

Expert opinion on the bachelor thesis

Stephan Roth, *On the Problem of Freedom of Will in Schopenhauer*

Kant's third antinomy of pure reason concerning freedom, its possibility and its limits, became a strong stimulus for rethinking the concept of freedom in the following philosophical tradition of German Idealism, which can be boldly called *the philosophy of freedom*. Kant's discussion of the notion of freedom aligns itself on the one hand with the Leibnizian spiritual automatism of the *Theodicea*, as well as with Humean skepticism from the position of "common sense," and on the other hand with the strict determinism of Spinoza's thought in his *Ethics*. In any case, without the regulative idea of freedom as the autonomy of the moral person's spontaneous action from him/herself (Lat. *sponte*), it is impossible to think of man as an end or rather purpose, but only as a means.

The gain of Kant's reflections on freedom is the determination of freedom not as opposed to causality or an exception from it, but as a distinct *kind of causality*.

If the philosophy of German Idealism seeks to think through and construct a system of freedom *within* nature and *in accordance with* nature, or to reconcile different kinds of causality that seem to compete or even exclude each other, post-idealist philosophy comes up with a new approach that differs markedly in each of the post-Hegelian thinkers (Feuerbach, Schopenhauer, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche), even if there are some intersections. The present bachelor thesis is devoted to one of these post-Hegelian thinkers, namely Arthur Schopenhauer and his concept of free will. To achieve this end, the author has studied three of Schopenhauer's main writings and several expository articles, from which he has chosen two (by Matthias Koblner on character, and Eugene Thacker on negativity/nihilism) for specific discussion of selected motifs associated with the presented treatment of the question of freedom.

If, according to Schopenhauer, everything in the universe happens on the basis of the principle of sufficient reason, then freedom in principle is not possible at all. And yet Schopenhauer's philosophy is also a philosophy of liberation: how is this possible? If everything is a manifestation of the blind will to life, how can anything appear that goes *against it and denies it*? If action is necessarily caused by real given causes, it is necessarily only *reactive*: how could there be any autonomy, *nota bene* spontaneity? The present work rightly notes the paradoxical situation in the case of Schopenhauer's conception of freedom and points this out through the correct accounts

of Schopenhauer himself and the explanatory literature, *without* attempting any definitive resolution of the problem.

In the context of the discussion of the intelligible human character and the possibility of liberation from the will, the key German term "Besonnenheit", originally from J. G. Herder, comes up on p. 34 (and onwards): could the author further characterize this term and its function?

On page 39, the author discusses the implication of Eugene Thacker's post-humanist thought in Schopenhauer's negative view of reality, suggesting a possible anthropocentrism. But is there really something similar in Schopenhauer?

The notion of negativity from page 40 onwards seems to be almost the first systematic elaboration of nihilism, which, however, would not come until much later in Nietzsche (albeit in the context of a rejection of Schopenhauer's metaphysics in particular). It seems to imply that *any* human action would be justifiable – because *nothing* matters and *everything* is equally worthless. Why, then, live and want anything *at all*? Why wouldn't it be "better" to commit suicide? Or even (to return again to the sufficient reason theorem): *why then is it something rather than nothing?* (Warum ist überhaupt etwas und nicht vielmehr nichts?)

I do recommend the submitted bachelor thesis for defence and I suggest a grade of “very good” (B+).

Aleš Novák, August 9, 2022