

SCHOPENHAUER AND WITTGENSTEIN: ASSESSING THE BUDDHIST INFLUENCES ON THEIR CONCEPTIONS OF ETHICS

Abstract: In the first part of this essay, the author discusses certain aspects of the Hindu and Buddhist philosophical and religious conceptions that could have made some impact on the European ethics before Schopenhauer. In the second part, he deals with various channels of possible Buddhist influence on Schopenhauer's ethical thought. Finally, in discussing Buddhist-Wittgenstein relationship, one is confronted with convergent, yet independent, responses to similar sets of problems. Independently, and less systematically than Buddhist philosophical schools, Wittgenstein indicates the way of liberation that cures from the "metaphysical pain" emerging from inappropriate use of language. His own project, however, was not metaphysical, but meta-linguistic in a very specific sense. The philosophical "cure" from the language disease leads ultimately to the "purification" and "decontamination" of thought: in turn, the mind rests in peace and silence before the senseless, paradoxical questions of the moral, esthetical, religious or metaphysical character.

Key words: Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein, ethics, Buddhism.

1. Buddhism and European Ethics before Schopenhauer

The first genuine spiritual encounter of India and Europe dates back from the Classical Antiquity. It was not made possible by any "esoteric sponsor" but, typically, by conquest, diplomacy and trade. The peaceful Buddhist missions of King Ashoka reached the Mediterranean in the mid-third century BCE, in order to preach about *ahimsâ* (nonviolence) and spread the good news about the universal victory of *dharma*. However, despite the fact that a Greek-Aramaic inscription, discovered near Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, confirms the existence of those benevolent ethical-political missions, the text itself does not supply us with any information concerning their possible political success. Indeed, a very few literary traces, preserved usually as fragments, shed some more light on the historical East-West meeting which took place in the Hellenistic age.

Here and there, we recognize the traces of the lost Megasthenes'¹ work *Indikâ* (undoubtedly, the most important classical source on Indian religions and caste-systems), or appraise Clement's and Porphyry's early knowledge about Brahmins and Sarmans. We also learn that Christians from the second century had some knowledge of the Buddhist 'virgin Maya', and thus perhaps about one of the versions of Buddha's birth narrative.² On the other hand, one does not possess any firmer evidence for an intriguing possibility that Ashvaghosha's version of Buddha's biography (composed in the first century CE!) influenced the corresponding narratives of Jesus' conception and birth known from Matthew and Luke.³

All in all, our scanty knowledge regarding any possible Hellenistic dialogue between the Greco-Roman/Christian and Indian religious-philosophical traditions should almost solely be confined to Alexander's conquest. According to valuable doxographic accounts of Apollodorus and Diogenes Laërtius, three prominent Greek philosophers found themselves in Alexander's suite: Onesicritus, the disciple of the Cynic Diogenes; Democritus' disciple Anaxarchus of Abdera; and Pyrrho of Elis, one of the forefathers of Skepticism.⁴ In all likelihood, some of those philosophers were able to incorporate some concepts from the Indian spiritual heritage into their own philosophical teachings. We may only assume that atomism of Indian philosophical school *vaiśeṣika* influenced, to a certain extent, the analogous interpretations of Democritus' followers. Diogenes Laërtius even refers that Democritus himself "was a pupil of some of the Magi and Chaldaeans whom Xerxes had left with his father as teachers... Some also say that he made acquaintance with the Gymnosophists in India and that he went to Ethiopia".⁵

¹ Megasthenes served, from 302-291 BCE, as an envoy of the Syrian ruler.

² See M. Vukomanović, *Rani hrišćanski mitovi*, Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 1997, p. 59.

³ Compare, for example, similar themes about Savior's immaculate conception, royal origin or the parallel figures of the wise Asita and righteous Simon. This comparative religious issue was more thoroughly discussed in my paper "Mit o Spasitelju", *Vidici*, no. 1-2 (1987), Belgrade, pp. 44-59.

⁴ Cf. D. Laërtius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (tr. Younge), London: George Bell & Sons, 1891; book 6 (p.249); book 9 (pp.400-402).

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 390-391.

Concerning any possible Buddhist influence on ethics and epistemology of some Greek-Hellenistic philosophical schools, we may contend that Pyrrho's method of suspending judgment (Gr. *epoché*) exhibits an amazing congruity with the original Buddhist meditation system (*dhyâna*). In European philosophy a similar method was elaborated, albeit in a much more profound theoretical manner, in Husserl's phenomenology. As far as I know, Husserl himself never referred to this interesting Buddhist parallel.

In the light of Pyrrhonism, a direct ethical consequence of *epoché* is the tranquility of mind seen as a chief good.⁶ General indifference and absence of all emotions leads a Skeptic to believe that nothing is "honorable or disgraceful, or just or unjust".⁷ By suspending judgment (which results from a more elementary suspension of will), one should be able, according to this classical Skeptic teaching, to avoid all things that depend on themselves. The ethical standpoint that everything is relative toward everything else should, therefore, aid us in avoiding all the apodictic assertions, be they positive or negative: "We suspend our judgment on the ground of their being uncertain; and we know nothing but passions..."⁸

All this may certainly be brought into a closer connection with some major aporetic statements of Hinayana Buddhism. In *Pâsâdika-sutta* (*Digha* III, 136) we encounter one of the oldest formulations of the Buddhist *epoché*⁹:

"There are some ascetics and Brahmins who hold the doctrine and view: (1) that the self and world are eternal; this is true and other view is vain...(2) the self and the world are not eternal...(3) they are both eternal and not eternal...(4) they are neither eternal nor not eternal...(Altogether, eight alternatives are stated about the self and the world – *M. V.*). Now in rejecting and passing beyond these principles of speculations relating to things in the past and things in the future the four Stations of Mindfulness have been thus taught by me and set forth. What are the four? Herein a monk abides contemplating his body, zealous, self possessed, and mindful, dispelling his

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 420.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 418.

⁹ The corresponding Buddhist idea may probably be expressed by the notion *citta-viveka* ("reduction of consciousness").

longing and dejection towards the world...his feelings...his mind...his thoughts. In rejecting and passing beyond the principles of speculations...the four Stations of Mindfulness have been thus taught by me and set forth”.¹⁰

The principle of moral constraint and indifference (*adiaphora*), as well as an inclination towards the ultimate *apatheia* (freedom from emotions), were not, however, the basic features of Pyrrhonism only. They became the common heritage of the most important ethical systems of Late Antiquity. I believe that some of those post-classical schools, such as Cynicism or Pyrrhonism, owed much more to various Oriental influences (including Early Buddhism) than it is usually admitted in some standard histories of Greek philosophy. Some of those syncretistic trends reappeared within the soteriological conceptions of Stoicism and various Hellenistic “gnosticisms”. The Stoic reliance upon the Cynic ethics (which itself markedly resembles some forms of Indian asceticism) had been widely acknowledged in Laërtius time.¹¹ It is also believed that Bardesanes of Edessa, as well as some other Gnostic teachers (e.g. Mani, Basilides, Carpocrates), came into early contacts with Buddhism during their stay in India.¹²

Arthur Schopenhauer, whose own Buddhist inclinations will be discussed later on, maintained, for example, that a systematic study of the Stoics would “convince everyone that the end of their ethics, like that of the ethics of Cynicism from which they sprang, is really nothing else than a life as free as possible from pain and therefore as happy as possible...yet it cannot be denied that the later Stoics, especially Arian, sometimes lose sight of this end, and show a *really ascetic tendency* which is to be attributed to the Christian and *Oriental spirit* in general which was then (i.e. in Late Antiquity - M. V.) *already spreading*” (emphases mine).¹³

¹⁰ *Early Buddhist Scriptures* (tr. E. J. Thomas), London: Kegan Paul, 1935, pp. 198-199.

¹¹ D. Laërtius, *Ibid.* p. 258.

¹² See E. Conze, “Buddhism and Gnosis”, *Further Buddhist Studies*, Oxford, 1975, pp. 15-32 or J. Kennedy, “Buddhist Gnosticism, the System of Basilides”, *JRAS*, 1902, pp. 377-415.

¹³ A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea (WWI)*, vol. II, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957, p. 357.

Ancient Stoic-Skeptic tradition made a significant impact on the most prominent ethical theory of modern Europe – i.e. on Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy. The Kantian Hellenistic ideal, originating, in my view, from the more profound and more systematic ethical teachings of the Buddhist India, has partially become apparent through Scheler's criticism of this famous philosopher. Emphasizing the difference between the Kantian and Christian ethics, Max Scheler associates Kant's moral teaching with the Stoic doctrine: "As Kant and Stoics believed, there is only a connection between the ought and the 'worthiness' of a good man to be, for example, happy".¹⁴

Discussing further the problem of eudemonism, as well as the connections between the "feeling state" and moral value, Scheler compares Stoic ethics with the Buddhist theory of life. Both of these doctrines are then opposed to the Christian theory, because Stoics and ancient Sceptics "considered apathy, i.e. the deadening of sensible feelings, as something good".¹⁵

It is very important, I think, both in terms of Scheler's scrutiny and for a broader understanding of the *apatheia* concept in the discussed ethical systems, to refer to Kant's own apology of that fundamental pre-Christian virtue. Such an apology is to be found in his introduction to the *Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, where it runs as follows:

"The word 'apathy' has come into bad repute, just as if it meant lack of feeling and therefore subjective indifference regarding the objects of choice; it is taken for a weakness. This misinterpretation can be avoided by giving the name '*moral apathy*' (emph. added) to that lack of emotion which is to be distinguished from indifference. In moral apathy the feelings arising from sensible impressions lose their influence on moral feeling... The true strength of virtue is the *mind at rest* (emph. added) with a deliberate and firm resolution to bring its *law* (emph. added) into practice. That is the state of health in the moral life".¹⁶

¹⁴ M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. 329.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

¹⁶ I. Kant, *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue* (tr. J. Ellington), The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1964, p. 68.

If we understand the word ‘law’ from the passage above in the Buddhist sense of *dharma*, the explanation provided by Kant might even appear as a quotation from some *Abhidharma* text! More than apparent are, of course, the corresponding Stoic and Skeptic parallels.

Now that we have established certain historical, as well as conceptual points of comparison between the Buddhist ethics and a very similar line in the development of the European moral philosophy, we are able to highlight some other interesting parallels between the two traditions. We have seen thus far that Kant’s ‘ethos of understanding’ and the Hellenistic ideal of a sage were deeply rooted in a fundamentally rational moral principle. The same type of rationality gave rise to few corresponding ethical conceptions that can be encountered not only in Kant’s *Critique of the Practical Reason*, but also in some of the greatest works of Hindu religious-philosophical literature. What I have in mind here is the Kantian concept of the *ethics of duty*, as well as his idea of the *discipline of the practical reason*. Let me now briefly consider some typical formulations of both these notions. In the first chapter of his *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant postulates that “an action done from duty derives its moral worth, *not from the purpose* which is to be attained by it, but from the maxim by which it is determined and therefore does not depend on the realization of the object of the action, but merely on the *principle of volition* by which the action has taken place, without regard to any object of desire”.¹⁷

On the other hand, the most popular ethics of duty encountered in Hindu philosophy culminates in the following sayings of the *Bhagavad-gita*: “He whose undertakings are all free from desires and self-will, and whose works are consumed in the fire of knowledge – he, by the wise, is called sage. Giving up attachment to the fruit of action, ever content, and dependent on none... Renunciation of the fruit of action is better than meditation; peace immediately follows such renunciation”.¹⁸

It is certainly in complete accordance with various Hindu teachings (and especially in the spirit of *yoga* and Buddhist *dhyana*)

¹⁷ I. Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Ethics* (tr. T. K. Abbott), London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1895, pp. 18-19.

¹⁸ *The Bhagavad-gita* (tr. Swami Nikhilananda), New York: Ramakrishna Vivekananda Center, 1944, pp. 133-134 and 278.

to associate this crucial deontological principle with an appropriate system or discipline of “mind cultivation”. In the light of Kant’s theoretical propositions, it has sometimes been forgotten that this thinker very seriously considered the idea of *practical exercise* through which “the dignity of the pure law” would be upheld.¹⁹ In Kant’s second Critique the same proposal has been developed in the following manner:

“Now there is no doubt that *this exercise and the consciousness of cultivation of our reason* (emph. added) which judges concerning the practical must gradually produce a certain interest even in its own law and thus in morally good actions”.²⁰

As soon as this “matching” brings some effect, “the pure moral motive must be brought to mind This is not only because it is the sole ground of character...but also because, in teaching a man to feel his worth, *it gives his mind a power unexpected even by himself, to pull himself loose from all sensuous attachments...*(emph. added)”.²¹

With the help of these rather detailed quotations from Kant’s opus, I have attempted to show how this entire idea about the cultivation of reason corresponds, to a certain extent, to some aspects of Hindu yoga. It seems that Immanuel Kant – the creator of the most influential ethical system in modern Western philosophy – clearly aligned himself with the Hellenistic model of the *ethos of understanding*, giving it, at the same time, a certain priority to the Platonic-Christian exaltation of the archetypal ideas pertaining to the sphere of the divine transcendence. With his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant, furthermore, prepared the basis for a sort of *atheistic religiosity*, which directly led to Schopenhauer’s and Nietzsche’s penetrating criticisms²² of Judeo-Christian tradition.

Through their genuine insight into the *rational* “advantage” of the Buddhist discipline of practical reason over the Christian

¹⁹ See *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, pp. 56-57, as well as *the Critique of Practical Reason* (tr. L.W. Beck), Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1956, p. 156.

²⁰ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 164.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

²² In the context of our comparative analysis, it is interesting that in both cases such a critique could not be fully accomplished without the strong reliance upon Hindu and Buddhist religious and philosophical heritage.

logique de coeur, both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer emphasized not only the philosophical, but also physiological and hygienic aspects of early Buddhism. Faithful to Shakyamuni's teachings, they both agreed that some 'hygienic measures' were needed for victory over *resentment*. To liberate the soul from various passions is, therefore "the first step towards recovery". Nietzsche's own axiological position "beyond good and evil" is, by the same token, adopted from Buddhist philosophy. On the other hand, Arthur Schopenhauer, the first renowned comparativist philosopher in the history of modern East-West encounters, profoundly recognizes the importance of the Hellenistic schools for the convergent development of the classical ethical concepts such as *ataraxia*, *apatheia* or 'spiritual hygiene'.²³

Not until Schopenhauer wrote his *World as Will and Idea* was the history of Western philosophy able to fully acknowledge its debt to the Oriental moral wisdom that quietly, and almost mysteriously, prompted some of the most significant trends in the continental European ethics.

2. *Consolatio philosophiae: Arthur Schopenhauer and the Rise of the "European Buddhism"*

2.1. *The Sources*

In his preface to the first edition of his major work *The World as Will and Idea* (1818) Arthur Schopenhauer presented his prospective readers with three, apparently pretentious requirements:

- 1) The book should be read twice.
- 2) The introduction to this book, written five years before this work, should be read before the book itself.
- 3) A thorough acquaintance with Kant's principal writings is also expected.

The third requirement is, at the same time, the main presupposition for an appropriate understanding of Schopenhauer's work. "But if, besides this, the reader has lingered in the school of the divine Plato", as Schopenhauer would have it, "he will be so much the better prepared to hear me, and susceptible to what I say. And if,

²³ See, for example, *WWI*, vol. II, ch. XVI.

indeed, in addition to this he is a partaker of the benefit conferred by the Vedas, the access to which, opened to us through the Upanishads, is in my eyes the greatest advantage which this still young century enjoys over previous ones, because I believe that the influence of the Sanskrit literature will penetrate not less deeply than did the revival of Greek literature in the fifteenth century: if, I say, the reader has also already received and assimilated the sacred, primitive Indian wisdom, *then is he the best of all prepared to hear what I have to say to him* (emph. added).²⁴

Now, it would be very interesting to examine how Schopenhauer, at the very outset of the 19th century, could have expected from his readers any knowledge of a still esoteric and generally inaccessible Indian wisdom. How is it possible, one may ask, that the German philosopher so prophetically anticipated a penetrating influence of the Sanskrit literature on the forthcoming generations of scholars?

In order to fully respond to those questions, one is unexpectedly drawn back into history of the famous Taj Mahal Mausoleum in Agra, India. This monument was, namely, built in accordance with the directions of the Persian Shah Jahan. When the emperor's son, Prince Dara Shukoh, sojourned in Kashmir, he had accidentally heard about the Upanishads and enthusiastically ordered their translations into Persian. The translation of 50 Upanishads was completed in 1657, and one century later, the French scholar Anquetil Duperron was already able to read them during his own stay in India. Moreover, Duperron began to prepare the first and (no matter how inaccurate) most famous European translation of those sacred texts. The first translations from Persian into Latin appeared in the *Asiatic Researches Annuals* in 1787, whereas the complete edition was published in Paris in 1802. And those were the paths by which these precious works of the Hindu religious literature reached Schopenhauer, becoming, as he used to say, the solace of his life and the solace of his death.²⁵

In contrast to Schlegel or Humboldt, Schopenhauer himself never learned Sanskrit. He became acquainted with the Upanishads,

²⁴ *WWI*, pp. xii-xiii.

²⁵ *Parerga and Paralipomena* (tr. E. F. J. Payne), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974 (vol. II, § 185). Further – *PP*.

as well as with many other works of Oriental literature, solely through their Latin, English or French translations. Moreover, among his various notes and writings we encounter very precise references to chief sources of his rather impressive knowledge about Brahmanism and Buddhism. We learn, for example, that Schopenhauer was well acquainted with the publications of the Asiatic Society (*Asiatic Researches*), and particularly with the writings of its founder – Sir William Jones.²⁶

It is usually maintained that Schopenhauer's admiration for India had been awakened by the pioneering work of Herder's contemporary F. Majer.²⁷ It seems, however, that the "pessimist philosopher" gained his first more systematic knowledge on Buddhism in the period between the two editions of *The World as Will and Idea*. In any event, his *Parerga and Paralipomena*, a philosophical essay pertaining to Schopenhauer's later phase, contains much more references to various studies on Buddhism.²⁸ His admiration for this religion provided a powerful impetus, so that he occasionally gave it an absolute priority to other traditions.²⁹

Even a less attentive reader of Schopenhauer's major writings can easily observe that their author very often *jointly* mentions or assesses Brahmanism and Buddhism, especially in an attempt to oppose them to some other religious or philosophical doctrines.³⁰ As a rule, such a confrontation takes place within the broader discussions on Judaism and Christianity, or, more specifically, their *theism*. Sometimes Schopenhauer considers one's knowledge of these Indian

²⁶ Cf. *WWII*, note 1 on p. 501. Besides Jones and Duperron, Schopenhauer in the same place mentions Polier's work on Hindu mythology, as well as some contemporary translations of various Orientalists. From the historical point of view it would be worthwhile to notice Schopenhauer's satisfaction with an obvious fact that "in the last forty years (i.e. since the first edition of the *WWI* – M. V.) Indian literature has grown so much in Europe, that the completion of the mentioned bibliographical note would (now) occupy several pages".

²⁷ See R. F. Merkel, "Schopenhauers Indien-Lehrer", *Jahrbuch der Schopenhauer-Gesellschaft* 32 (1945/48), pp. 158-181.

²⁸ Such as I. J. Schmidt's *Geschichte der Ostmongolen* (vol. II, p. 203); Spence Hardy's *Manual of Buddhism* (II, 276); E. Burnhof's *Introduction a l'histoire du Bouddhisme* (II, 382); Upham's "Doctrine of Buddhism" (III, 282), etc.

²⁹ See *WWI* II, p. 371.

³⁰ See, for example, *PP* II, pages 37, 238, 302, 362, 364, 368, 370-371, 376, 378, 381, etc.

religions as a *prerequisite* for any thorough understanding of Christianity. His praise for Hinduism and Buddhism goes, in fact, far beyond a reasonable extent, so that he even tries to convince the reader that the New Testament “must somehow be of Indian origin”!³¹

It seems to me, however, that such a unanimous appreciation of Oriental wisdom conceals an excessive level of anti-Judaism that strikes us almost immediately from the pages of his *Parerga and Paralipomena* (especially in the paragraphs on ethics and religion). It is very difficult to say whether such an antipathy was a result of his purely philosophical rejections of Judaic ‘theism’ and ‘rationalism’, or perhaps a reflection of some more general ideological trends of German Romanticism. At any rate, Schopenhauer hopes, for example, that “one day even Europe will be purified of all Jewish mythology”,³² or that Judaic “crude dogma was sublimated by the Christian”, so it must be admitted that Christianity is “far superior” to Judaism.³³

After these preliminary remarks on the sources of Schopenhauer’s knowledge about Indian religions, let me, at least briefly, reflect upon some issues of Schopenhauer’s philosophy.

2.2. *Mâyâ, Karman, Nirvâna: Three Pillars of Schopenhauer’s Atheism*

The point of departure of Schopenhauer’s philosophy has been partly formulated in the very title of his *opus magnum* by an assertion that the *World is My Idea* (or Representation).³⁴ According to the German philosopher, this is an aprioristic statement “which holds good for everything that lives and knows”. The real foundation of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics is to be encountered in a fundamental belief that the whole world is only an object in relation to the corresponding subject, “perception of a perceiver, in a word, idea”.³⁵ Schopenhauer believed that this metaphysical ‘truth’ had already

³¹ See *PP* II, p. 380.

³² *PP* II, p. 226.

³³ *PP* II, p. 363.

³⁴ I think that the word *re-presentation* is not the completely accurate translation of the German *Vorstellung*, which actually covers the English term *idea*, as well as *presentation* (*pre-* is, namely, the true equivalent of the German *vor-*, while the prefix *re-* implies the reversibility of a certain process).

³⁵ *WWI* I, p. 3.

been expressed in Berkeley's idealism, as well as in the Vedantic school of Indian philosophy.

The essence of this teaching is, therefore, not new. In the same line with Heraclitus, Plato, Spinoza and Kant, Schopenhauer puts "the ancient Indian wisdom", i.e. the doctrine of *mâyâ* understood as a "veil of deception, which blinds the eyes of mortals, and makes them behold a world of which they cannot say either that it is or that it is not: *for it is like a dream* (emph. added); it is like the sunshine on the sand which the traveler takes from afar for water or the stray piece of rope he mistakes for a snake".³⁶

From such a philosophical viewpoint one may, therefore, quite naturally pose the question about the actuality of an outer world, i.e. about the possibility of distinction between dream and reality. In order to remain faithful to his initial metaphysical conception, Schopenhauer allows that it is impossible to make any absolute distinction between dreams and reality, phantasms and real objects: "Life and dreams are leaves of the same book".³⁷

Schopenhauer's "dream theory" is, again, nothing new either in European or Eastern philosophy. In almost identical form we encounter it both in Taoism and in Heraclitus' fragments.³⁸ Nevertheless, Schopenhauer mainly relies on the Vedanta doctrine of *mâyâ*: the world itself is experienced as a mere dream or an illusion. On the other hand, Schopenhauer wrongly assumes that the roots of this Indian doctrine may be recognized back in the Vedic times. For even in the most ancient Upanishads (e.g. *Brihadâraṇyaka*) the concept of *mâyâ* had not been used in the same sense in which Schopenhauer began to employ it. In ancient brahmanic literature, including the Vedas and older Upanishads, *mâyâ* was still understood as a creative divine power by which this world came into being. Not until the later Upanishads did *mâyâ* obtain another meaning: that of the world-delusion, dream and phantasm. This case may serve as a good example of how Schopenhauer himself acquired his knowledge about Indian religious-philosophical traditions. In early 19th century it was hardly possible for such an inspired thinker (without an appropriate linguis-

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁸ E.g. the anecdote about Chuang-tzu and a butterfly, or Heraclitus' fragments 21, 88, 89.

tic “equipment”) to go far beyond the unsystematic information obtained from various missionary publications.

The second basic axiom of Schopenhauer’s system is summarized in his statement that the “World is the Objectivation of Will”. Led by Kant’s distinction between the ‘phenomenon’ and the ‘thing-in-itself’, Schopenhauer opposed the world presentation to *will*, its real basis and presupposition. Will is, therefore, the essential characteristic of a human being as a ‘subject’, and natural initiator of human action.³⁹ Furthermore, will is the eternal and indestructible essence of every living organism; it is absolutely confronted with the impermanence of the world, time/space and appearance. Will objectifies itself within the realm of this transient world. Its objectivation is the energy of action or creation by which the entire phenomenal world has come into being. Like the Vedic Ishvara, a human being also partakes in creating and shaping this world. Their different degrees of perfection are the only points of distinction in such formations. According to Schopenhauer, it is important to understand that will is the universal principle of volition, both in the organic and inorganic realms of existence. Hence this impulse is blind and unconscious, emerging from the same primary instinct – will to life. The whole existence oscillates between the two poles – life and death. Only will, taken as a thing-in-itself, never dies. By the same token, fear from death is senseless, because it stems from the fear of pain that may be experienced during the dying process.

It is apparent, I think, that the doctrine of will as an energy of action roughly corresponds to the ancient Indian *karma-samsara* theories. Both Vedantic and Buddhist interpretations of this teaching emphasize the similar vitalism and dynamics encountered in Schopenhauer’s “voluntaristic” ethics. The action (*karman*) that stems from the willing is the principal cause of becoming and disappearing (i.e. continuous rebirth) of living organisms. The world is the result of that effort, of that constant drive towards re-shaping the reality. And this willing may be endless, representing the ultimate cause of all rebirth. Very often, Schopenhauer’s crucial arguments are borrowed from Indian soteriological conceptions. On the other hand, he is able to accommodate those Oriental teachings to his own concepts and ideas. A relation of convergence may certainly be established

³⁹ Cf., for example, his explanation on the page 153 (*Ibid.*).

between his and Indian philosophies. A unique blending of these two perspectives – sometimes labeled as “European Buddhism”⁴⁰ – emerged from this.

However simplified it may seem, Schopenhauer’s version of Buddhism contributes, indeed, to the first comparative encounter or, rather, creative dialogue between the East and the West in the history of European metaphysics and ethics. With this in mind, let me consider some of the more explicit theoretical contributions of the Buddhist “partner” in this dialogue. We have already mentioned Schopenhauer’s inquiry into the chainlike structure of the principle of volition and karmic causality. This whole idea is very precisely formulated in the first volume of his *World as Will and Idea*, within the unusual context of discussion about the Object of Art. There it runs as follows:

“And *willing* arises from *want*, therefore from *deficiency*, and therefore from *suffering*. The satisfaction of a wish ends it; yet for one wish that is satisfied there remain at least ten which are denied. Further, the desire lasts long, the demands are infinite; the satisfaction is short and scantily measured out. But even the final satisfaction is itself only apparent; every satisfied wish at once makes room for a new one; both are illusions; the one is known to be so, the other not yet. No attained object of desire can give lasting satisfaction, but merely a fleeting gratification; it is like the alms thrown to the beggar, that keeps him alive to-day that his misery may be prolonged till the morrow (emph. added)”⁴¹

Affliction is, therefore, the prevalent content of human life. The satisfaction of the desire is only ostensible, so that the new wants and needs lead to repeated dissatisfactions, etc. Happiness is always an unattainable human goal if it arises from an effort of will to accomplish any temporary purpose. After a certain period of life, one becomes aware of the painful fact that the ultimate goal may never be attained. The subject of willing behaves like Sisyphus, Ixion or Tantalus.⁴² Suffering and pain become the only certain realities, while death is the final result of the will to life.

⁴⁰ The expression itself is borrowed from F. Nietzsche. He associated it, however, with the ‘nihilistic catastrophe’ which, in his view, is an essentially European phenomenon. In contrast to Nietzsche, I employ “European Buddhism” in a more positive, “dialogical” sense.

⁴¹ *WWI*, p. 253.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 254.

Schopenhauer, therefore, attempts to find the solution for endless suffering and pain in quite another direction. His examination is based on the insight that any affirmation of life, i.e. the positive realization of will, finally brings evil into play. If this positive act of will leads to the ultimate pain, suffering, disease or death, then the authentic response to life should be *negative* in its character. The natural result of this existential experience of affliction and pain is the *disgust* or *abhorrence* expressed toward world and life, an awareness of their worthlessness. The negative attitude towards life results in the claim for denial or cessation of will. The chain of suffering and pain must, therefore, be ceased in an opposite direction.⁴³

This, however, does not mean that Schopenhauer recommends suicide as final solution. On the contrary. Suicide is, in fact, “a phenomenon of strong assertion of will”.⁴⁴ It is the expression of human *weakness*, his inability to overcome the life pain. One should, however, confront the suffering in an utterly different manner. *Via negativa* recommended by Schopenhauer may only be realized by *askesis*. Asceticism is understood as a gradual negation of will, a slow, but thorough elimination of the causes of suffering. The ascetic effort is, at the same time, the last act of will by which it definitely denies itself, bringing its own essence on the level of absurdness. According to Schopenhauer, this is the only appropriate way leading to absolute liberation. As we have already pointed out, such a liberation is to be found in an absolute and eternal peace, in ‘cooling down’ one’s life: “No will: no idea, no world. Before us there is certainly only nothingness”.⁴⁵

Although Schopenhauer himself never explicitly said that, it is hard to avoid the impression that this entire theoretical scheme – the core of his ethical conception – represents an original adaptation of the traditional Buddhist doctrine.⁴⁶ The negation of suffering and pain originating in the will to life is interpreted in the classical Buddhist ethics of the Hinayana school as the neutralization of the

⁴³ This argumentation is more thoroughly elaborated in the fourth book of *WWI*, vol. I.

⁴⁴ *WWI* I, p. 514.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 531.

⁴⁶ It is certainly no accident that the last footnote, encountered at the very end of his exposition, refers to the Buddhist Prajna-Paramita teaching, as well as to J. J. Schmidt’s work “Über das Mahajana und Pratschna-Paramita”.

karmic causality that ultimately leads to Nirvana, the final “extinction of the fire of life”.

The genuine Buddhist teaching, formulated in the chain-of-causation doctrine (*paticca-samuppanna*), might have been familiar to Schopenhauer through some English translations and interpretations of the Buddhist canonical writings.⁴⁷ The German philosopher’s ethical conception, in which the exposition of this chain-of-causation occupies very dominant position, reminds very much of the Buddhist analysis of the twelve ‘links’ (*nidāna*) scheme. This scheme exemplifies the chain of causation as constantly renewing in the Samsara-circle of life and death. According to this Buddhist conception, which basically relies on the traditional Indian doctrine of karma and its origin, all the dispositions finally originate in ignorance. The ignorance (*avidyā*) causes the aggregates (*samkhāra*), whereas the aggregates generate consciousness (*vidyāna*), name-and-form (*nama-rupa*) and feeling (*vedanā*). From feeling, again, the ‘thirst of life’ (*tanhā*) and the desire to be (*upadana*) eventually arise. Being (*bhavo*), rebirth (*dyāti*), old age and death (*dyarā-maranam*) are ultimately caused by that desire. The chain of causation is not unrepeatable, but may be applied to all possible incarnations, i.e. to the potential lives and deaths of any individual.

Schopenhauer thus searched for a way out of the Samsara-circle in an ascetic striving for Nirvana, the final “extinction” of the “fire of life”. In fact, he only followed the way of Gautama Buddha, opened up twenty-five centuries ago. In that sense, Schopenhauer’s “nihilism” represents a kind of modern philosophical interpretation of the ancient Buddhist doctrine about the ‘worthlessness of the self’ (*sunna-vāda*).

Consequently, Schopenhauer was one of the rare modern European thinkers who had accepted Shakyamuni’s ‘four noble truths’ (the truth about the pain, about the origination of pain, about the cessation of it and about the path to its cessation). This doctrine found its appropriate setting in the heart of the lonesome German philosopher who, until the very end of his life, sought for his only consolation in the newly recovered works of Indian religious literature.

⁴⁷ Such as the popular textbook *Milindapanho* (“The Questions of King Milinda”), or the collection of suttas *Samyutta-nikaya* (cf. II, 10 in *Early Buddhist Scriptures*, pp. 118-121).

3. Wittgenstein and Buddhism or How to Shew the Fly the Way out of the Fly-Bottle

Thus far I have been presenting various channels of possible Buddhist influence on the European and, in particular, Schopenhauer's ethical thought. It seems quite understandable that the discussion of the post-classical, Hellenistic, as well as Schopenhauer's moral conceptions has led from the question of sources (both historical and literary ones) to some more specific issues of comparative or hermeneutical character.

As for Wittgenstein's philosophy, our approach should be guided by an entirely different procedure. So far as I was able to discern, one may not ascribe any *direct* impact of Buddhist philosophy onto Wittgenstein's thought. Indeed, nothing is known of any sources of such an influence. In contrast to Schopenhauer, who is truly impressed by almost every sutta or stanza from the Indian religious writings, Wittgenstein *does not refer* to any work or passage from that literature. Furthermore, the philosopher from Vienna rarely refers to other authors at all. And when he does so, it is not unusual that amongst his various notes, sketches and brackets we find the name of Arthur Schopenhauer. We ought to be cautious enough, however, not to overemphasize an obvious link between the two philosophers. For it is hard to attest that Schopenhauer – an ingenious philosophical transmitter of Oriental heritage though he was – played any significant mediating role in prompting Wittgenstein's interest for Buddhism. At this point I agree with Chris Gudmunsen who claims that even if there were some similarities between Wittgenstein and Buddhism, they had not been “passed on via Schopenhauer” who himself influenced Wittgenstein on different issues.⁴⁸ It is, in fact, much easier to assess the importance of Schopenhauer's impact on the “ethical” Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*,⁴⁹ than to determine any corresponding affinities between the Schopenhauer-Buddhist lines of thought and Wittgenstein's conception of ethics.

⁴⁸ See C. Gudmunsen, *Wittgenstein and Buddhism*, New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1977, p. 112.

⁴⁹ Cf., for example, the studies of R. B. Goodman, “Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein on Ethics”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* vol. 17, no. 4 (1979) and J. S. Clegg, “Logical Mysticism and the Cultural Setting of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*”, *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* vol. 59 (1978).

In my approach to this problem I am, therefore, left with the third, and probably most productive hypothesis: in discussing Buddhist-Wittgenstein relationship, one is actually confronted with the convergent, yet independent, responses to similar sets of problems. One should bear in mind, however, that some striking similarities occurring between Wittgenstein's and Buddhist (especially Mahayana) philosophical conceptions may not so easily be observed in the more specific area of ethics and religion.⁵⁰

To bring this out, we first note that Ludwig Wittgenstein (in contrast to Moore or Russell) did not systematically write on the topics of "practical philosophy". Even among his various posthumously published manuscripts,⁵¹ ethical and religious problems were discussed in proportionally lesser extent. Simultaneously, this does not mean that Wittgenstein neglected, or less respected those practical matters. On the contrary, as T. Redpath has aptly pointed out, it is more likely that Wittgenstein expressed a kind of 'religious attitude' towards moral and esthetic judgments. In this connection it may be said that Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus* and "Lecture on Ethics" treated ethics as transcendental or even supernatural.⁵² Well known is, of course, Wittgenstein's "explosive" metaphor that "we cannot write a scientific book, the subject matter of which could be intrinsically sublime and above all other subject matters...if a man could write a book on Ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world". In other words, any attempt at putting ethical (or, for that matter, religious) expressions into the language of logical analysis, would inevitably result in nonsense.

On the other hand, in his 1919 letter to Ficker, Wittgenstein surprisingly uncovers the point of his *Tractatus* as "an ethical one... *My book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the inside as it were...* I have managed...to put everything into place by being silent about it" (emph. added).⁵³

⁵⁰ In the most detailed analysis written in English of those convergent "movements of thought", i.e. in Gudmunsen's book *Wittgenstein and Buddhism* (chapter on Ethics and Religion), we find very little material that would lead us to accept any overly optimistic resolution to this problem.

⁵¹ See Bibliography.

⁵² *Tractatus* 6.421.

⁵³ Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Letter to Ficker, 1919), Oxford, 1967, pp. 143-144.

One could better understand what Wittgenstein really meant with this seemingly ambiguous pronouncement if one recalls his pregnant “ladder metaphor” appearing at the very end of his Tractarian enterprise.⁵⁴ More precisely, the *Tractatus* may be understood as a book on ethics in the sense that it “draws the (inside) limits” to the sphere of the ethical, by making use of language (propositions) that must be *transcended* at the very moment when they cease to perform their supporting function.

What is implied by this proposal is that almost entire theoretical enterprise undertaken in the *Tractatus* and “A Lecture on Ethics” represents a unique *peirastiké*,⁵⁵ or setting the boundaries of language in the similar sense in which Kant “measured the extent” of the domain of pure understanding in his first Critique. Wittgenstein’s philosophical task is, in my view, “critical” or “peirastic” in pretty much the Kantian manner, albeit applied on different sets of problems. It is, moreover, reductive or “*epoché*-al” in the vein of the same tradition leading from Pyrrho, via Stoics and Kant to Husserl and two modern representatives of “European Buddhism – Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. And hereby we arrive at the Buddhist pole of the discussed relationship. But before I refer to some similarities with Buddhism, it would be worthwhile, I think, to reflect more carefully on what is actually implied by the above proposal.

In his conclusions to both *Tractatus* and “A Lecture on Ethics”, the author exhibits a very similar methodical attitude towards all attempts to exceed the limits of language:

“What we cannot speak about we must consign to silence”.
(*Tractatus*, 7)

“My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was *to run against the boundaries of language* (emph. mine). This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless” (*A Lecture on Ethics*, p.13).

Going beyond language means, accordingly, to go beyond the *world, life and self*.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ See *Tractatus*, 6.54.

⁵⁵ An Aristotelian term which basically means “defining” or “determining the limits” (scope) of a subject matter.

⁵⁶ See *Tractatus* 5.6; 5.621; 5.63, etc.

After his comprehensive comparative inquiries into the worlds of various mythologies and religions, the German 19th century philologist Max Müller came to a firm conclusion that *myth* originated in the self-deception and deficiency, in a sort of weakness or ‘disease’ characteristic of language.⁵⁷ We could perhaps, by making use of a similar analogy, declare that Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* was fully alive to the same weakness of language pertaining to any hopeless attempt to go beyond its “natural” boundaries. Moreover, his own philosophical enterprise consisted very much of a “therapeutic” effort to “cure” or “clean” theories from different kinds of “pollution”. *Therapeia logou* or “the therapy of language” was, in fact, a unique Wittgensteinian technique of “showing the fly the way out of the bottle”.⁵⁸ I am inclined to believe that this same therapeutic method should not be confined to the *Tractarian* Wittgenstein only. It finds its adequate expression further, in his “second phase” (*Philosophical Investigations*), where it was metaphorically described as the aim of his philosophy.

Comparing the work of the Viennese philosopher with Nagarjuna’s Buddhist teaching, Fred Streng appropriately asserts that Wittgenstein’s method was founded on the assumption that “the metaphysical systems are mental constructs produced to a large extent *from an extension of functional relationship of words*” (emph. added).⁵⁹ When we develop further this interesting Buddhist-Wittgenstein parallel, we find that the liberation of thought, according to both philosophies, consists of freeing oneself from the burden of superfluous concepts and problems rooted in the illegitimate extension of verbal boundaries. Philosophy is, therefore, “a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language”. In the context of Buddhist religious philosophy, a similar principle carries a specific weight both in the classical teachings of the Theravada school,⁶⁰ and in the Mahayana philosophy of Nagarjuna or various Zen teachers.⁶¹ Especially in Zen does the paradoxical nature of

⁵⁷ Max Müller, “The Philosophy of Mythology”, appended to his *Science of Religion*, London, 1873, pp. 353-355.

⁵⁸ *Philosophical Investigations*, 309.

⁵⁹ See Gudmunsen, *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁶⁰ Let us recall the Early Buddhist doctrine of “vain speculations” (*Digha* III, 136) - note 10 of this essay.

⁶¹ On the parallels with Nagarjuna, see Gudmunsen (ch. 5) and F. Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1967.

koans display an anti-metaphysical, practical impact. The way things really are cannot be described by words.⁶² The “real nature of Buddha” in Zen, as well as the ethical or religious postulates about the ultimate good, absolute value or existence of God (Wittgenstein) may not be expressed by standard verbal means; the potential misuse of language could not even be avoided by the employment of similes, allegories or metaphors.⁶³ This is the case with Zen *koans*, and the same applies to Wittgenstein’s own aphorisms.

How can all this be related to Wittgenstein’s conception of ethics? Independently, and less systematically than the Buddhist philosophical schools, Wittgenstein indicates the way of liberation that cures from the “metaphysical pain”⁶⁴ emerging from inappropriate use of language. He does not recommend either positive or negative ‘hygienic measures’ prescribed by Stoics, Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, remaining thus more faithful to Kant’s *critical and agnostic* heritage. His own project, however, was not *metaphysical*, but *meta-linguistic* in a very specific sense. The philosophical “cure” from the language disease leads ultimately to the “purification” and “decontamination” of thought (mind, consciousness): in turn, the mind rests in peace and silence before the senseless, paradoxical questions of the moral, esthetical, religious or metaphysical character. If there is any area of the transcendent, supernatural values placed beyond our relative conceptions of good and evil, right and wrong, we should respect it profoundly, silently and, at the same time, not ridicule it with futile attempts of a fly seduced by an empty bottle.

⁶² Gudmunsen, *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁶³ See “A Lecture on Ethics”, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Note Wittgenstein’s frequent variations on the pain-theme in *Philosophical Investigations* (I 253; 284-296; 310ff; 315ff; 350ff, etc).

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ŠOPENHAUER I VITGENŠTAJN: RAZMATRANJE
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Sažetak

Ovaj esej se sastoji iz tri dela. U prvom delu autor razmatra izvesne aspekte hinduističkih i budističkih filozofskih i religijskih doktrina koje su mogle imati uticaja na evropsku etiku do Šopenhauera. Na primer, Pironov metod uzdržavanja od suda ispoljava zapanjujuću sličnost s izvornim budističkim metodom meditacije (*dhyâna*). U evropskoj filozofiji sličan metod je razvijen u Huserlovoj fenomenologiji, iako na jedan puno složeniji teorijski način. Razmatranje postklasičnih, helenističkih moralnih doktrina vodi od problema izvora (istorijskih i literarnih) do nekih specifičnih pitanja komparativne ili hermeneutičke prirode. Pa ipak, u povesti zapadne filozofije nije se jasno ukazalo na dug budističkoj etici sve dok Šopenhauer nije napisao *Svet kao volja i predstava*. U drugom delu rada autor se stoga bavi različitim tokovima mogućeg budističkog uticaja na Šopenhauerovu etičku misao. Vrlo često Šopenhauerovi ključni argumenti su pozajmljeni iz indijskih soterioloških učenja. S druge strane, on je u stanju da prilagodi ta orijentalna učenja svojim vlastitim pojmovima i idejama. Između njegove filozofije i indijskih filozofija moguće je uspostaviti odnos konvergentnosti. Iz toga je proizišlo jedinstveno stapanje dveju perspektiva koje se ponekad označava i kao „evropski budizam“.

Za razliku od Šopenhauera, Vitgenštajn ne upućuje ni na kakvo delo, ili odlomak iz hinduističke ili budističke literature. Štaviše, teško je braniti stav da je Šopenhauer imao ikakvu značajniju posredničku ulogu u buđenju Vitgenštajnovog interesovanja za budizam. Mnogo je, u stvari, lakše ukazati na važnost Šopenhauerovog uticaja na „etičkog“ Vitgenštajna iz *Tractatusa*, nego utvrditi ikakvu sličnost između šopenhauerovsko-budističke i Vitgenštajnovе etičke koncepcije. Raspravljajući o odnosu između Vitgenštajna i budizma, susrećemo se s konvergentnim, ali nezavisnim odgovorima na slične vrste problema. Nezavisno, i manje sistematično od budističkih filozofskih škola, Vitgenštajn ukazuje na put oslobođenja što leži od „metafizičke boli“ zasnovane na nepravilnoj upotrebi jezika. Međutim, njegov vlastiti projekat nije bio *metafizički*, već *metalingvistički* u jednom vrlo specifičnom smislu. Filozofsko „izlečenje“ od bolesti jezika vodi, u krajnjoj liniji, do „očišćenja“ i „dekontaminacije“ misli. Kao rezultat toga, um nalazi spokoj i mir pred besmislениm, paradoksalnim pitanjima moralnog, estetičkog, religijskog ili metafizičkog karaktera.

Ključne reči: Šopenhauer, Vitgenštajn, etika, budizam.