my presentation find their rightful place some considerations on my own philosophy. It does not aim to explain the existence of the world from its last grounds: on the contrary, it stays with the factual aspect of the internal and external experience, as they are*

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<sup>1</sup> Joh. Hirscherger, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, II. Teil; Neuzeit und Gegenwart, 4. Aufl., Fftrder, Freigurg, 1960, p. 412.

<sup>2</sup> A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, I, in: Sämtliche Werke, Bd. I, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1986, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Ah. Schopenhauer, „*The World as Will and Representation*” translated by Alex Boboc, Grinta Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca 2008, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> I. Petrovici, Schopenhauer, Bucharest, Alcalay&Co, 1937, p.80.

accessible to each, as arises and shows its true and deep connection, without sending itself to certain external things and their relations to the world.

My philosophy makes no considerations on what is beyond all possible experience, but it offers only clarifications of what goes on in the external world and in the sense of self; it is content to understand the essence of the world by its internal connection with itself. Therefore, philosophy is not immanent in the Kantian meaning of the word. This is exactly why it still leaves out many issues, namely, why what is factually shown is so and not different a.s.o"<sup>1</sup>

In another context, Schopenhauer writes: "Perhaps no other philosophical system is so simple and composed of so few elements like mine"; "in other philosophical systems consistency is so ruled that the sentence is followed by sentence ... My sentences, on the contrary, are not based on chains of conclusions, but directly on the intuited world itself, and the strict consistency present in my system, as in any other, is not usually acquired by simple logic"...<sup>2</sup>

Schopenhauer opposes the positivism of his time, keeping the theoretical tradition of German philosophy. "By metaphysics - he writes - I understand any so-called knowledge, that goes beyond the possibility of experience, beyond nature or the way things appear to us, to give an explanation of what shapes nature one way or another, or in popular speech, of what lies behind nature and makes it possible"<sup>3</sup>.

Schopenhauer wants a certain metaphysics, that would grasp the roots of existence and its intimate remains. The rational construction can never give us this certainty, but intuition will, not a transcendental or supernatural one, but that regular one as soon as we know how to guide it to the mystery of the "thing-in-itself".

The fact that Schopenhauer's metaphysical research is preceded by an important chapter on epistemology shows that he strictly followed the path of Kantian philosophy.

The first part of his major work "*The World as Will and Representation*" deals with epistemology. This is also the least original part of the whole of Schopenhauer's philosophy.

It was left to Schopenhauer's originality to discover the path to lead us to the essence of reality. "There is a difference, says Schopenhauer, between Kant's method and the one I follow. Kant starts from mediated and rational knowledge, but I start from direct and intuitive knowledge. He is the one that measures the height of a tower by its shadow, and I'm measuring it directly by itself"<sup>4</sup>.

In fact, Schopenhauer believes, as Kant, that reason functions are measured only by a mere systematization, an organization of knowledge, without creating anything. Our rational ideas are not creative, nor can they penetrate beyond appearances. "Reason is feminine in nature, it can not give anything until it has

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<sup>1</sup> A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, I, in: *Sämtliche Werke* II, Bd. I, Frankfurt a. M. Suhrkamp, 1986, p. 821: Epiphilosophie.

<sup>2</sup> A. Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralpomena*, I: Fragmente zur Geschichte der Philosophie: 14 Einige Bemerkungen über meine eigene Philosophie, in: *Sämtliche Werke*, IV (1989), p. 162, 163.

<sup>3</sup> A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, II, in: *Sämtliche Werke*, II, Aufl., 1989, p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> Ion Petrovici, Schopenhauer, „*Historical-Philosophical Monography*”, republished, Bucharest, 1997, Euroson \$Book Publishing House, p. 75.

received. *She herself has nothing but modes of reasoning without any substance.*"<sup>1</sup> Schopenhauer believes however that through intuition we can have a unique picture of the thing-in-itself; but not through a mystical intuition, but through a perfectly regular one. Here is one of the most significant innovations this philosopher brought in terms of philosophical methodology. Since the thing-in-itself can be known - a result of regular intuition - then the basis of metaphysical knowledge can be no other than experience. Thus, an end is somehow put to the rooted opinion that metaphysics, speculating on the absolute and the transcendent, can not be established on empirical insights.

It is unprecedented how Schopenhauer thinks the purpose of metaphysics: *"the duty of metaphysics is not to go over the experience that is the world, but rather to come to fully understand the experience, since this, external or internal, is without a doubt the main source of knowledge"*<sup>2</sup>. Since metaphysics raises the question of existence at its core, this problem can only be solved empirically and intuition is the way we can grasp reality immediately, directly; only through intuition can we gain a full knowledge, superior to that we could achieve with our logic.

*"Intuition is not the only the source of true knowledge; it is itself true knowledge, the only one which deserves its name."*<sup>3</sup>

**3.** Thus, Schopenhauer is the most authorized precursor to Bergson – the contemporary French philosopher who built intuitionism. But Bergson, more radical than Schopenhauer in the work of freeing intuition of any intellectual alloy, eventually brings us to regions so estranged from those where the common intuition operates that one might say that it brings us at least near mystical vision.

Schopenhauer not only does not get tired of showing that *"intuition is the primary source of any evidence"* and that *"there is no absolute truth other than in direct or mediated relation with intuition ... and the concepts that eventually lead to intuitions resemble those paths in forests that are lost with no exit"*, but he goes so far with harnessing intuition that he will support that wherever there is a clear intuition of truth, any added demonstrations and rational legitimations are completely useless.

In other words, truth can not be acquired rationally, by scientific demonstrations, it can be given directly by intuition.

Thus, Schopenhauer somehow declares himself an enemy of modern rationalism, which claims that man can come to know both the sensible and the supersensible world through reason; even God is knowable through reason.

In Schopenhauer's opinion, knowledge of the thing-in-itself can not be achieved through reason. He does not trust logic.

Moreover, all of Schopenhauer's philosophy is built around the idea that the thing-in-itself can be sensed, as he feels rational inference can not descend into the deep. Bergson, who also bases his philosophy on intuition, supports as paramount reality from which everything derives a similar concept, *the vital drive* can be another name for will - and he claims that it does not exist in space, it is not

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<sup>1</sup> Ion Petrovici, Schopenhauer, *ibidem*, p. 28-29.

<sup>2</sup> Ion Petrovici, *quoted work*.

<sup>3</sup> Ion Petrovici, *quoted work*

subject to any determinism as it is of an absolute spontaneity, but realizes that he can not remove it from time. Otherwise it would not mean an intuitive reality and Bergson attributes to *the vital drive*, as an absolutely essential note, the flow in pure duration, and even the problem that time is the "*fabric*" of existence itself.

No doubt that Bergson starts from Schopenhauer's metaphysics based on both will and intuition. Intuition is the only source of true knowledge. Intelligence neither creates intuitions, nor can exceed them by itself, but only systematizes them, thus having a secondary role.

Similarly, Bergson believes that man doesn't understand life, consciousness, freedom, pure duration through intelligence, but through intuition<sup>1</sup>.

It is obvious that the two thinkers are related in terms of analysing intuition, but each understands something else by intuition and relates differently to it.

Schopenhauer - although considered an *apostle of pessimism* - believes that the absolute can be known. The important thing is to know how to discover the true way to find it. In this respect, the German philosopher allows us to understand: If we want to get to know reality in itself, stripped of the colorful clothing of appearances, we will have to appeal to intuition. "*True knowledge, direct knowledge is only intuition, fresh and new perception.*"

As Bergson<sup>2</sup> will later state, in Schopenhauer's opinion, man, apart from the direct intuition of immediate data of his own conscience, can also have an intuition of both his inner essence and the essence of other beings, translating into the heart of their reality.

We thus understand that intuition is in the view of both thinkers the process by which we understand both the essence within us and the universal essence.

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<sup>1</sup> H. Bergson, „*Creative Evolution*”, Iasi, European Institute Publishing House, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> H. Bergson, „*Essay on the Immediate Conscience Data*”, Iasi, European Institute Publishing House, 1992.

