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Kant and Schopenhauer on the Ultimate Goal of Human Life

Abstract

Contemporary reflection concerning man focuses upon man as a being living only "here and now", it is "short-termed" in character. In this paper, going against the current of this dominant tendency, I would like to show how interesting and important is the question about the ultimate goal of human life. In my considerations I refer to the thought of Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer—two classical authors of modern philosophy—who still seem to exert a significant influence on the European culture. Even if in their systems they depart from similar assumptions, their conclusions concerning man are radically different: for Kant, every human being has unique value and is called to create "civil society"; for Schopenhauer every individual being (including man) is volatile and devoid of meaning and value.

The question remains open as to whether the ultimate message of their philosophy can be still an inspiration for us today, or whether it already sounds rather strange and unfamiliar in confrontation with the spirit of modernity.

Keywords

goal of human life, I. Kant, A. Schopenhauer

We would venture to say that one of the features characterizing a man living in the contemporary culture is "short-term" thinking. For example, as remarks Patrick J. Deneen, liberalism reduces time to the present moment.[1] Most analyses concerning man focuses upon a being who lives only "here and now"; thus they are "soft"[2] in character and escape from categories applied in classical philosophy, such as substantial being, immutable nature, categorical obligation; in this context, the question of the final goal of human existence becomes an utterly abstract matter. In the present paper, going against the current of this dominant tendency, I would like to demonstrate, how interesting and important this ultimate question is. Human beings who take no interest in the final meaning of their lives[3] somehow lose an important part of their own essence. The manner in which this question is answered may, on the other hand, strongly influence clinching many matters constituting their everyday functioning.

In this light, I make use of the thought of Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer[4] who are two classical authors of the modern philosophy who still seem to have a significant influence on the European culture, even if the final message of their philosophy may sound already rather strange and foreign for contemporary men. What is interesting about them is that departing from similar premises they arrive at radically different conceptions of man, their vision of ultimate goal of human life being the best exemplification of this chasm.

Certainly what Kant and Schopenhauer agree upon is that reflection on the final destiny of man entails necessity of confronting the question of evil. The whole human life is a drama, in which evil—however we would define it — plays an important role. Man seems to be called to cope with this situation and somehow sorting it. He cannot avoid this vocation, since his greatest desire is to live in a reality to which evil has no access.

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[1] P. J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, Yale University Press 2018, p. 75.

[2] An interesting opposition of thinking in terms of a "strong" and a "soft" subject may be found for instance in the book of P. Druchliński, R. Moń, A. Kobyliński, E. Podrez, *Etyka a problem podmiotu*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Ignatianum, Kraków 2023.

[3] In this article I do not distinguish between the „ultimate goal" and the „meaning" of human life.

[4] I compare the thought of Kant and Schopenhauer more widely in my book *Kant i Schopenhauer. Między racjonalnością a nicością,* Wydawnictwo Naukowe WSP, Rzeszów 1996, cf. Also: A. Bobko, *Non Multa. Schopenhauers Philosophie des Leidens,* Konigshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2001.

Building his philosophical system, at a certain point, Kant faces the situation of splitting his universe into two disjunctive worlds: nature and the world of freedom. Persisting in this situation collides undoubtedly with the idea of universal rationality. Kant expressed his conviction that there must be a perspective in which these two worlds collide[5]. His consideration of the problem of finality of nature, and of the question of the ultimate goal of human life in particular, may be seen as an attempt to concretize this conviction. It is the vision of reality delineated by Kant, in which universal respect of rational laws leads to elimination of the destructive force of evil, that seems to be the domain where freedom realizes its goals in nature.

In all philosophical analyses Schopenhauer shows that the world is will and representation to the forefront poses the truth that suffering is the most positive and the most durable element of reality. The question about the final goal opens a perspective in which suffering may be overcome.

It should also be noted that the parts of both above-mentioned philosophical systems pertaining to ultimate goal and to the possibility of eliminating evil from the world are of a somewhat different character than their other elements. The style of philosophizing here is less rigorous, theses seem to be formulated "in conditional mood". It is especially visible in the case of Kant. As a matter of fact, in the third part of *Religion within the limits of reason alone* (bearing the significant title *The Victory of the Good over the Evil Principle, and the Founding of a Kingdom of God on Earth*), and particularly in his essay on *Perpetual Peace* Kant expresses his dreams—not inconsistent with prior theses, and yet dreams—about a universe that would be utterly rational. In Schopenhauer, in turn, the idea of negating will and withdrawing from life is consequence of his conviction that we never come to significant truths by means of rational cognition, but rather by means of intuitive insight, artistic creation or contemplation. That which is really precious may be acquired only through art and genius. Hence comes also liberation from life, and by the same token from suffering.

After these introductory remarks we may begin our interpretation of how Kant and Schopenhauer delineate their visions of the ultimate destiny of man.

[5] I. Kant, *Critique of Judgement,* transl. by Werner S. Pluchar, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis-Cambridge 1987, p. 15.

1. Kant—a vision of civil society

Kant's practical philosophy shows unequivocally that man's task, as a rational being (a person susceptible of assuming moral obligations), is selfless perpetuation of good. This goal can be accomplished through self-perfection, through more and more complete subordination of one's own spontaneity to the moral law, that is creation of "good will". It turns out, however, that this process of co-creating morality, or rationality in the world of freedom does not come off without a hitch. On the contrary, in this process there always arises some destructive factor, disintegrating the emerging order. Kant ultimately refers to it as a penchant for evil and constates that, together with a predisposition to good, it is deeply rooted in human nature. Consequently, he writes: "To become morally good it is not enough merely to allow the seed of goodness implanted in our species to develop without hindrance; there is also present in us an active and opposing cause of evil to be combatted."[6] Destiny of individuals, as well as of humanity as a whole, may be interpreted as a battle of good with evil. Yet man, as the adversary gets to contend with remains to a great extent unknown, which does not permit it to be unequivocally identified. Hence, we detect a certain helplessness of man in this struggle, as well as paradoxical situations, in which apparently "good tree" bears evil fruits. Is therefore a vision of moral (rational) order realizable at all?

Kant radicalizes these doubts, stating: "Men (as was noted above) mutually corrupt one another's moral predispositions; despite the good will of each individual, yet, because they lack a principle which unites them, they recede, through their dissensions, from the common goal of goodness and, just as though they were instruments of evil, expose one another to the risk of falling once again under the sovereignty of the evil principle."[7] From the point of view of Kant's ethics—ethics based on intentions and not on consequences of actions, for which man's good will is the most precious—it is an unusual statement, even a bizarre one: man acting out of good will would be an "instrument of evil". This sentence is, as a matter of fact, a confession that morality alone is helpless

[6] I. Kant, *Religion within the limits of reason alone,* transl. by Theodore M. Greene, Hoyt H. Hudson, Harper & Row, New York 1960, p. 50.

[7] I. Kant, *Religion within the limits of reason alone,* transl. by Theodore M. Greene, Hoyt H. Hudson, Harper & Row, New York 1960, p. 88.

in the face of evil. Maintaining balance between spontaneity of will and moral duty, that is, maintaining rationality in the world of freedom demands support.

The statement quoted above contains, at the same time a clue suggesting where one can look for a solution of this factual situation—men need some kind of "a principle which unites them", a principle that would allow them to engage in the common struggle with evil. Eliminating evil ceases to be the task of individuals and becomes a matter of community, that is, of the whole of humanity.

In his essay *Idea for a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view* Kant writes: "In man (…) those natural capacities which are directed to the use of his reason are to be fully developed only in the race, not in the individual."[8] The full use of reason, and, by the same token, constituting rationality to its full extent will be possible only when the subject charged with this task becomes humanity as a whole. It is only then that the possibility of the ultimate overcoming of evil appears: "The sovereignty of the good principle is attainable, so far as men can work toward it, only through the establishment and spread of a society in accordance with, and for the sake of, the laws of virtue, a society whose task and duty it is rationally to impress these laws in all their scope upon the entire human race."[9] From the helplessness in the face of evil there emerges, so to say, a new duty. It is, as Kant explains, "a duty which is sui generis, not of men toward men, but of the human race toward itself. For the species of rational beings is objectively, in the idea of reason, destined for a social goal, namely, the promotion of the highest as a social good."[10] The good which is free from the threat of evil can be only a common good, that is, a good created by people and maintained by their concordant effort.

Concretely, however, in what should acting towards a common good consist of? Is not speaking about some ideal consentaneous community a sheer uttering of spells that are supposed to overcome something which is maybe not possible?

Contrary to appearances, Kant is not a dreamer, but a realist. He is aware of the fact that common life of men in society is full of inner tensions: "Envy, the lust for power, greed, and the malignant inclinations bound up with these, besiege [man's] nature, contented within itself, as soon as he is among men. And

[8] I. Kant, *Idea for a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view*, transl. by Lewis White Beck, in: idem, *On history,* The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis 1963, p. 13.

[9] I. Kant, *Religion within the limits of reason alone,* transl. by Theodore M. Greene, Hoyt H. Hudson, Harper & Row, New York 1960, p. 86.

[10] I. Kant, *Religion within the limits of reason alone,* transl. by Theodore M. Greene, Hoyt H. Hudson, Harper & Row, New York 1960, p. 89.

it is not even necessary to assume that these are men sunk in evil and examples to lead him astray; it suffices that they are at hand, that they surround him, and that they are men, for them mutually to corrupt each other's predispositions and make one another evil."[11] Such a severe assessment of man's ability to live in society seems to stand downright in opposition to what has been said previously about the role of community in creating good. But there is no contradiction here, for, as Kant states, "the means employed by Nature to bring about the development of all the capacities of men is their antagonism in society, so far as this is, in the end, the cause of a lawful order among men."[12] Creation of a community does not automatically remove the causes that made the realization of full good by individuals impossible. We may even say that its creation generates a space in which man's bad inclination may reveal themselves even more intensely. Yet, here, Kant perceives a source of positive power. Natural "tensions" are supposed to lead to a state of balance—a state, in which all local incongruences will be regulated by universal, arranging law.

In order for the community to be able—in spite of its inner tensions and centrifugal forces blowing it apart from within—to keep its cohesion and to act towards development of moral order, some kind of bond ("uniting principle") is necessary that originates from outside the community itself. According to Kant, the duty of creating community demands an external support, an impulse or at least a crutch that would be a constant point of reference. He writes: "We can already foresee that this duty will require the presupposition of another idea, namely, that of a higher moral Being through whose universal dispensation the forces of separate individuals, insufficient in themselves, are united for a common end."[13] Kant claims therefore that the community encompassing the whole of humanity and acting on behalf of good must be religious in character. It is a further concretisation of the conviction that morality itself is not capable of opposing evil. The victory over evil is the act of God—"morality leads inevitably to religion".[14] Creation of ethical community is conceivable only if we

[11] I. Kant, *Religion within the limits of reason alone,* transl. by Theodore M. Greene, Hoyt H. Hudson, Harper & Row, New York 1960, p. 85.

[12] I. Kant, *Idea for a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view*, transl. by Lewis White Beck, in: idem, *On history,* The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis 1963, p. 15.

[13] I. Kant, *Religion within the limits of reason alone,* transl. by Theodore M. Greene, Hoyt H. Hudson, Harper & Row, New York 1960, p. 89.

[14] I. Kant, *Religion within the limits of reason alone,* transl. by Theodore M. Greene, Hoyt H. Hudson, Harper & Row, New York 1960, p. 7.

assume the existence of God as its creator and lawgiver, because its establishment surpasses, according to Kant, human possibilities. "To found a moral people of God is therefore a task whose consummation can be looked for not from men but only from God Himself."[15]

In Kant's definition "religion is (…) the recognition of all duties as divine commands."[16] Therefore morality constitutes the very core of religion; the only way of worshipping God is the fulfillment of moral duties. Religion, without changing anything in the form of moral precepts, endows morality with a new character. Teaching that God is the giver of moral principles inscribed in human mind, it imparts to them, so to say, some kind of "physical" power that opens the perspective of eliminating evil from the world. The real source of this power is God himself. It is he who is the actual builder of his Kingdom on earth, that is, of the society where there reigns an everlasting peace, and eventual conflicts are solved by rational laws. Yet the duty and effort of laborious coming closer to such an ideal has been imposed upon man. Man—adoring God, or living according to the precepts of duty—is the only way to its realization: "[Man must] proceed as though everything depended upon him; only on this condition does he dare to hope that higher wisdom will grant the completion of his well-intentioned endeavors."[17]

Hence membership in the religious community does not deprive man of his distinctiveness and autonomy. The only imperative that obliges him to action remains his intrinsic moral imperative. Thanks to this conception Kant identifies the idea of the Kingdom of God on earth, presented in *Religion within the limits of reason alone*, with the idea of civil society. "The greatest problem for the human race, to the solution of which Nature drives man, is the achievement of a universal civic society which administers law among men."[18]

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the idea of civil society, taken to a great extent from Kant and so popular in today's political culture, is understood in total, often consciously intended, separation from the "religious context",

[15] I. Kant, *Religion within the limits of reason alone,* transl. by Theodore M. Greene, Hoyt H. Hudson, Harper & Row, New York 1960, p. 92.

[16] I. Kant, *Religion within the limits of reason alone,* transl. by Theodore M. Greene, Hoyt H. Hudson, Harper & Row, New York 1960, p. 142.

[17] I. Kant, *Religion within the limits of reason alone,* transl. by Theodore M. Greene, Hoyt H. Hudson, Harper & Row, New York 1960, p. 92.

[18] I. Kant, *Idea for a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view*, transl. by Lewis White Beck, in: idem, *On history,* The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis 1963, p. 16.

so vividly present in Kant. It leads undoubtedly to an undue simplification or even falsification of Kant's conception, for "civil society" and "the Kingdom of God on earth" are two complementary ideas. As aptly remarks O. Höffe, political considerations and considerations on philosophy of religion do not contain, as is customary today, concurring models, but quite on the contrary—models that are complementary.[19]

What is the most important, however, is that the vision of global human society governed by rational laws and living in eternal peace embodies Kant's ideas and dreams of man (humanity) who implements a wholly rational universe. This vision is only a hypothesis; it is not possible to prove whether its realization is possible. It does not, however, contradict any element of Kant's system—quite on the contrary, it completes it in its own way.

2. Schopenhauer—negating of the will to live

In Schopenhauer's philosophical conception the will to live desires constant self-presentation, strives constantly for new confirmations of one's self, and it finds them in its representations; whereas the confirmation of will is all the more complete when the degree of autonomy (individuation) is higher, accomplished by the manifestation in which it comes into effect. Rational cognition, being as a matter of fact itself a product of will, seizes its particular, singular manifestations, endowing them with an ordered structure of the world of representations. Rationality does not penetrate into the nature of will, it only creates its "superficial" image. It is an image in which the will is seen through the prism of the particular and individual, and each individuum pretends to be the unique, real expression of will. The process of manifestation of will, leading to emergence of more and more subtle individua, has, however, a certain side effect. As J. Garewicz writes, "when individuality reaches its peak, when man turns out to be a genius, (…) then opens a possibility of negating the will to live."[20] In the first part of his system Schopenhauer speaks about the confirmation of will. Hence when is its negation, supposed to come into effect through a man-genius?

[19] O. Höffe, *Immanuel Kant,* transl. by Marshall Farrier, State University of New York Press, Albany 1992, p. 194.

[20] J. Garewicz, *Schopenhauer,* Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1998, p. 91.

The natural situation of man is the condition in which he remains under the constant "pressure" of the will to live. Man is the manifestation of will, and therefore he naturally desires his own person to be the unique and genuine reflection of the whole truth about the will to live. An expression of such an attitude is egoism. Schopenhauer wants to demonstrate that it is possible to overcome this state of things.

The first impulse engendering the thought about autonomizing oneself and freeing oneself from the will to live comes from art. "Aesthetic pleasure in the beautiful", writes Schopenhauer, "consists, to a large extent, in the fact that, when we enter the state of pure contemplation, we are raised for the moment above all willing, above all desires and cares; we are, so to speak, rid of ourselves. We are no longer the individual (…), but the eternal subject of knowing purified of the will."[21] Art opens us to the world of ideas—universal, eternal and immutable representations of the will. To be able to see this world, we have to discard that what is individual in us. Correlations of the universal representation must be a general, universal object of cognition. Aesthetic experiences show that it is possible; contemplation of the beautiful liberates from the pression of will that creates individuum of our person. It is, however, a very volatile liberation: the "will is silenced [only] for a few moments."[22]

Art offers us only a foretaste of the real independence from the will to live. At the same time it indicates that the path leading to it is surpassing one's individuality. The next impulse that allows us to progress on this way and contains our natural egoistic inclinations is triggered in the experience of suffering. Suffering is omnipresent. Of course, it mostly touches ourselves, but it can also awaken in us compassion for suffering of others. The compassionate man, whom Schopenhauer refers to also as a just man, "perceives that the distinction between himself and others, which to the wicked man is so great a gulf, belongs only to a fleeting, deceptive phenomenon".[23] Compassion that constitutes the real essence of all love[24] bears the sense of bond with other suffering human beings.

[21] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I, p. 390.

[22] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I, p. 390.

[23] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I, p. 372.

[24] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I, p. 374.

This sense has its "metaphysical foundation"—we are all objectifications of one will to live. A just man does not yet recognise this real state of affairs, he only has a presentiment of it. That is why he does not liberate himself from his own desires, he does not give up confirmation of his own individuum. He just tries to avoid situations in which this confirmation would lead to increasing the suffering of others; he is even, to a certain extent, capable of restraining his own needs if this would contribute to ease the others' plight.

Artistic genius, the attitude of the just only "brushes against" that which Schopenhauer calls negation of the will. Negation of the will is an act in which "the will (…) turns away from life. (…) Man attains to the state of voluntary renunciation, resignation, true composure, and complete willingness."[25] How is something like that possible, seeing that man is product of will, and all his actions are only necessary expressions of the intelligible character?

About this apparent contradiction Schopenhauer writes that it is "only the repetition in the reflection of philosophy of this real contradiction that arises from the direct encroachment of the freedom of the will-in-itself, knowing no necessity, on the necessity of its phenomenon."[26] Freedom appertains only to the will, since only the will does not have any foundation. All manifestations of the will are subject to the principle of sufficient reason, that is, they necessarily follow whatever is their *ratio sufficiens.* The idea of negating the will introduces into this scheme something essentially new: man, irrespective of the whole twine of factors that determine him, seems to "appropriate" freedom of the will of which he is manifestation. Schopenhauer explains it as follows: "The key to the reconciliation of these contradictions lies in the fact that the state in which the character is withdrawn from the power of motives does not proceed directly from the will, but from a changed form of knowledge."[27] Knowledge, or cognition is what enables man to surpass his own character—"self-suppression of the will comes from knowledge."[28]

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[25] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I, p. 379.

[26] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I., p. 403.

[27] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I, p. 403.

[28] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I., p. 404.

It is not, however, a rational cognition that offers us insight into the world as representation. It is not even that knowledge that, basing on metaphysical experience, teaches us that the world is the will as well. Schopenhauer speaks here about a direct intuitive cognition, even a mystical one, in which man—or, more precisely, the very will present in him—comes to the knowledge of the thing in itself. It is a recognition of one will in multitude of its manifestations, a direct intuition of the truth that all individuation is only an illusion, a "shadow" cast by one and the same essence. It is such a cognition that leads to the radical transformation of man.

How may such a degree of cognition be attained? Is there any relation between this cognition and rational knowledge? What is the role that particular cognitive faculties play in it? We do not find precise answers to these question in Schopenhauer. Grasping totality, insight in the essence of will is a matter of genius, and this is something that can be neither learned nor even adequately described. On the other hand, Schopenhauer stresses that such a cognition is accessible only for those whose rational cognition has attained the highest degree of subtlety. Genius is thus some kind of "superstructure" founded upon intelligence; one of its preliminary conditions is supposed to be "the deliberation of the faculty of reason, enabling [man] to survey the whole of life independently of the impression of the present moment."[29] Schopenhauer claims even that "the last work of intelligence is to abolish willing, whose aims and ends it had hitherto served."[30] Hence it turns out that—in spite of its limitation—rational cognition (intelligence) plays a certain role in neutralizing the will to live.

Therefore, what is the fruit of this cognition, of the knowledge that we can rightly refer to as mystical one? According to Schopenhauer mystical cognition does not give to those who attained it the possibility of positive mastering the will to live, of channeling its boisterous spontaneity according to one's own ideas. It only delivers the *quieter* [*Qietiv*] of all and every willing[31], that is, a means of neutralizing all possible desires. The one who acknowledged that

[29] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I., p. 404.

[30] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. II, p. 610.

[31] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I, p. 379; see p. 404.

all individuals are unimportant "shadows" of the real essence of the world loses his interest in his own desires, evidently entangled in the domain of "shadows". This cognition therefore leads to negation of the will, to disconnecting from its current—as a result, "the will turns away from life."

The state of negating the will to live is best illustrated by the figure of an ascetic. In his work Schopenhauer recalls numerous legends on severe ascetic customs of monks, present in Christian tradition as well as in religions of the Far East. The body of an ascetic seems to be a mere objectification of the will. But in reality it constitutes its negation, because motives that are natural motor of bodily actions do not influence it any more. The ascetic "renounces (…) this inner nature, which appears in him and is expressed already by his body, and his action gives the lie to his phenomenon, and appears in open contradiction thereto."[32] The most spectacular act of negating the will to live is mastery of the sexual drive and living in chastity.

It is worth mentioning that Schopenhauer, who considers turning away from life as the peak of human capacities *tout court*, does not permit the thought of suicide. Suicide is not, according to him, a denial of the will, but "a phenomenon of the will's strong affirmation. For denial has its essential nature in the fact that the pleasures of life, and not its sorrows, are shunned. The suicide wills life, and is dissatisfied merely with the conditions on which it has come to him. Therefore, by no means does he give up the will-to-live, but merely life, since he destroys the individual phenomenon."[33]

What awaits man after crossing this highest threshold of initiation which is the negation of will to live? Schopenhauer responds: nothingness! "Denial, abolition, turning of the will are also abolition and disappearance of the world, of its mirror;"[34] it reveals itself to us as "a transition into empty nothingness."[35] Departing from our imagination, we are not able to create any positive image

[32] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I., p. 380.

[33] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I, p. 398. Separately on the subject of suicide he writes in *Parerga und Paralipomena,* in: *Sämtliche Werke,* Bd. IV, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M 1986, pp. 361–368.

[34] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I, p. 410.

[35] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I., p. 409.

of what happens after the will is negated and denied. For its closest possible description may pass terms known from the writings of mystics: "ecstasy, rapture, illumination, union with God."[36] Yet mystical experiences in Schopenhauer's understanding (acts of denial of the will to live) do not entail anything positive (he does not mention any "contact with the Absolute"). Their result is utterly negative; yet they allow for detachment from the current of life, for attainment of the state to which the all-present suffering has no access. For where there are no desires and strivings the mechanism that generated suffering ceases to function. Detachment from the will to live is therefore the ultimate surmounting of evil, but at the same time a means of entering in total emptiness.

3. Conclusion

The message that is to be found in Kant and Schopenhauer on the final meaning of human life invites reflection. Firstly, it is striking that modern classical authors who laid the foundations of the contemporary pragmatic and disordered culture, developed their philosophy in an extremely systematic way. The horizon of their analyses concerning detailed epistemological questions were ultimate questions—and among them especially the question about the goal of human life. It is interesting to note that they answer this question in radically different ways. Their point of departure is somehow common—Schopenhauer considers himself to be a Kantian, and he holds the thinker from Königsberg to be the greatest genius of the European philosophy beside Plato. Yet at a certain point they parted ways, and their messages are so radically different that we may see in them two opposite poles of understanding man: for Kant every human being has a unique value and is called to create great things (ultimately to build the Kingdom of God on earth, that is, the rational universe of "civil society"); for Schopenhauer every individual being (including a man) is volatile and deprived of meaning, and failure to understand this only multiplies suffering (hence the striving for absolute nothingness). Attempting to consider these questions, we move somehow in spaces determined by possibilities presented in those visions. On the one hand, following Kant we can understand man as a social

[36] A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, transl. by E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1969, vol. I, p. 410.

being, who, by making use of his reason, can endow his own existence and the existence of the whole humanity with ultimate validity. On the other hand, Schopenhauer inspires to think in terms close to the contemporary "culture of singles"—man is condemned to loneliness, his life is on the road to nowhere. At this point contemporary culture proposes to enjoy life in the spirit of consumerism and hedonism, and Schopenhauer encourages empathy for the suffering and extinguishing the will to live which is tormenting us.

It is also interesting that both thinkers consider the problem of the final goal of human life without any reference to the problem of happiness. Throughout centuries—both in the Greek and in the Christian tradition—it is happiness that was the category coming to the fore in the context of the question of meaning of life, and philosophy was supposed to answer the question how to live in order to realize that goal. It seems that also today, if one would like to return to the question of the ultimate goal and purpose of life, it is happiness that would be the first association that comes to mind. Yet, for Kant human rationality sets man more important tasks, whereas according to Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy happiness is utterly beyond man's reach.

These considerations prompt another closing remark. Taking up the issue of the final goal of human life seems to be an essential preliminary condition of discussing more down-to-earth, mundane and everyday matters. Without such a perspective and distance we become entangled in unending disputes, most often without any meaningful conclusions. Such a state of affairs characterises majority of contemporary discussions, especially those led in the public sphere. Perhaps by reopening ourselves to final matters we would get the opportunity to cool down the temperature of today's interim misunderstandings.

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