resurrección pertenece al ámbito sobrenatural, de fe. En la última filosofía de Soloviev parece oponerse la *ética* como doctrina, representada por Tolstoi y sus principios morales pseudocristianos pero meramente humanos, a una *salvación* netamente sobrenatural, distinta de cualquier realización terrena de la paz universal o de la anulación de la pobreza. Por eso, aunque su Anticristo realice obras "buenas", éstas no lo son realmente, porque las realiza sólo por amor propio, confiando sólo en sí mismo, y sin referencia alguna a Dios. La mentira es la misma de siempre: seréis como dioses, no habrá otro Dios que vosotros. Del mismo modo, la perfecta síntesis de todas las contradicciones se muestra como un engaño, tanto más peligroso mientras más apariencia de bien reviste.

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Michael TANNER: *Schopenhauer* London: Phoenix, 1998, 54 pp.

Recent years have witnessed a modest but encouraging revival of scholarly interest in Schopenhauer within the English-speaking philosophical world. In the past two decades, a spate of studies and monographs have appeared —some of very high calibre— which have critically examined Schopenhauer's metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics, and moral philosophy[1]. This is not even to mention those historical works that deal with Schopenhauer's place in culture, whether as a conduit through which Eastern ideas flowed into Europe, or as what Nietzsche called an "educator": a thinker whose influence over writers and artists of undeniable importance (Nietzsche, Wagner, Bur-

[1] Here are some representative studies, listed in alphabetical order: John Atwell, *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World: The Metaphysics of Will.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); John Atwell, *Schopenhauer: The Human Character.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); D.W. Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer.* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); Christopher Janaway (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Christopher Janaway, *Schopenhauer.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Christopher Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Julian Young, *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer.* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987).

ckhardt, Tolstoy, Turgenev, De Maupassant, Conrad, Hardy, Mann, Freud, Jung, Wittgenstein, Borges) is remarkable[2].

With the publication of *Schopenhauer* Michael Tanner —currently Dean of Corpus Christi College at Cambridge University— has made a welcome contribution to this slowly growing body of secondary literature. More of a free-standing, impressionistic essay than a detailed scholarly *tour de force* bristling with defensive footnotes and haughty *ex cathedra* pronouncements, Tanner's slim volume offers a selective but illuminating whistle-stop tour through *The World as Will and Representation*. Instead of attempting a comprehensive inventory and painstaking dissection of Schopenhauer's principal arguments or theses, Tanner has chosen to focus his reflections on a single point: Schopenhauer's claim that aesthetic experience can offer us some relief from the vanity and misery that essentially permeate human life. His theme, in other words, is the relation between pessimism and art. The first half of *Schopenhauer* concerns the former; the second half, the latter.

After a brief explanation of the idealist framework Schopenhauer inherited from Kant (pp. 1-9), Tanner introduces Schopenhauer's distinctive contribution to philosophy: the metaphysical thesis that the thing in itself, far from being absolutely unknowable as Kant held, is essentially what makes itself known to my self-consciousness as will —primal, blind, irrational and, above all, insatiable. Tanner's description of the will is as simple as it is memorable: "Look at a baby lying in its bed and crying for milk or attention; that is Schopenhauer's picture of what we basically are. Our bodies are literally, for him, the phenomenal representation of our wills. And these wills are not subject to the constraint of reason: they are imperious, impatient and, of course, in the first place entirely egoistic" (p. 11).

This identification of the Kantian *Ding an sich* with the will forms the cornerstone of Schopenhauer's pessimism. The basic idea is straightforward: since the world is essentially will, and since the will is essen-

[2] Cf. Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

tially evil, it follows that the world is fundamentally bad. Moreover, this is *necessarily* the case: evil is rooted in the very nature of things, and is not a contingent or accidental feature of the world that might conceivably be eliminated by political or social reform, scientific progress, technological advances, or human effort. Evil, in a word, is here to stay. Or so, at any rate, Schopenhauer maintained.

What Schopenhauer offers us, then, is a reasoned defence of a philosophical thesis about the world in general, according to which we are doomed to be unhappy and miserable. The discussion of that thesis occupies the first half of Tanner's book, which contains many perceptive remarks about the metaphysical foundations of Schopenhauer's pessimism. Not the least of Tanner's achievements is the fact that he has managed to capture the distinctive flavour of Schopenhauer's philosophy in less than a paragraph of lucid and unpretentious prose: "One of the things that distinguishes Schopenhauer from most other philosophers is his insistence that the world is not the place we would like it to be; and he has no patience with attempts to write off as "mere appearances" all those elements in life, such as pain, decay, death and the rest of the conditions of existence which Plato and many since have denied, creating a world according to what they fancy. Indeed, Schopenhauer goes to extreme lengths to stress precisely those things that most philosophers have neglected or denied" (p. 8).

One would be hard pressed to convey the gist of Schopenhauer's thought more economically. For this brief description brings together the central themes of Schopenhauer's philosophy —his insistence on the priority of the will over the intellect; his pessimistic appraisal of human life; his understanding of the body; his analyses of madness, sexual love and death; the importance he attaches to art— most of which had received precious little attention from philosophers prior to the publication of *The World as Will and Representation*.

Tanner then goes on to make some helpful and perceptive remarks about Schopenhauer's metaphysics. He asks whether "will" is really the best way to describe what Schopenhauer regards as underlying all appearances (p. 13); wonders how Schopenhauer can describe the noumenal will using concepts

that can only be validly applied to phenomena (p. 14); doubts whether it makes sense to speak of willing in general as the kind of thing that might have a final goal (p. 17); discusses the logical connection between the metaphysics of the will and the pessimism thought to flow from it (pp. 14-21); examines and rejects the claim that pain is positive, and pleasure a mere privation (pp. 21-23); and, finally, expounds and criticizes Schopenhauer's arguments against suicide, which are —as Tanner duly notes— reminiscent of Christian moral teachings (pp. 29-31). All these topics are handled deftly.

Nevertheless, this half of the book is not free of problems. First, there is one error which is a positive howler. Tanner writes: "If the term 'pessimism' means the view that this is the worst of all possible worlds, or something like that, then it is a grave mistake for Schopenhauer to be called a pessimist" (p. 29). No; the grave mistake is Tanner's: Schopenhauer explicitly says that this *is* the worst of all possible worlds, since no world worse than ours could exist (i.e. —it simply would fall apart, or collapse). He writes: "But against the palpably sophistical proofs of Leibniz that this is the best of all possible worlds, we may even oppose seriously and honestly the proof that this is the worst of all possible worlds... [S]ince a worse world could not continue to exist, it is absolutely impossible; and so this world itself is the worst of all possible worlds"[3].

A second, and more general, problem is that Tanner often writes as if Schopenhauer simply set out his pessimism more or less dogmatically, without bothering to defend it with arguments. He claims that the author of *The World as Will and Representation* "doesn't produce tight or even loose arguments a great deal of the time. Rather he writes incrementally, more or less making the same point but gradually piling on what is usually the agony... His prose has more colour than that of most philosophers; indeed, he cultivates a careful literary style, for which we may be grateful at the same time as we need to be vigilant to see that he is not per-

[3] See p. 583 of Volume II (§46) of *The World as Will and Representation*. trans. E.F.J. Payne. 2 volumes. (New York: Dover, 1966).

suading us by mere rhetoric rather by argument" (pp. 16-17).

Similar complaints about Schopenhauer leaning on rhetoric rather than logic can be found throughout the text (cfr. pp. 19, 20-21, 27).

Virtually no-one, I think, would claim that Schopenhauer is as nimble and inventive a dialectican as (say) Aquinas or Hume; nor would anyone deny he was a superb stylist, a writer gifted with a refined literary sensibility. Nonetheless, Tanner is not being entirely fair here, especially since he occasionally misrepresents or even ignores some of Schopenhauer's arguments for pessimism. To wit: Tanner rightly notes that Schopenhauer regards happiness and pleasure as privations (that is, as mere relief from pain and torment, not as something positive in their own right); but in Tanner's text this appears to be an arbitrary assertion, since no mention is made of the two arguments Schopenhauer repeatedly used to defend that thesis. The first argument is metaphysical: since to desire means to suffer a lack or want, happiness (understood as the satisfaction of desire) is merely the elimination of pain or suffering. The second is phenomenological: we are aware only of pain, but never of pleasure, as something positive[4]. These may or may not be good arguments; but they surely deserve more consideration than they receive here.

We have seen that Schopenhauerian pessimism is a very gloomy doctrine indeed; but Tanner denies that it robs us of all consolation, rightly noting that Schopenhauer offers "recipes... for making life more tolerable than his many gloomy accounts suggest it ever could be" (p. 31). Chief among the palliatives —and that is all they can be, since there is no cure for existence as far as Schopenhauer is concerned— is art, which is the subject of the second part of *Schopenhauer*. More specifically, Tanner deals with the way in which art permits us to escape, if only briefly, from the horror and torment of life.

Once again, we begin with Kant (pp. 31-32), whom Schopenhauer follows in regarding aesthetic contemplation as disinterested, that is, as a form of apprehension that is without

[4] For representative statements of these arguments, see Volume I (§58) and Volume II (§46) of *The World as Will and Representation*. trans. E.F.J. Payne. 2 volumes. (New York: Dover, 1966).

reference to my will. Hence aesthetic experience frees us from the bondage to the will; and, since our servitude to the will is what ultimately makes us suffer, aesthetic experience offers us a release from pain, a blissful respite from the misery of existence. This invocation of the so-called "aesthetic attitude" is coupled with an insistence that aesthetic experience is essentially cognitive, not emotive; that art, far from merely arousing or expressing feelings, functions as a source of knowledge. Unfortunately Schopenhauer develops this latter claim in a bewilderingly obscure way; for he goes on to identify the objects of aesthetic contemplation with the so-called "Platonic Ideas": mysterious immutable entities that lie outside of space and time, are grades of the will's objectification, and are forms or archetypes of species of things found in the world of phenomena. This doctrine is notoriously hard to fathom, and Tanner raises many good questions about it. Two merit special mention.

First, Schopenhauer's understanding of the Ideas differs significantly from that advanced by Plato, for whom the Ideas were ideal in a double sense, being both exemplars and metaphysically perfect. Given their perfection, knowledge of the Ideas is evidently a good thing. However, Schopenhauer tells a different story: the Ideas cannot be perfect, since they are grades of the objectivity of the will, and the will is essentially evil. How, then, can knowledge or contemplation of the Ideas possibly be deemed desirable or good? It is, as Tanner says, "wholly puzzling how an intimate relation with them could prove valuable or pleasurable" (p. 33).

Secondly, why assume that aesthetic contemplation is of Ideas rather than of concrete or particular objects (as in the still life paintings of the Dutch masters)? Schopenhauer took this view, Tanner plausibly suggests, because he uncritically accepted the time-honoured philosophical assumption that true knowledge is of the universal not the particular: "Particular objects, in their materiality and specificity, have often been felt to be lacking in the dignity which knowledge bestows, or which is bestowed by knowledge" (p. 36).

This brings us to Schopenhauer's insightful discussion of the specific art forms, the greatest of which is music (pp.

40-53). As Tanner points out, Schopenhauer was struck by music's capacity to affect us consistently in ways no other art can; and he sought an metaphysical explanation of its uniqueness, contending that whereas other arts objectify the will indirectly (by means of the Platonic Ideas), music is a copy of the will itself. Thus music reveals or discloses the essence of the world —at least for those who have ears to hear.

This bit of speculation has proven enormously influential —Wagner was absolutely taken with it, as was the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy*— but it is highly problematic nonetheless. Here we re-encounter a variant on the problem mentioned above in connection with the Ideas: How can Schopenhauer regard music as the greatest and most consoling of the arts, but also say that it reproduces that which is responsible for making this the worst of all possible worlds? Surely, we might think, knowledge of the will is the *last* thing capable of bringing us the consolation music promises.

Tanner explains this incoherence quite convincingly. His explanation, roughly, is that Schopenhauer failed to divest himself of a standard philosophical prejudices which, when taken in conjunction with his pessimism, led him astray. The prejudice in question is the understanding of art as mimesis, or as aiming at an accurate representation of reality. But as Tanner observes, Schopenhauer has no business accepting this assumption, since he absolutely rejects what it is needed to make sense of it:

> There has been a long tradition in western thinking about art to the effect that the more closely it approaches a copy of the truly real, the greater it is. That, however, is only a theory one might wish to hold if the truly real is in itself something desirable; as in western philosophy it almost always has been. Since it is Schopenhauer's distinction to find the truly real appalling, it is all the stranger that he should hymn the virtues of an art-form that is in such direct contact with it. It is as if he had unthinkingly taken over certain assumptions of the tradition that he was otherwise at great pains to negate (p. 47).

Despite its brevity, Michael Tanner's book is a very fine introduction to the thought of a philosopher who has long languished in undeserved obscurity.

It is, moreover, a most charming and accessible introduction: Tanner writes in a casual but graceful style, studiously eschews jargon and cant, and has a knack for making subtle points in simple language. This is not to deny that *Schopenhauer* has its shortcomings: the book is slightly marred by a certain exegetical carelessness, and by a failure to do justice to some of Schopenhauer's arguments. But I suspect that these minor faults will be readily forgiven by most of Tanner's readers, who will be eager to tackle *The World as Will and Representation*, having been well prepared to appreciate the profusion of insights —and confusions— contained therein.

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