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978-0-521-87138-9 - Arthur Schopenhauer: Parerga and Paralipomena:
Short Philosophical Essays: Volume I
Translated and Edited by Sabine Roehr and Christopher Janaway
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Parerga and Paralipomena

Short Philosophical Essays

Volume 1

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

Vitam impendere vero.
[‘To devote one’s life to truth.’
Juvenal, *Satires*, IV. 91]

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Contents

XI

<i>Preface</i>	5
Sketch of a history of the doctrine of the ideal and the real	7
Fragments for the history of philosophy	31
On university philosophy	125
Transcendent speculation on the apparent deliberateness in the fate of the individual	177
Essay on spirit-seeing and related issues	198
Aphorisms on the wisdom of life	273

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Preface^I

VII

These additional writings, delivered subsequently to my more important and systematic works, consist partly of a few essays on a wide variety of special topics and partly of isolated thoughts on even more diverse subjects, all brought together here because, largely due to their subject matter, they could not find a place within the systematic works; some, however, merely because they came too late to claim their rightful place there.

Above all, I had in mind here those readers who are acquainted with my systematic and more comprehensive work, for perhaps they too will find here some desired elucidation. But on the whole the content of these volumes, with the exception of a few passages, will be intelligible and palatable even to those lacking such acquaintance. Nevertheless, the reader familiar with my philosophy will be at an advantage, because it forever casts its light on everything I think and write, albeit only from afar; as, on the other hand, it itself receives some further illumination from everything that emanates from my mind.

Frankfurt am Main, December 1850.

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*Sketch of a history of the doctrine of the ideal
and the real* 3

Plurimi pertransibunt, et multiplex erit scientia

Daniel 12:4

[‘Many shall run through it, and knowledge shall be increased’]

Descartes is justly considered the father of modern philosophy, primarily and generally because he taught reason to stand on its own feet by instructing people to use their own minds, which had rested until then on the Bible on the one hand and Aristotle on the other. He is the father in a particular and more narrow sense¹ because he was the first to become aware of the problem around which all philosophizing has mainly revolved since then: the problem of the ideal and the real, i.e. the question what in our cognition^a is objective and what subjective, thus what is to be ascribed to any things distinct from ourselves and what to ourselves. – For in our heads images arise, occasioned not internally – originating from choice or from the association of ideas – but externally. These images alone are what is immediately known to us, what is given. What kind of relation might they have to things that exist completely separately from and independently of us and that would somehow cause these images? Are we certain that such things are even there? And, in case they are, do the images give us any information about their constitution? – This is the problem, and consequently, for the last two hundred years, it has been the main endeavour of the philosophers to separate the ideal, that is, that which belongs exclusively to our cognition, from the real, that is, that which exists independently of our cognition, clearly in a well-executed, clean cut, and thus to determine their relation to one another.

^a *Erkenntnis*

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- 4 In reality, neither the ancient nor the scholastic philosophers seem to have become distinctly aware of this primordial philosophical problem, although we find a trace of it, as idealism and even as the doctrine of the ideality of time, in *Plotinus*, in *Ennead* III, Book 7, ch. 10, where he teaches that the soul made the world by emerging from eternity into time. It says there, for example: ‘for there is no other place for the universe than soul’^a and also: ‘Time, however, is not to be conceived as outside of soul, just as eternity is not outside being’;^b which in fact already pronounces Kant’s ideality of time. And in the following chapter: ‘and this life generates time. This is why it is said that time came into existence simultaneously with this universe, because soul generated it along with this universe.’^c Nevertheless, the distinctly known and distinctly pronounced problem remains the characteristic theme of *modern* philosophy, after the necessary reflectiveness^d had first been awakened in *Descartes*, who was struck by the truth that we are initially limited to our own consciousness and that the world is given to us only as *representation*. With the help of his well-known ‘I doubt, I think, therefore I am’^e he wanted to emphasize the exclusive certainty of the subjective consciousness, in contrast to the problematic nature of everything else, and to pronounce the great truth that self-consciousness is the only thing truly and unconditionally *given*. Closely considered, his famous proposition is the equivalent of the one I started out from: ‘The world is my representation.’ The only difference is that his stresses the immediacy of the subject, mine the mediacy of the object. Both propositions express the same thing from different angles. They are the reverse of each other and thus related in the same way as the laws of inertia and causality, according to my explanation in the preface of the *Ethics*.^f People have indeed repeated his proposition innumerable times since then, from a mere feeling of its importance and without a clear understanding of its actual meaning and purport. (See *Descartes*, *Meditations*, Med. II,^g p. 15.)² Thus it was he who
- 5

^a οὐ γάρ τις αὐτοῦ τούτου τοῦ παντὸς τόπος, ἢ ψυχὴ (*neque datur alius hujus universi locus, quam anima*)

^b δεῖ δὲ οὐκ ἐξωθεν τῆς ψυχῆς λαμβάνειν τὸν χρόνον, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ τὸν αἰῶνα ἐκεῖ ἐξω τοῦ ὄντος. (*oportet autem nequaquam extra animam tempus accipere, quemadmodum neque aeternitatem ibi extra id, quod ens appellatur.*) [Schopenhauer refers to III, 7, 10, but the two passages actually are from III, 7, 11]

^c οὗτος ὁ βίος τὸν χρόνον γεννᾷ: διὸ καὶ εἶρηται ἅμα τῷδε τῷ παντὶ γεγονέναι, ὅτι ψυχὴ αὐτὸν μετὰ τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς ἐγέννησεν (*haec vita nostra tempus gignit: quamobrem dictum est, tempus simul cum hoc universo factum esse; quia anima tempus una cum hoc universo progeniit*)

^d *Besonnenheit* ^e *dubito, cogito, ergo sum*

^f [*The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, Preface to the first edition, 17–18 (Hübscher SW 4, XXII f.)]

^g [René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*; incidentally, Med. II does not contain the exact phrasing that Schopenhauer provides above]

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[More information](#)*Sketch of a history of the doctrine of the ideal and the real* 9

uncovered the chasm between the subjective, or ideal, and the objective, or real. He clothed this insight in the form of a doubt concerning the existence of the external world; but through his barely adequate way out of this – namely that the benevolent God Almighty could not possibly betray us – he showed how profound the problem is and how difficult to solve. Meanwhile it was through him that this scruple entered philosophy and was bound to continue to trouble people until it was thoroughly laid to rest. Since then the consciousness has existed that without thorough knowledge and elucidation of the described distinction no certain and satisfactory system was possible, and the question could no longer be dismissed.

In order to answer it, *Malebranche* first invented the system of occasional causes.^a He grasped the problem itself, in its full extent, more clearly, more seriously, and more deeply than *Descartes*. (*The Search after Truth*,^b Book III, second part.) The latter had assumed the reality of the external world upon the credit of God; and then it seems strange that, while the other theistic philosophers take pains to demonstrate the existence of God from that of the world, *Descartes*, on the contrary, proves the existence of the world only on the basis of the existence and truthfulness of God; it is the cosmological proof in reverse. Going a step further here as well, *Malebranche* teaches that we see all things immediately in God himself. Of course this is to explain something unknown with the help of something even more unknown. Moreover, according to him, we not only see all things in God; but He is also the only active element^c within them, so that the physical causes are only apparently so, but are mere occasional causes.^d (*The Search after Truth*, Book VI, second part, ch. 3.) So we have here already essentially the pantheism of *Spinoza*, who seems to have learnt more 6
from *Malebranche* than from *Descartes*.

Altogether one might be surprised that pantheism did not gain complete victory over theism already in the seventeenth century; since the most original, beautiful and thorough European expositions of it (for compared to the *Upanishads* of the *Vedas* all of that is nothing) all became known during that period, namely through *Bruno*, *Malebranche*, *Spinoza*, and *Scotus Erigena*. The latter was rediscovered in Oxford, after having been forgotten and lost for many centuries, and first appeared in print in 1681, four years after *Spinoza*'s death. This seems to prove that the insight of individuals cannot prevail as long as the spirit of the age is not ripe to receive it. In our time, on the other hand, pantheism, even if only in *Schelling*'s eclectic and confused revival, has become the prevalent mode of thought of

^a *gelegentlichen Ursachen* ^b *Recherches de la vérité* ^c *Wirkende* ^d *causes occasionelles*

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scholars and even educated people. For Kant had gone before with his overthrow of theistic dogmatism and had cleared the way for it, whereby the spirit of the age got prepared, just as a ploughed field for the seed. In contrast, in the seventeenth century philosophy left that path again, and on the one hand arrived at *Locke*, for whom Bacon and Hobbes had paved the way, and on the other hand, by way of *Leibniz*, at *Wolff*; these two then reigned supreme in Germany in the eighteenth century, even if in the end only by being absorbed into syncretistic eclecticism.

The profound thoughts of *Malebranche* first gave rise to *Leibniz's* system of pre-established harmony,^a whose widespread fame and high repute in its own time prove that the absurd most easily succeeds in the world. Although I cannot claim to possess a distinct grasp of Leibniz's monads, which are mathematical points, physical atoms, and souls at the same time, it seems to me beyond doubt that such an assumption, once established, could serve to avoid all further hypotheses for explaining the connection between the ideal and the real and to dispatch the question by claiming that both are already completely identified in the monads. (For that reason in our own day Schelling, as the originator of the system of identity, has relished this assumption.) However, the famous philosophizing mathematician, polyhistorian, and politician did not favour using them for this purpose; to this end he formulated pre-established harmony instead. The latter provides us with two completely different worlds, each incapable of acting on the other in any way (*Principles of Philosophy*^b §84; and 'Examen du sentiment du P. Malebranche,' pp. 500ff. of Leibniz's *Works*, published by Raspe^c), each one the completely superfluous duplicate of the other. Yet the two are supposed to exist once and for all, run parallel, and be exactly in step with each other to a hair. Therefore the creator of both, right from the beginning, established the most precise harmony between them, in which they now most beautifully run side by side. Incidentally, pre-established harmony might be best made comprehensible by comparing it to the stage, where very often the physical influence^d is present only apparently, as cause and effect are merely connected by means of a harmony pre-established by the director, for example when one character shoots and the other falls down in time.^e In §§62 and 63 of his *Theodicy*,

^a *harmonia praestabilita*

^b [*Principia philosophiae, more geometrico demonstrata: cum exceptis ex epistolis philosophi et scholii quibusdam ex historia philosophica* is the Latin title of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's *Monadology*]

^c [*Examen du sentiment du P. Malebranche que nous voyons tout en Dieu, contre J. Locke*, *Oeuvres philosophiques, latines et françaises, de feu M. de Leibnitz*. Tirées de ses manuscrits qui se conservent de la Bibliothèque royale à Hanovre, ed. Rudolf Erich Raspe, Amsterdam and Leipzig, 1765]

^d *influxus physicus* ^e *a tempo*