

Blavatsky on Schopenhauer



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[A correspondent, having read “with the greatest interest the profound article by T. Subba Row ‘A Personal and an Impersonal God,’ in *The Theosophist* of February,” contributes some paragraphs on Schopenhauer’s thesis “The World is my mental perception” and cites his references to the Vedānta philosophy. H.P. Blavatsky adds the following note:]

For the benefit of those of our readers in India, who, although excellent Vedāntic scholars, may have never heard of Arthur Schopenhauer and his philosophy, it will be useful to say a few words regarding this German Metaphysician, who is ranked by many among the world’s great philosophers. Otherwise, the above translated fragment, picked out by our brother, Mr. Sanders, for the sole purpose of showing the great identity of view, between the Vedānta system — the *archaic* philosophy (we beg Professor Max Müller’s pardon) and the comparatively modern school of thought founded by Schopenhauer — may appear unintelligible in its isolated form. A student of the Göttingen and Berlin Universities, a friend of Goethe and his disciple, initiated by him into the mysteries of colour,¹ he evolved, so to say, into a profoundly original thinker without any seeming transition, and brought his philosophical views into a full system before he was thirty. Possessed of a large private fortune which enabled him to pursue and develop his ideas uninterruptedly, he remained an independent thinker and soon won for himself, on account of his strangely pessimistic view of the world, the name of the “misanthropic sage.” The idea that the present world is radically evil, is the only important point in his system that differs from the teachings of the Vedānta. According to his philosophical doctrines, the only thing truly real, original, metaphysical and absolute, is WILL. The world of objects consists simply of appearances; of *Māyā* or illusion — as the Vedāntins have it. It lies entirely in, and depends on, our representation. Will is the “thing-in-itself” [Ding an sich] of the Kantian philosophy,

. . . the substratum of all appearances and of nature herself. It is totally different from, and wholly independent of, cognition, can exist and manifest itself without it, and actually does so in all nature from animal beings downward.

Not only the voluntary actions of animated beings, but also the organic frame of their bodies, its form and quality, the vegetation plants, and in the inorganic kingdom of nature, crystallization and every other original power which manifests itself in physical and chemical phenomena, as well as gravity, are something outside of appearance and identical with, what we find in ourselves and call — WILL. An intuitive recognition of the identity of will in all the phenomena separated by individuation is the source of justice, benevolence, and love; while from a non-recognition of its iden-

¹ See A. Schopenhauer’s Essay, *Über das Sehen und die Farben*, 1816; [Cf. modern translation by Georg Stahl, *On Vision and Colors*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010.]

tity spring egotism, malice, evil and ignorance. This is the doctrine of the Vedāntic *Avidyā* (ignorance) that makes of *Self* an object distinct from Parabrahm, or Universal Will. Individual soul, physical self, are only imagined by ignorance and have no more reality and existence than the objects seen in a dream. With Schopenhauer it also results from this original identity of will in all its phenomena, that the reward of the good and the punishment of the bad are not reserved to a future heaven or a future hell, but are ever present (the doctrine of *Karma*, when philosophically considered and from its esoteric aspect). Of course the philosophy of Schopenhauer was radically at variance with the systems of Schelling, Hegel, Herbert and other contemporaries, and even with that of Fichte, for a time his master, and whose philosophical system while studying under him, he openly treated with the greatest contempt. But this detracts in nothing from his own original and profoundly philosophical though often too pessimistic views. His doctrines are mostly interesting when compared with those of the Vedānta of “Śamkarāchārya’s” school, inasmuch [as] they show the great identity of thought arriving at the same conclusions between men of two quite different epochs, and with over two millenniums between them. When some of the mightiest and most puzzling problems of being are thus approximately solved at different ages and by men entirely independent of one another, and that the most philosophically profound propositions, premises and conclusions arrived at by our best modern thinkers are found on comparison nearly, and very often entirely, identical with those of older philosophers as enunciated by them thousands of years back, we may be justified in regarding “the heathen” systems as the primal and most pure sources of every subsequent philosophical development of thought.

