

Supervisor's assessment of bachelor thesis

Student: Stephan Roth

Thesis title: On the Problem of Freedom of Will in Schopenhauer

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Stephan Roth embarked on an undoubtedly rocky and adventurous philosophical journey: in his bachelor thesis, Stephan makes the attempt at conceptually and interpretatively unpacking the dark, highly abstract, and mind-bogglingly complicated problem of free will in Arthur Schopenhauer. His attempt is guided by a careful and very competent reading of the relevant primary sources as well as by a selection of recent secondary literature.

Having discussed the nascent work continuously, we have both with Stephan been very much aware of the ultimate impossibility of solving the problem itself. Schopenhauer either is contradicting himself in suggesting both the ubiquitous determinateness of the phenomenal world *and* the possibility of a free action (choosing to refrain from willing), *or* has not sufficiently provided arguments in favour of his claims. In this thesis, we can witness a very speculative and complicated attempt at solving the contradiction by Matthias Koßler. The value of the thesis cannot be judged based on "positive" results. The value lies in the ability to identify and further analyse relevant *philosophemata* regarding the problem of free will *via* discussing Schopenhauer.

The problem itself is already present in its paternal philosophy of Immanuel Kant where, similarly, it cannot be solved. It is, in this sense, a traditional *aporia* which, nonetheless, remains a topical issue, which can best be seen by the never-ending stream of new interpretative attempts at making sense of this fundamental problem (curiously, and quite randomly, I came across a similar attempt in the Czech Philosophical Journal in the 1960s).

What clearly distinguishes the reviewed thesis is its sovereign ability to clearly, succinctly, and concisely discuss extraordinarily difficult philosophical notions. From the reader's perspective, I have very rarely noticed that I am reading a "mere" bachelor thesis. The thesis has beautiful "highlights" in piercing and well-phrased formulations, such as: "What Schopenhauer effectively does with these explanations is to deny the term "willing" the dimension of "wishing" which it has in the German language." 13

Despite this, I do have a few questions to ask:

Even though this is a major motif (not to mistake for "motive"), I would like to hear a clearer position on the problem of motives. What really are motives should they a) be the sufficient reason behind actions, and b) are not acts of willing/wishing/choosing? ["The motives that stand in the subject's mind are mere abstractions of possible causal chains but also stands completely aside the actual forces and concepts that cause human acts." 16 and also: "When saying that practical reason

“guides” human actions Schopenhauer only refers to the modus in which the actions and their motive are cognized and not that the practical reasoning caused any action." 18, finally: "Motivation is the cognitive path for the human understanding of character, the character also being the place where Schopenhauer localizes the “transcendental freedom” and therefore the possibility for an ethics." 32]

Regarding the “Bill example”: how does Bill get to choose to act on his newly understood self-awareness of being an alcoholic? Is this realization the "cause" for his refraining from drinking?

When discussing the Koßler interpretation, I have some doubts: is the quality of the human character to somehow encompass all possible forms singularly human? Why would it be? Also: should it be the case that human character includes the “cosmos” of ideas, how would we arrive at different individual characters? I think that both of these questions can be satisfyingly answered. The real issue is the speculation at the heart of Koßler’s argument, but that cannot really be meaningfully discussed.

For both Koßler and Thacker I am missing a more pronounced author’s critical voice.

As it is, I am very satisfied with the thesis and wholeheartedly recommend it for the defence. It is, as grades go, in my view “excellent” [1].

In Prague on the 6th September 2022

Jakub Marek, Ph.D.