

SCHOPENHAUER AND THE CRITICISM OF CONSUMERISM

SCHOPENHAUER Y LA CRÍTICA AL CONSUMISMO

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RESUMEN: Schopenhauer is not usually thought of in relation to the issue of consumerism. However, his philosophy contains the seeds of a fully-fledged criticism of consumer society. This article assesses the strengths as well as the ideological shortcomings both of his diagnosis and of the solutions that he puts forward. As will be shown, Schopenhauer's ideological mistakes are a precedent to the ones that we make still today, and identifying his errors—and the reasons for them—can help to identify and correct ours. His analysis and condemnation of the impulses at work in consumerism is a reminder that the problem of impulsive consumption exceeds the individual sphere and that, despite the image that we usually get from advertising, there can be more to life than shopping. Finally, though his solutions are beset by the same ideological problems as his diagnosis—for which reason they do not necessarily have to be our solutions—they nevertheless evidence that the existence of alternatives can still be envisaged and that, now more than ever, the search for them is a worthy effort.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Arthur Schopenhauer, consumerism, capitalism, postmodernity, marxism, psychoanalysis, ideology, superego, Slavoj Žižek, György Lukács, Terry Eagleton, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, William Golding.

ABSTRACT: Normalmente no se piensa en Schopenhauer en relación con el problema del consumismo. Sin embargo, su filosofía contiene las semillas de una crítica completa de la sociedad

de consumo. Este artículo analiza tanto los puntos fuertes como los defectos ideológicos de su diagnóstico y de las soluciones que propone. Como se verá, los errores ideológicos de Schopenhauer son un precedente de los que nosotros cometemos aún hoy, e identificar sus equivocaciones —y las razones tras ellas— puede ayudar a identificar y corregir las nuestras. Su análisis y condena de los impulsos que operan en el consumismo nos recuerdan que el problema del consumo impulsivo excede la esfera individual y que, a pesar de la imagen que normalmente nos transmite la publicidad, la vida puede consistir en algo más que en comprar. Finalmente, si bien sus soluciones se ven lastradas por los mismos problemas ideológicos que su diagnóstico —razón por la cual no tienen por qué ser necesariamente las soluciones que nosotros preferimos— aun así prueban que todavía podemos imaginar la existencia de alternativas y que, ahora más que nunca, su búsqueda merece la pena.

KEYWORDS: Arthur Schopenhauer, consumismo, capitalismo, posmodernidad, marxismo, psicoanálisis, ideología, superyó, Slavoj Žižek, György Lukács, Terry Eagleton, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, William Golding.

Pessimistic philosopher, irrationalist philosopher, the philosopher of will, the philosopher of music, the philosopher of compassion: with greater or lesser accuracy, all of these and other labels have been applied to Arthur Schopenhauer, one of the most outstanding figures not only of Western philosophy but also —by dint of his attempts to establish bridges with Asian thought— of universal philosophy. What Schopenhauer has not usually been called is a philosopher of consumerism. This article is an attempt to show that his philosophy contains the seeds of a fully-fledged criticism of consumer society, putting this aspect of his thought in relation to the work of more recent authors like Slavoj Žižek, György Lukács, Terry Eagleton, the contemporary Spanish writer Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio and the British writer William Golding, and highlighting the strengths as well as the ideological shortcomings both of Schopenhauer's diagnosis and of the solutions that he puts forward.

I will begin my discussion with a summary of Schopenhauer's views on wealth and property, linking them to his social position and to his philosophical positions on ontology, epistemology, ethics and happiness; further, I will pit the modern character of Schopenhauer's repressive morality against the injunctions of postmodern superego, as characterised by Žižek. Next I will examine some possible criticisms to the ideological underpinnings of Schopenhauer's world view from the perspectives of Marxism and of psychoanalysis, throwing light on them by reference to Lukács's notion of *indirect apologetics*, to Eagleton's work on ideology and to Golding's comments on ethical character and legal repression¹. After that, I will point out

¹ Golding's comments are relevant because they were made very probably under the influence of Schopenhauer's thought, or at least from a very similar perspective to that of the German philosopher, which they somehow

some of the weaknesses and strengths of Schopenhauer's theory as they emerge from the comparison with Sánchez Ferlosio's exploration of consumer behaviour in today's society. I will conclude with an assessment of the relevance of Schopenhauer's thought for the current understanding and criticism of consumerism.

I

As the heir to a well-off family with commercial interests, Schopenhauer possessed a fortune that allowed him to live comfortably, and to devote himself to the cultivation of philosophy without the need to transform this activity into a professional occupation. At the same time, Schopenhauer always displayed a scornful attitude —one could call it *aristocratic*— towards money and wealth. A good example of this attitude is his description of the rich heir who, free from financial worries, decides to put his money and intellect to good use, spending his days philosophising rather than devising new ways of increasing his fortune or of wasting it:

... to possess at the outset so much that we can live comfortably, even if only for our own person and without a family, and can live really independently, that is, without working, is a priceless advantage. For it means exemption and immunity from the poverty and trouble attaching to the life of man, and thus emancipation from universal drudgery, that natural lot of earthly mortals. [...] But inherited wealth attains its highest value when it has come to the man who is endowed with mental powers of a high order and who pursues activities that are hardly compatible with earning money. For then he is doubly endowed by fate and can now live for his genius; but in this way, he will pay a hundredfold his debt to mankind by achieving what no other could do and by producing something that contributes to the good of all and also redounds to their honour. Again, another in such a favourable position will deserve well of humanity through his philanthropic activities.²

It is difficult not to read this passage, in which he brings together the rich intellectual and the philanthropist, as a complacent self-portrait. And it is equally hard not to read the following attack on academic philosophers as an excuse for his failure to build a career in the university: «for the purpose of acquiring gain, everything else is pushed aside or thrown overboard, for example, as is philosophy by the professors of philosophy» —professors whom he also calls «businessmen of the chair» and whom he compares with the sophists that his admired Plato criticised (foremost among them a philosopher like Hegel whom

complement. *Vid.* Saavedra Carballido, Jesús M., «Will, Suffering and Liberation in William Golding's *The Spire*», *Atlantis* 36, no. 1, 2014, 71-86; Saavedra Carballido, Jesús M., «Golding's Metaphysics: William Golding's Novels in the Light of Arthur Schopenhauer's Philosophy», unpublished PhD thesis, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2015.

² Schopenhauer, Arthur, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, translated by Eric F.J. Payne, vol. 1, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2000, p. 350.

Schopenhauer hates so much)—³. On the whole, Schopenhauer is of the opinion that «nothing is to be expected, nothing can be demanded, and nothing is to be had for money except mediocrity», and that philosophy, in particular, is «degraded» when it is forced «to become a means of earning one's bread»⁴. Actually, he extends this judgement to all writers: «there are two kinds of authors, those who write for the sake of the subject and those who write for the sake of writing. The former have had ideas or experiences which seem to them worth communicating; the latter need money and thus write for money». He then sentences, without mentioning that he himself had been forced to renounce the royalties for some of his works because no publisher had wanted to sell them otherwise: «Copy-money and the reservation of copyright are at bottom the ruin of literature. Anything worth writing is written only by those who write solely for the sake of the subject»⁵.

Despite his disdain for money-making, Schopenhauer does not refrain from speaking metaphorically of existence in economic terms, for example as a ruinous business: «life is a business whose returns are far from covering the cost», because «such a mighty effort and struggle with the exertion of all one's strength, under constant care, anxiety, and want, and with the inevitable destruction of every individual life, finds no compensation in the ephemeral existence itself, which is obtained by such effort, and comes to nothing in our hands».⁶ Moreover, he devotes considerable attention to the issues of wealth and property. His comments in this regard must be understood, like all other aspects of his thought, in connection with the keystone of his philosophy —the existence of an essential will and its usual prevalence over the intellect.

According to Schopenhauer, the world as we know it is divided into a single essence that he identifies as *will*, on the one hand, and the manifestations or appearances (*Erscheinungen*) of this essence, on the other. The innate roots of human nature, including individual affects and desires, lie in this essential will shared by humankind with all other beings and things in the world. At its most general, the essential will is «a ceaseless activity» that is «blind» in the double sense of being both originally devoid of consciousness, hence of rationality, and «without aim»⁷. Schopenhauer is convinced that this activity «springs from lack, from deficiency» of a kind that can never be remedied⁸. That is why, a little more specifically, the essential will can be seen as «a constant striving»⁹. What it strives for is a «final satisfaction» of which it is

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 347, 148.

⁴ Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World as Will and Representation*, translated by Eric F. J. Payne, vol. 1, New York, Dover, 1969, p. xx.

⁵ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, p. 501.

⁶ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 353, 579.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 309, 149, 311.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

«incapable», and because of which «it goes on for ever». As a manifestation of the essential will, no thing or being in the world «is without striving, or without longing or desire»¹⁰.

Though its final fulfilment by direct means is impossible, the essential will attains some indirect and temporary fulfilment by proxy, through the intermediation of those among its manifestations that are endowed with consciousness —i.e. that are capable of intellectual *representation* (*Vorstellung*)— and take advantage of it to fulfil their desires. According to Schopenhauer, the intellect is «originally and by its nature [...] completely the servant of the [essential] will»¹¹. As a rule, then, consciousness is will-coloured, because it «apprehends originally in things nothing but their relations to the will, the direct, the indirect, the possible»¹². To be sure, among human beings there are other kinds of consciousness (of which more below); yet the only one that is required by the essential will's yearning for satisfaction, and the one that is common to human and nonhuman animals alike, is the perception of discrete *physical* objects placed in a specific temporal, spatial and causal location. Schopenhauer claims that all physical consciousness without exception must be a means for the fulfilment of the desires dictated by one's essence: in this respect, the «intellect, like the claws and teeth, is nothing but a tool» for the preservation of the individual and, ultimately, «for the service of the will»¹³. According to Julian Young, that is why physical consciousness shows things «always in relation to me, a being in the world as its spatio-temporal «centre», i.e. «in their utility» from the perspective of my well-being»¹⁴. This means that this I-here-now viewpoint always involves a consideration of potential effects, establishing a causal connection between my body —therefore between my desires, as dictated by the essential will— and external physical objects, such that the latter are inevitably judged according to their possible impact on me. Young refers to this kind of consciousness as *egocentric*¹⁵. Schopenhauer says that, «just as most people do not have a surplus of money, but only just enough for their needs, so is it the same with intellect; of this they have just enough for the service of their will, that is, for carrying on their business». The last word, *business*, is crucial here, for «in the affairs of state, war, matters of finance or trade, intrigues of every kind, and so on, the *will* through the vehemence of its craving must first compel the intellect to exert all its strength in order to discover the exact clue to all the grounds and consequents in the case in question»¹⁶.

Schopenhauer's theory of physical cognition, as expounded so far, is not without problems. According to Bernard Reginster, it is marred by «a certain lack of clarity» concerning the relation

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 308-309.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹² *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 376.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

¹⁴ Young, Julian, *Schopenhauer*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 127.

¹⁵ *Vid. ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁶ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena, op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 81-82, 417-418.

between will and consciousness. In particular, Schopenhauer confuses being interested in an object—in the sense of being curious about it, of focusing on it in order to satisfy one's desires—and having a biased knowledge of it. Reginster explains that it may well be the case that «my practical interests are presumably better served if [my mind] represents the relevant features of the surrounding world accurately»¹⁷. This may well be true, but even if we admitted that not all consciousness—not even all egocentric consciousness—is biased, this would not give the lie to Schopenhauer's belief that egocentric consciousness is always the slave of one's appetites: perhaps egocentrism is never disinterested, but it may well be all the more valuable for it.

The primacy of the essential will has not only epistemological consequences but also ethical ones. (Unlike Schopenhauer, I distinguish ethical dispositions, which are innate, from the moral prescriptions operating in society.) As regards ethics, Schopenhauer makes the mistake of confusing pleasure with the absence of pain, stating that, insofar as they generally seek their own pleasure and try to avoid suffering, egocentric individuals—«men of business» and «tradesmen» foremost among them¹⁸—are egoistic. Here it is once more useful to follow Young and distinguish epistemological *egocentrism* from ethical *egoism*.¹⁹ All egoism is tied to egocentrism, but egocentrism can be linked not only to egoism (the desire to avoid one's own suffering) but also to malice (the sadistic yearning for the other's suffering). For Schopenhauer, it is on ethical egoism that all kinds of consumption usually rest. This consumption must be understood as generally as possible: not only of goods in the market but also of other things and beings in a «constant struggle» or war of all against all in the course of which egocentric consciousness is employed to compete with, chase, kill and feed on one another²⁰.

Because it relies on the spatial, temporal and causal principle of individuation, the physical world perceived through the lens of egocentrism is fragmented into countless individuals engaged in never-ending conflict and afflicted by perennial suffering. Schopenhauer's thought locates egocentrism at the root of egoism, and thus, on the one hand, as a source of the concern provoked by the fear of unpleasurable experiences, and, on the other, of all those forms of suffering that result from the individualistic struggle for satisfaction. Egocentric consciousness cannot but be full of the «anxiety» that arises from viewing all physical objects as potential sources of dissatisfaction; as a result, it is inextricably bound with «unhappiness» and suffering²¹. It is thus that egocentrism, the built-in mechanism in charge of preserving conscious life, makes this selfsame life almost unbearable.

¹⁷ Reginster, Bernard, «Knowledge and Selflessness: Schopenhauer and the Paradox of Reflection», in *Better Consciousness: Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Value*, edited by Alex Neill and Christopher Janaway, 98-119, Chichester and Malden, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 115.

¹⁸ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 71.

¹⁹ *Vid.* Young, *Schopenhauer*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

²⁰ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 354.

²¹ Young, *Schopenhauer*, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

When allied with egocentrism, the final outcome of willing is frustration; even if one does get «momentary gratification», this soon gives way to «fearful emptiness and boredom», and so to the need to pursue new objects²². Every egocentric individual thus «swings like a pendulum»²³, and not only between pleasure and unpleasure, but also between the painful states of «want and boredom»²⁴. In this regard, Schopenhauer states that «The motive [i.e. the physical object of desire as it appears in consciousness] in general stands before the will in protean forms; it always promises complete satisfaction [...]. But if this is attained, it at once appears in a different form, and therein moves the will afresh»²⁵. The oscillation between want and boredom besets all human pursuits, as shown by the trajectory of sexual desire, which Schopenhauer presents as the most conspicuous of all aspects of the essential will (hence his use of the expression *will to life*). There are interesting parallels between Schopenhauer's discussion of the greedy quest for wealth and possessions, on the one hand, and (male) sexuality, on the other: «The man's love diminishes perceptibly from the moment it has obtained satisfaction; almost every other woman charms him more than the one he already possesses; he longs for variety»²⁶.

For Schopenhauer, «every keen pleasure is an error, an illusion, since no attained wish can permanently satisfy, and also because every possession and every happiness is only lent by chance for an indefinite time, and can therefore be demanded back in the next hour»²⁷. Things are easier when a person is able to adopt a nonegoistic and nonegocentric standpoint. The *nonegocentric* or *metaphysical* perspective arises whenever things are apprehended independently of causality, hence regardless of their pleasurable or unpleasurable effects on us. Like the more radical alternative of involuntary death, nonegocentric consciousness affords both an alternative and a temporary solution to the problems raised by egocentrism. This *better consciousness*, as Schopenhauer sometimes calls it²⁸, comes in different varieties: the saint's vision of the essence of the world which leads either to virtuous compassion and altruistic action or to resigned withdrawal and the renunciation of all action; aesthetic contemplation; «*inner apprehension*» or «*inward observation*»²⁹, which Schopenhauer takes to be the royal road to the conceptualisation of the essence of the world as will. All three varieties tend to operate individually, and to that extent they —and Schopenhauer's concentration on them— can be regarded as individualistic. As regards inner observation, in particular, it occurs when humans

²² Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 353, 312.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 359.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 327.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 542.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 88.

²⁸ *Vid.* Young, *Schopenhauer*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁹ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 36, 196.

focus on the inner workings of their own body, shedding the intellectual forms of causality and space in the process. When looking inside, the subject apprehends «the individual acts of will» in temporal succession³⁰. Bryan Magee explains that the object thus grasped, the individual will, comprises not only «willed action or behaviour»³¹, but also —and this is Schopenhauer’s peculiar extension of willing beyond its usual purview— the «movements of the human heart»³², that is, «all affects and passions»³³. The latter amount «in all cases» to «bodily sensations» of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, of pleasure and displeasure, «and all those countless sensations that lie between these two extremes», which enter consciousness as something in accordance with one’s desires or opposed to them³⁴. However, contrary to what Western thought has usually identified as the defining trait of the faculty of volition, with Schopenhauer one’s inwardly observed will does *not* comprise what Immanuel Kant calls the power of free choice (*Willkür*).

What all kinds of nonegocentric consciousness have in common is that, by virtue of their independence of causality, they are all useless from the point of view of the satisfaction of the essential will: «Where the [causal] bond between intellect and will is loosened, the intellect, diverted from its natural destiny, will neglect the service of the will»³⁵. Another shared characteristic is that they are all the token «of an extraordinary and intellectually eminent individuality».³⁶

Schopenhauer thinks that aesthetic contemplation, in particular, is the token of intellectual *genius*. As a rule every person, including the scientist, relies on egocentric consciousness alone: «what the sciences consider in things is also essentially nothing more than [...] the connexions of time and space, the causes of natural changes, [...] and thus merely relations»; the only difference is that scientific knowledge is more «systematic» and more general, and that it possesses more «completeness»³⁷. The genius, by contrast, contemplates all things independently of their causal relations, including the relation to oneself. Even if we think that geniuses are still dominated by their desires —a moot question whose elucidation exceeds the scope of this article— we cannot deny that they do not live in thrall to those desires: arguably, these become dormant for lack of the available physical objects usually offered by the egocentric intellect. This is what happens, for example, when we find ourselves

³⁰ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 46.

³¹ Magee, Bryan, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, 2nd rev. ed., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, p. 131.

³² Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 451.

³³ Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, edited and translated by Christopher Janaway, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 38.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38-39.

³⁵ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 387.

³⁶ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 319.

³⁷ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 177.

in «a very lonely region of boundless horizons, under a perfectly cloudless sky, trees and plants in the perfectly motionless air, no animals, no human beings, no moving masses of water, the profoundest silence», which is «a summons to [...] contemplation»: insofar as «it affords no objects, either favourable or unfavourable, to the will that is always in need of strife and attainment, there is left only the state of pure contemplation»³⁸. Given that it cannot serve the will, cognitive genius «is itself a kind of superfluity», a «power [...] beyond the measure required for the service of the will»³⁹; it is an «abnormal excess of intellect», hence it can only be merely accidental⁴⁰ —a fact that, for Schopenhauer, does not diminish its importance—.

Schopenhauer sometimes states that geniuses are extraordinary: nature brings forth just a «few» of them «here and there among countless millions»⁴¹. However, he also recognises that genius «must be inherent in all men in a lesser and different degree». Though most of us are incapable «of producing works of art», none of us are «incapable of enjoying» them, because we all have some «susceptibility» to aesthetic qualities⁴².

Extending the purview of the term somewhat beyond Schopenhauer's preferred usage, we can say that, insofar as all people are capable of any kind of nonegocentric consciousness —not only in the aesthetic domain— all partake of genius. The genius is the opposite of the *homo economicus*, a type that Diana Meyers describes as follows:

To achieve maximal fulfillment, homo economicus must organize his chosen pursuits into a rational life plan. He must decide which desires are most urgent; he must ensure that his desires are co-satisfiable; and he must ascertain the most efficient way to satisfy this set of desires. Madcap spontaneity and [...] improvisation are registered as defeats.⁴³

Geniuses do not covet what they contemplate. For this reason, they find that «most of the pleasures that are generally sought after are entirely superfluous; [...] they are only a bother and a burden».⁴⁴ Indeed, «just as those with a small surplus of money give themselves pleasure, so do those others give themselves intellectual pleasure» alone⁴⁵. For example, the saint who has attained a nonegocentric insight into the essence of the world and whose ethical

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 410.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 188.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁴³ Meyers, Diana, «Feminist Perspectives on the Self», in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2010, available from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/feminism-self/> [accessed 28 February 2014].

⁴⁴ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 319.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 82.

disposition is compassionate, is guided by «charitableness even to the giving away of one's hard-won daily earnings». This saint, «instead of thinking first of himself and of his own future needs, always relieves the present greater want of others without further regard, in fact presents the whole of his property to the poor, in order then, destitute of all resources, to go and preach to others the virtue he himself has practised»⁴⁶.

Human beings are different from other animals not only in that they have the ability to apprehend things metaphysically, but also in that only they possess the faculty of reason, thanks to which they can employ abstract concepts. Even if genius and saintly wisdom are —because the special cognitive and ethical characteristics on which they rest— usually out of the reach of most people, one should not renounce to learn to live a good life with the help of what Schopenhauer calls *practical reason*, that is, «reason in so far as it guides man's actions»⁴⁷. Schopenhauer explains that «the faculty of reason manifests itself *practically*, and thus *practical reason* shows itself, wherever action is guided by reason, where [the physical] motives are abstract concepts, wherever the determining factors are not individual representations of perception, or the impression of the moment which guides the animal»⁴⁸. Man has «the gift of reason (*Vernunft*)», which:

... enables him easily to survey his life and the course of the world in both directions as a whole; it makes him independent of the present, enables him to go to work deliberately, systematically, and with forethought, for evil as well as for good. But what he does is done with complete self-consciousness; he knows exactly how his will decides, what he chooses in each case, and what other choice was possible according to the case in point.⁴⁹

Schopenhauer warns that «this is entirely different from, and independent of, the ethical worth of conduct»; that «rational action and virtuous action are two quite different things». Even so, he cannot but praise the practical use of rationality. And, in his view, «The most perfect development of *practical reason* [...] is the ideal represented in the *Stoic sage*. For the Stoic ethics is originally and essentially not a doctrine of virtue, but merely a guide to the rational life, whose end and aim is happiness through peace of mind»⁵⁰. In contrast to «the real, i.e., theoretical, philosopher» that «translates life into the concept», the stoics are «practical philosophers» that «translate the concept into life», thus demonstrating that «the rational method [...] is valid and useful in practical life»⁵¹.

While the genius is the opposite of the *homo economicus*, the stoic sage, i.e. the egoist who lets his conduct be guided by rationality, is the most perfect representative of this economic

⁴⁶ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 388, 515.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83-84.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 518.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 185. Schopenhauer criticised stoicism on other grounds, however; *vid.* Young, *Schopenhauer*, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36, 232.

frame of mind which Schopenhauer commends again, as we will see, in the context of his legal and political theories.

Meanwhile, it can be argued that, insofar as it aims at rationally regulating the individual's economic behaviour so as to guarantee the individual's peace of mind, Schopenhauer's thought is a form of stoic capitalism. What he finds fault with is not capitalistic accumulation per se but the anxiety that accompanies the capitalistic lifestyle.

Considering the matter of wealth from a general angle, Schopenhauer recognises that «With a race so destitute and full of needs as the human, it is not surprising that *wealth* is esteemed, indeed worshipped, more highly and sincerely than anything else, and even the power merely as a means to wealth». To this he adds, concerning early-19-century society in particular, that «the value of possessions is nowadays so universally acknowledged that it is not in any need of a recommendation»⁵². He himself defends «the natural right to property» as long as it is «gained by one's own labour». According to his view of private property, individuals are the rightful owners of any object that they have worked on, creating it, transforming it or simply contributing to its preservation. In other words, an object becomes someone's possession the moment they put their energy—their will—into it. However, he acknowledges that «in most cases» our possessions are usually «gained not through proper work with the sweat of our brows» but rather «inherited, acquired by marriage, won in the lottery, or, if not that, then [...] by prudent thought and ideas that occur to us, e.g. in the business of speculation, and indeed occasionally through stupid ideas, which the god Success has crowned and glorified by way of chance»⁵³.

Schopenhauer is well aware of the claim that the egoist's sumptuous consumption is at the root of social inequality and political violence. A man's property can «be only what is made by his own powers», and for this reason «*property* [...] is not taken from a person *without wrong*»⁵⁴. This is how Schopenhauer explains this kind of injustice:

... by taking this [property], we take the powers of [the owner's] body from the will objectified in it, in order to make them serve the will objectified in another body. For only in this way does the wrongdoer, by seizing not another's body, but an inanimate thing entirely different from it, break into the sphere of another's affirmation of will, since the powers, the work of another's body, are, so to speak, incorporated in, and identified with, this thing.⁵⁵

When one is the rightful owner of an object, however, one can sell it, exchange it or donate it:

⁵² Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 347, 322.

⁵³ Schopenhauer, *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-184.

⁵⁴ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 335-336.

⁵⁵ *Idem*.

The [...] right to property [...] by its nature gives the possessor of a thing a power over it just as unlimited as that which he has over his own body. From this it follows that he can hand over his property to others by exchange or donation, and those others then possess the thing with the same [...] right as he did.⁵⁶

Finally, Schopenhauer explains that «the *doing* of wrong» against a legitimate owner «occurs either through *violence* or through *cunning*»; it could be argued, from a Marxist angle, that the latter modality includes taking advantage of ideology (about which I will have more to say below): «Through cunning I place before the other man's will *fictitious motives*, on the strength of which he follows *my* will, while believing that he follows *his own*. As knowledge is the medium in which the motives are to be found, I can achieve this only by falsifying his knowledge».⁵⁷ In Schopenhauer's eyes, the use of violence or of cunning is the only thing that distinguishes slavery from poverty, two situations caused by the same kind of wrongdoing whereby some people deprive others of their rightful possessions:

Poverty and slavery are [...] only two forms, one might almost say two names, for the same thing whose essential nature is that a man's powers are for the most part employed not for himself, but for others. The result of this is partly that he is overloaded with work and also that his needs meet with meagre satisfaction.⁵⁸

This remarkable passage can be read as prefiguring those in which Karl Marx condemns the situation in which businesspeople appropriate the product of the workers' labour, thus bringing about their estrangement or alienation from the product that they have worked on. According to Marx, it is typical of capitalism that «the worker does not appropriate the product of his own labour; that it appears to him as *alien property*», and that «the master-servant relation is the appropriation of an alien *wills*»⁵⁹. For Marx, «the class struggle between the appropriator and the producer», involves the fact that, «in relation to the worker who *appropriates* nature by means of his labour, this appropriation *appears* as estrangement, his own spontaneous activity as activity for another and as activity of another, [...] production of the object as loss of the object to an *alien* power, to an alien person»⁶⁰.

Nor is this the only respect in which Schopenhauer's work predates some of Marx's criticisms of capitalism. There is also this other passage where Schopenhauer gives voice to the arguments —which he will eventually reject— against luxury. He begins by saying:

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

⁵⁷ *Idem.*

⁵⁸ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 244.

⁵⁹ Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker, 2nd rev. ed., New York and London, W.W. Norton, 1978, pp. 260, 266.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 646, 81.

... a great part of the powers of the human race is withdrawn from producing all that is necessary in order to procure for the few that which is entirely superfluous and unnecessary. Therefore, as long as there is luxury on the one side, there must necessarily be excessive work and a miserable existence on the other, whether it be given the name of poverty or slavery, *proletarius* or *servus*. The fundamental difference between the two is that slaves have to attribute their origin to violence, and poor men theirs to cunning.⁶¹

On this view, he goes on, the luxury of the minority

... is the primary source of that evil which, either under the name of slavery or that of the proletariat, has at all times borne heavily on the great majority of the human race. [...] Thus in order that a few may have what is an unnecessary and superfluous refinement; indeed that these may be able to satisfy artificial needs, a great part of mankind's existing powers must be devoted to things of this nature and so be withdrawn from the production of what is necessary and indispensable.⁶²

From this perspective, «the most effective way to alleviate human misery would be to diminish luxury, or even to abolish it altogether».⁶³

Schopenhauer must have been well aware of the catastrophic impact that the luxury of a minority has on the lives of the majority, as shown by his mention of slaves and his heartrending depiction of industrial workers' lives:

How man deals with man is seen, for example, in Negro slavery, the ultimate object of which is sugar and coffee. However, we need not go so far; to enter at the age of five a cotton-spinning or other factory, and from then on to sit there every day first ten, then twelve, and finally fourteen hours, and perform the same mechanical work, is to purchase dearly the pleasure of drawing breath. But this is the fate of millions, and many more millions have an analogous fate.⁶⁴

Even so, Schopenhauer does not agree with the solution put forward by those who want luxury abolished, nor even with their initial diagnosis⁶⁵. On the contrary, he defends opulence arguing that «The arts and sciences are themselves the offspring of luxury and repay their debt to it», rounding off his argument with a statement that reads very much like a bourgeois justification of economic liberalism: «The products of all these industries, however, certainly

⁶¹ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 245.

⁶² *Idem*.

⁶³ *Idem*.

⁶⁴ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 578.

⁶⁵ A disagreement overlooked by Zapata Sierra, Daiman, «Arthur Schopenhauer, ¿defensor del capitalismo?», *Versiones* 1, no. 5, 2015, p. 31.

do not benefit the wealthy alone, but all classes. Things which in former times one could hardly afford are now obtainable at a low price and in quantities, and even the life of the humblest classes has greatly gained in comfort»⁶⁶.

Needless to say, Schopenhauer's rejection of the abolition of luxury is in harmony with his own lifestyle, already described. It also fits like a glove the ideological needs of the bourgeoisie as a whole. As on other occasions, however, his stance on wealth and property goes somewhat against the grain of bourgeois public opinion. To begin with, he distinguishes between a person's internal and external advantages, a distinction intended to throw light on the key issue of well-being and, ultimately, of happiness. Internal advantages refer to what a man *is* by nature («personality in the widest sense»), including «health, strength, beauty, temperament, [...] character, intelligence»); external advantages have to do with both what a person *has* («property and possessions in every sense») and what a person *represents* «in the eyes of the others» («their opinion of him»), that is, «honour, rank, and reputation»). For reasons that have to do with the metaphysical underpinnings of his philosophical model, Schopenhauer claims that, «Compared with genuine personal advantages, such as a great mind or a great heart, all the privileges of rank, birth, even royal birth, wealth, and so on, are as kings on the stage to kings in real life»⁶⁷. At the same time as he defends the social need for superfluous property, he is therefore convinced that it can contribute very little to one's own weal: «Human cheerfulness or dejection is obviously not determined by external circumstances, by wealth or position, for we come across at least as many cheerful faces among the poor as among the rich»⁶⁸. The distinction between internal and external endowments being a question of kind rather than degree, intense consumption and excessive accumulation do not increase our happiness. If anything, it can increase our woes. For one thing, possessions make us anxious about the possibility of their loss:

Wealth proper, that is, great superfluity, can do little for our happiness. Therefore many wealthy people feel unhappy [...]. For what wealth can achieve, beyond the satisfaction of the real and natural needs, has little influence on our happiness proper; on the contrary, this is disturbed by the many inevitable worries that are entailed in the preservation of much property.⁶⁹

For another thing, since «want and boredom are the two poles of [the suffering that dominates] human life», the very rich are permanently in danger, if not of suffering from the want that torments the poor, then at least from the boredom that ensues from satiety: «Life presents itself primarily as a task, namely that of gaining a livelihood, *de gagner sa vie*. When

⁶⁶ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 246-247.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 315.

⁶⁸ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 316.

⁶⁹ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 320-321.

this problem is solved, what has been gained is a burden, and there comes the second problem»⁷⁰. It is true that «want and privation produce pain», but «security and affluence give rise to boredom», and for this reason «we see the lower classes constantly struggling against privation and thus against pain» while, for their part, «the wealthy upper classes are engaged in a constant and often really desperate struggle against boredom»⁷¹. In fine, as far as the good life is concerned, «Differences of rank and wealth give everyone his part to play, but there is certainly not an internal difference of happiness and satisfaction that corresponds to that role. On the contrary, here too there is in everyone the same poor wretch with his worries»⁷².

Oblivious of the lesson in austerity that Schopenhauer imparts through his criticism of opulence, the average egoist still sees wealth and property as means of fencing off dissatisfaction. Schopenhauer is aware of this: «*Means at our disposal*», he writes, are believed by the short-sighted egoist to be «a bulwark against the many evils and misfortunes that can occur»⁷³. And then he describes the frivolous lifestyle to which this belief often leads:

The normal man, [...] as regards the pleasures of his life, relies on things that are *outside him* and thus on possessions, rank, wife and children, friends, society, and so on; these are the props of his life's happiness. [...] For this reason his wishes and whims are always changing; if he has the means, he will buy country-houses or horses, give parties, or travel; but generally speaking, he will indulge in great luxury, just because he seeks satisfaction from without in all kinds of things.⁷⁴

What the average individual does not realise is that «the needs for luxury, extravagance, pomp, and splendour» —which «are neither natural nor necessary»— «are without end and very difficult to satisfy».⁷⁵

Schopenhauer insists that, in comparison to the money and property accumulated, a person's health, their intellectual powers and their ethical dispositions are much more important for their happiness: «what a man *has in himself* is most essential to his life's happiness».⁷⁶ Obviously, such degree of wisdom is only available to aesthetic geniuses, to the happy few that have attained sainthood, or to those that let their conduct be governed by practical reason. As for the rest of people, the fear of dissatisfaction makes it «natural and even inevitable» for them to love not only possessions but also money itself, «which, as an untiring Proteus, is ready at

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 295, 286.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 329.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 317.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 339-340.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

any moment to convert itself into the particular object of our fickle desires and manifold needs. Thus every other blessing can satisfy only *one* desire and *one* need. [...] Money alone [...] meets not merely one need *in concreto*, but needs generally *in abstracto*»⁷⁷.

Schopenhauer argues that, since money is «the abstract representative of all the objects of desire», it «takes their place, and excites the same vehement passions that were formerly awakened [...] by the objects of actual pleasure»⁷⁸. Therefore, its protean character turns it into the quintessential object of desire. Once more, we find in this line of reasoning an antecedent of Marx's thought, according to which money is an all-powerful mediator:

By possessing the *property* of buying everything, by possessing the property of appropriating all objects, *money* is thus the object of eminent possession. The universality of its *property* is the omnipotence of its being. It therefore functions as the almighty being. Money is the *pimp* between man's need and the object, between his life and his means of life.⁷⁹

In other respects, by contrast, Schopenhauer's remarks on the excessive attachment to money is set apart from Marx's later opinions by virtue of the different ontological premises on which they rest. For Schopenhauer, money only contributes to the direct satisfaction of the individual's egoistic desires; to the satisfaction of those dictated by the species—which Schopenhauer regards as much more important, as they respond more precisely to the activity of the essential will—it contributes only indirectly, if at all:

The man [who], having his eye on money instead of on the satisfaction of his [amorous and ultimately sexual] inclination in the case of his marriage, lives more in the individual than in the species. This [...] appears contrary to nature, and excites a certain contempt. A girl who rejects the proposal of a wealthy and not old man, against her parents' advice, in order to choose, setting aside all considerations of convenience, according to her instinctive inclination, sacrifices her individual welfare to that of the species. But on this very account, we cannot withhold a certain approbation; for she has preferred what is more important, and has acted in the spirit of nature (more precisely of the species), whereas the parents advised her in the spirit of individual egoism.⁸⁰

To the egocentric and careless pursuit of wealth and property, Schopenhauer contrasts nonegocentric indifference or at least rational temperance. Insofar as they go against the impulsive satisfaction of one's desires, these nonegocentric and stoic states of mind have a strong ascetic component. However sensible it may have seemed in his own times, when morals—and moral thought, as exemplified by Kant's—were predominantly based on restraint,

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 347-348.

⁷⁸ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 638.

⁷⁹ Marx and Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁸⁰ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 558.

disinterest and even sacrifice, today Schopenhauer's advocacy of these modes of awareness is likely to find fewer followers, at least if we are to believe Slavoj Žižek's description of how the postmodern individual is expected to behave: far from valuing the renunciation of pleasure, or at least its judicious management, postmodernity values enjoyment no matter how stultifying, exhausting and painful it turns out to be in the long run.

According to Žižek, present-day capitalistic societies no longer rest on «repression and strict regulation» but on compulsory enjoyment. In order to do justice to this change, some psychoanalytical theorists, following Jacques Lacan's lead, have replaced Sigmund Freud's repressive understanding of the superego (originally a psychic agency allied with the reality principle, which mediates the pleasure principle, in order to regulate desire) with its permissive reverse (a superego now pushing us, like a relentless drive, to a region of painful enjoyment located beyond the pleasure principle). In Žižek's interpretation of Lacan, «the essential content of the superego's injunction is "Enjoy!"». Žižek explains: «"You can do your duty, because you must do it" is how Kant formulated the categorical imperative. The usual negative corollary of this formula serves as the foundation of moral constraint: "You cannot, because you should not"». While the Kantian prohibition underlies the Freudian conception of the superego, the Lacanian superego «inverts the Kantian "You can, because you must" [...] turning it into "You must, because you can"». In fact, today's encouragement to enjoy yourself doing whatever you like (*do it just because you like it!*) conceals the injunction to enjoy yourself doing what *you must*: «Our [...] society which seems hedonistic and permissive is actually saturated with rules and regulations [...]. The injunction becomes: "You must do your duty, and you must enjoy doing it"». Thus «there is the obverse paradox of pleasure becoming duty in a "permissive" society. Subjects experience the need to "have a good time", to enjoy themselves, as a kind of duty, and, consequently, feel guilty for failing to be happy»⁸¹. In this context, the postmodern superego becomes an imperious capitalist superego: we can consume as much as we like because we must (in the last instance, because the survival of our cherished social order depends on this, hence, for example, our political leaders' encouragement to buy more so as to reactivate the economy) and we must enjoy ourselves in the process!

For the postmodern injunction to enjoy to be effective, we must renounce to leave egocentrism behind. According to Schopenhauer, what distinguishes egocentric individuals, more specifically egoists, is that they covet the objects that they perceive: «When we look at something we do not possess, the thought readily occurs: "Ah, if that were mine"». ⁸² By contrast, nonegocentric geniuses do not covet what they observe. Going even further, those who have attained saintly wisdom realise «the vanity of all possessions»⁸³.

⁸¹ Žižek, Slavoj, «"You May!"», *London Review of Books*, 3-6, 18 March 1999, available from <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n06/slavoj-zizek/you-may/> [accessed 10 December 2017].

⁸² Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 436.

⁸³ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 396.

Without shedding egocentrism, and acknowledging that we can change neither our desires nor the egoistic way in which we perceive objects as related to our well-being, we can still avoid suffering if, instead of striving to accumulate an ever-increasing amount of money or of possessions, we learn carefully to choose the way in which we satisfy our needs and whims. This is precisely what Schopenhauer's philosophy tries to teach us (in this sense, it is a practical philosophy despite its author's claims to the contrary, a contradiction within Schopenhauer's work that, as we will see, has been commented on by Eagleton). As far as possible, it is necessary to avoid competition and excess, picking neither too easy nor too difficult objects and consuming them with moderation (and without hurting others)⁸⁴: «it is quite easy to be very unhappy, whereas to be very happy is not exactly difficult but absolutely impossible»; therefore «it is advisable to reduce to very moderate proportions our claims to pleasures, possessions, rank, honour, and so on, just because it is this striving and struggling for happiness, brilliance, and pleasure that entail great misfortunes»⁸⁵.

The problem with the acquisition and accumulation of physical objects is simply that they can never deliver the lasting satisfaction that they promise. This is true, Schopenhauer believes, of desire in general and of the desire for wealth and possessions in particular. Just as he compares the essential will with «an unquenchable thirst»⁸⁶, he also speaks of «the mean thirst for money»⁸⁷, explaining that the rich man «is not consoled by the many things he already

⁸⁴ Schopenhauer's ideas about the legitimate scope of philosophy are thus belied by his own work. He claims that real philosophy must be pure not applied (in particular, not applied to conduct, i.e. not practical): ideally, he says, «philosophy is always theoretical, since it is essential to it always to maintain a purely contemplative attitude, whatever be the immediate object of investigation; to inquire, not to prescribe. But to become [applied and more specifically] practical, to guide conduct, [and even] to transform character, are old claims which with mature insight it ought finally to abandon» (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 271). Yet his own philosophy does not conform to this theoretical ideal: though it does not aspire to change people's conduct by altering their character —a modification that Schopenhauer deems impossible— it does (re)commend and encourage certain ways of behaving (it has a practical goal precisely because it claims to be theoretically sound). This contradiction merits some comment: Schopenhauer praises the capacity of religion «to restrain the rough [...] dispositions of the masses», that is, its effectiveness «in practical affairs [...] as a guide to conduct» (Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 325, 330–331). Sometimes Schopenhauer goes as far as to suggest that religious leaders have a greater practical power than philosophers. As «practical aims in every respect take precedence of theoretical» considerations (*ibid.*, p. 331), religion would thus be more important than philosophy. The problem with this conclusion is that it does not correspond to Schopenhauer's general opinion about the relative merits of religion —which excites more feelings than concepts and often relies on absurd dogmas based on authority alone (*vid. ibid.*, pp. 345–346)— and philosophy. In principle, then, philosophy must be at least as capable as religion of acting as a practical guide to conduct (*vid. Young, Schopenhauer*, *op. cit.*, pp. 165–168).

⁸⁵ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 408.

⁸⁶ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 312.

⁸⁷ Schopenhauer, *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

possesses. Wealth is like sea-water; the more we drink, the thirstier we become». ⁸⁸ It is important for us, rational beings, to realise that the attempt to acquire all that we want is vain, and that «we must in life, if we wish to grasp and possess one thing, renounce and leave aside innumerable others that lie to the right and to the left». If we behave «like children at a fair» and try to «snatch at everything that fascinates us in passing», we «run a zigzag path, wander like a will-o'-the-wisp, and arrive at nothing» ⁸⁹. Even when we circumstantially achieve what we are after, satiety soon leads to the feeling of emptiness associated with boredom:

... a person [...] wants with burning eagerness to accumulate everything, in order to slake the thirst of egoism. As is inevitable, he is bound to see that all satisfaction is only apparent, and that the attained object never fulfils the promise held out by the desired object, namely the final appeasement of the [...] will. He sees that, with fulfilment, the wish changes only its form, and now torments under another form; indeed, when at last all wishes are exhausted, the pressure of will itself remains, even without any recognized motive, and makes itself known with terrible pain as a feeling of the most frightful desolation and emptiness. ⁹⁰

Given that our will-full appetites have no end and are always in search of novelty, excessive consumption and accumulation are more detrimental than beneficial. For this reason, a rich man «will not be happy, for the exemption from want delivers him into the hands of boredom [...]. But this very boredom will soon lead him into extravagances» that hardly contribute to his happiness. ⁹¹

II

We have just seen that Schopenhauer does not hesitate to condemn as wrong the kind of appropriation of another's property —i.e. of the product of another's work— that Marx later described as being linked particularly to the capitalistic mode of production. However, at a deeper level there are other aspects of his thought that can be read as contributing to the preservation of capitalism. It is to these that I turn now.

As is well known, Schopenhauer holds the view that the essential will exerts its overwhelming if often covert influence over all behaviour, including in the economic sphere. In a thought-provoking analysis carried out from a Marxist perspective, Terry Eagleton reverses the hierarchy, and, instead of making the thirst for wealth depend on the essential will shared by humans with the rest of the world, he interprets the notion of the essential will as a mystifying concept behind which lurk the basest capitalist passions. According to Eagleton, the concept of the essential will is a good example of the way in which ideology can disguise social circumstances as natural dispositions.

⁸⁸ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 347.

⁸⁹ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 303.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

⁹¹ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 351.

Within the Marxist tradition, ideology can be defined as a set of normative aspirations, beliefs and (discursive and nondiscursive) practices that embody and contribute to preserve the social *statu quo*⁹². As Eagleton explains, ideology often employs to that end strategies of unification, rationalisation, legitimation, naturalisation and universalisation. What this means is, to begin with, that ideologies «are rarely homogeneous», but, by virtue of their thrust towards social *unification*, they «strive to homogenize» and «lend coherence to the groups or classes which hold them, welding them into a unitary, if internally differentiated, identity, and perhaps thereby allowing them to impose a certain unity upon society as a whole»⁹³. In the psychoanalytical definition of the term, which Eagleton adopts from Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, the *rationalisation* of the social situation is a «Procedure whereby the subject attempts to present an explanation that is either logically consistent or ethically acceptable for attitudes, ideas, feelings, etc., whose true motives are not perceived»⁹⁴. The *legitimation* of the social situation is «the process by which a ruling power comes to secure from its subjects an at least tacit consent to its authority». *Naturalisation* involves making the social situation «appear spontaneous and inevitable»⁹⁵. *Universalisation* consists in presenting values and interests that «are in fact specific to a certain place and time [...] as the values and interests of all humanity». Its naturalising and universalising components are «part of the *dehistoricizing* thrust of ideology, its tacit denial that ideas and beliefs are specific to a particular time, place and social group»⁹⁶.

Schopenhauer's description of what he considers the normal state of the world is doubly ideological, insofar as it is naturalising and universalising from the ontological and epistemological perspectives alike. On the one hand, Schopenhauer takes willing qua unquenchable yearning—identified by Eagleton as capitalistic insatiability—to be the essence of the world. On the other hand, Schopenhauer presents the egocentric outlook as the only kind of consciousness of which the essential will can avail itself so as to achieve (through the intermediation of those among its manifestations that feed on each other and are endowed with consciousness) indirect and temporary satisfaction.

According to Eagleton's account of the behaviour of ideology, extending the capitalist organisation of human life to all historical periods and, beyond the human sphere, to all animate and inanimate beings, thus giving the idea that such a way of life is necessary and unavoidable, is an obvious ideological manoeuvre. And this is precisely the move

⁹² Some of Marx and Engels's seminal texts on ideology can be found in Marx and Engels, *The Marx–Engels Reader*, *op. cit.*, pp. 4, 154–155, 172–173, 319–324.

⁹³ Eagleton, Terry, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London and New York, Verso, 1991, p. 45.

⁹⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 51; originally in Laplanche, Jean, and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, London, Karnac Books, 2006.

⁹⁵ Eagleton, *Ideology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 54, 55.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 59.

made by Schopenhauer when he reifies the passions that keep capitalism going into a timeless urge that underlies the world as a whole irrespective of spatial and temporal considerations, that is, when he presents contingent historical realities as an essential component of existence.

In some respects, Eagleton's reading follows close in Lukács's footsteps. Lukács describes Schopenhauer as an *indirect apologist* of capitalism, by which he means that Schopenhauer does not strive to downplay or smooth out the contradictions and injustices of capitalism, passing them off as mere appearances or transient anomalies of the best of all conceivable systems, as *direct apologists* do. Rather, Schopenhauer acknowledges these flaws as irrefutable facts, but treats them in such a way that they ultimately support the existence of capitalism. In doing so, Schopenhauer invents the strategy of crudely calling attention to the atrocities of capitalism, while explaining them away not as features of capitalism alone, but as characteristics of all human and animal life insofar as these are ultimately rooted in the essence of the whole world. According to Lukács, Schopenhauer's point is that all resistance against these atrocities, and by implication against capitalism, is futile, as it would mean altering human nature itself. Even more, says Lukács, the intellectual remedies for this plight that the German philosopher puts forward—above all in the aesthetic and ethical spheres, by virtue of what Lukács interprets as the subject's mental detachment from society—tend to reveal an elitist strand of individualism that is adverse to social intervention and to the very idea of social progress. By establishing an analogy between the individual will that anyone can observe within themselves and the rest of nature, Schopenhauer transforms the individual into a cosmic power that can regard all social activity with lofty disdain. What is more, Schopenhauer thinks that egoism prevails among human beings (and other animals), an opinion that overlooks its *transient historical* dimension and almost elevates normal capitalistic selfishness to an immutable anthropological or cosmic quality. Schopenhauer's philosophy thus fulfils a double social function—that of arguing for the meaninglessness of political action, and that of justifying capitalist rapacity⁹⁷—.

In Lukács's view, Schopenhauer's indirect apologetics and his individualistic stance are in full harmony with his position as a well-off rentier that does not miss any philosophical opportunity to defend private property (we have already seen that Schopenhauer considers it a natural right) and (not only capitalism but) any social system capable of guaranteeing it⁹⁸. This interpretation leads Lukács to condemn Schopenhauer's effort to dissociate true philosophy (pure contemplation) from any kind of practice⁹⁹. Lukács concludes that Schopenhauer's true relation

⁹⁷ Vid. Lukács, György, *El asalto a la razón: La trayectoria del irracionalismo desde Schelling hasta Hitler*, translated by Wenceslao Roces, México D.F., Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959, pp. 167-198.

⁹⁸ Vid. *ibid.*, pp. 173, 198.

⁹⁹ Vid. *ibid.*, p. 193.

with the Enlightenment —let us recall his endorsement of the expression *sapere aude*¹⁰⁰, which Kant adopted from Horace as the motto of the Enlightenment— is one of distortion or betrayal: Schopenhauer's emphasis on the points of contact with certain Enlightened tendencies is just a way of justifying his reactionary view of human beings and the world.¹⁰¹

Like Lukács, Eagleton argues that Schopenhauer's description of the world as dominated by ceaseless yearning, «irrespective of this or that particular hankering», is nothing more than a covert extrapolation from the early-19th-century commercial world in which Schopenhauer occupied a privileged place by inheritance. Whereas in earlier social orders «desire is still too narrowly particularistic, too intimately bound up with local or traditional obligation, to be reified in quite this way», by Schopenhauer's time, explains Eagleton, capitalist society has evolved to the point where «the determinant role and regular repetition of [capitalistic] appetite [...] permits a dramatic theoretical shift: the construction of desire as [...] a momentous metaphysical event or self-identical force». What allows this kind of reification is not only the transformation of appetite, «in the form of commonplace possessive individualism», into «the order of the day, the ruling ideology and dominant social practice», but, more specifically, «the perceived infinity of desire» in a social system «where the only end of accumulation is to accumulate afresh». As desire is hypostasised, it «comes to seem independent of any particular ends, or at least as grotesquely disproportionate to them». In the end, capitalist appetite «begins monstrously to obtrude itself as [...] an opaque, [...] self-propelling power utterly without purpose or reason». In Schopenhauer, «the uncouth rapacity of the average bourgeois» is transformed into «the prime metaphysical mover» of the entire world, which is thereby «recast in the image of the market force». The image of the human individual that emerges from this theory is that of «a helpless puppet of the will»¹⁰². The individual is thus put in thrall to the same inhuman force that underlies the rest of the world as appearance:

At the very root of the human subject lies that which is implacably alien to it, so that [...] this will which is the very pith of my being, which I can feel from the inside of my body [...] is absolutely unlike me at all, without consciousness or motive, as blankly unfeeling and anonymous as the force which stirs the waves.¹⁰³

Like other aspects of Schopenhauer's thought, his claim that the bourgeois individual, the polyp and the waves share a common essence, in the form of some sordid craving, «removes the hope of any historical alternative».¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Vid. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 390, and Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 428.

¹⁰¹ Vid. Lukács, *El asalto a la razón*, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

¹⁰² Eagleton, Terry, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Malden and Oxford, Blackwell, 1990, pp. 158-160.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

If what Schopenhauer presents as the essential will is nothing more than the core of bourgeois capitalism, then his presentation «naturalizes and universalizes bourgeois behaviour».¹⁰⁵ Since naturalisation and universalisation are two of the main features of ideology mentioned by Eagleton, it is obvious that —contrary to what its initial lack of philosophical impact might suggest— Magee is right in saying that the ontological component of Schopenhauer's theory has always been much «in keeping with the temper of the time».¹⁰⁶ Actually, it could be argued that Schopenhauer's essentialism is even more in keeping with present-day attitudes than it was with the economic ethos of his own age. After all, according to Žižek, we now live in a time in which any alternative to capitalism is inconceivable:

... today [...] nobody seriously considers possible alternatives to capitalism any longer, whereas popular imagination is persecuted by the visions of the forthcoming «breakdown of nature», of the stoppage of all life on earth —it seems easier to imagine the «end of the world» than a far more modest change in the mode of production, as if liberal capitalism [...] will somehow survive even under conditions of a global ecological catastrophe.¹⁰⁷

This is an ideological view of social life that Schopenhauer has contributed to perpetuate, and not only through his ontology but also through much of his epistemology. If, on the one hand, he tends to view the entire world as fuelled by insatiable desire, on the other, he regards the egocentric view of the external world as being characterised by unavoidable fragmentation and permanent conflict. Judging from what psychoanalysis has to say about the intrinsic heterogeneity of the human mind, this insistence on external division and strife could be the ideologically inflected result of psychological projection. Let us recall that, from a psychoanalytical perspective, fragmentation and conflict are the most salient features of the human psyche. According to Sigmund Freud, the psychic apparatus is divided into systems (in the first topography: the unconscious, preconscious and conscious) and into agencies (in the second topography: the id, ego and superego)¹⁰⁸. According to Dylan Evans, for Lacan this split both constitutes the subject and «indicates the presence of the unconscious»¹⁰⁹. In Lacan's own words, the «objection to any reference to totality in the individual» stems from the fact that subjectivity itself, which is a consequence of socialisation, «introduces division therein».¹¹⁰ Moreover, psychoanalytical theorists are well aware that the way in which the individual deals

¹⁰⁵ *Idem*.

¹⁰⁶ Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

¹⁰⁷ Žižek, Slavoj, «Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology», in *Mapping Ideology*, edited by Slavoj Žižek, 1-33, London and New York, Verso, 1994, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ *Vid.* Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, *op. cit.*, pp. 449-453.

¹⁰⁹ Evans, Dylan, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, p. 192.

¹¹⁰ Lacan, Jacques, *Écrits*, translated by Bruce Fink *et alia*, New York and London, W.W. Norton, 2006, p. 242.

with this split or gap is historically inflected. Sometimes the attempted response involves the projection onto the external world of what one treats as an internal flaw. In this regard, Lacan argues that there is a certain psychological attitude that is peculiar to the modern mind: «The me [*moi*] of modern man [...] has taken on its form in the dialectical impasse of the beautiful soul who does not recognize his very reason for being in the disorder he denounces in the world»¹¹¹. As John P. Muller and William J. Richardson's discussion of this passage makes it clear, it is not only the *belle âme* that «projects internal conflict onto the world and then proceeds to denounce it»¹¹². This attitude is characteristic of the modern frame of mind as a whole: a typical trait of modernity is that «internal disorder is [...] denounced in the other, who is seen as a threat to the ego».¹¹³ It could be argued, in this light, that when Schopenhauer presents fragmentation and conflict as characterising the usual state of the world, not as something peculiar to modernity but as something common to all stages in humankind's trajectory, he is extending the modern frame of mind to other periods, turning it into a transhistorical constant. The outcome here would be just as ideological as that of the extrapolation from the desires of modern humans to the entire world.

We have just seen that, from the Marxist and psychoanalytical perspectives alike, Schopenhauer is caught in an ideological dynamic which makes competitive individualism appear as a natural, unavoidable feature of the world. Despite this fundamental ideological flaw, Eagleton does not dismiss Schopenhauer's thought as totally worthless. Distancing himself from Lukács's total condemnation, Eagleton suggests that Schopenhauer's thought deserves being paid attention to on a number of counts, of which the most relevant in relation to consumerism are the following. Schopenhauer believes, in Eagleton's words, that «If human beings were capable of contemplating objectively for one moment this perverse attachment of theirs to unhappiness, they would necessarily abhor it»¹¹⁴. Though Eagleton does not make this point directly, it could be argued that Schopenhauer's emphasis on nonegocentric contemplation as a better consciousness that somehow breaks free from desire anticipates the Marxist attack on the ideological conformity with capitalism. We could add, more generally, that Schopenhauer's endorsement of the expression *sapere aude* is a step in the direction of getting to know and leaving behind not only the prevailing supra-individual conditions of human misery, but their counterproductive attachment to them. Once its ideological underpinnings have been laid bare, Eagleton suggests, Schopenhauer's philosophy can be read as an indictment not of the entire world, but of past human history, of the history of capitalism in particular, and thereby as a guiding light for the future. Thus Eagleton admits

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹¹² Muller, John P., and William J. Richardson, *Lacan and Language: A Reader's Guide to Écrits*, New York, International Universities Press, 1982, p. 313.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹¹⁴ Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

that Schopenhauer's «appalling vision» of history is accurate in many respects: «The dramatic mutations of human history, its epochal ruptures and upheavals, have been in one sense mere variations on a consistent theme of exploitation and oppression». Eagleton adds that Schopenhauer's bleak portrayal is only a characterisation «of all history to date». This qualification of Schopenhauer's view of history does not prevent Eagleton from adding that the philosopher's thought serves as a reminder that this «intolerable narrative cannot continue». Despite its occasional quietist inclinations, then, Schopenhauer's thought can inspire political action. It is the belief that the course of history can be changed that inspires emancipatory political struggles (of the kind that Eagleton supports), «even as the crippling burden of that history would seem to bear mute witness against the feasibility of such a faith»¹¹⁵. Eagleton remarks that Schopenhauer's claim that the bourgeois individual, the polyp and the waves share a common essence, in the form of some sordid craving not only serves to negate any historical alternatives but also «to discredit bourgeois Man [...] writing him repellently large», a «debunking» which «shakes bourgeois ideology to the root» and by virtue of which «the meagre *contents* of social life [...] are [...] discredited by the very move which grants them metaphysical status»¹¹⁶. Further,

Once the actual bourgeois subject, rather than its high-minded idealist representation, is placed *à la* Schopenhauer at the nub of theory, there seems no way of avoiding the conclusion that it must be liquidated. There can be no question any longer of judicious reform: nothing short of that revolution of the [bourgeois] subject which is its [...] obliteration will serve to liberate it from itself.¹¹⁷

This rejection of bourgeois egoism has contradictory consequences. On the one hand, Eagleton asserts, much like Lukács, that «Schopenhauer is adamant that philosophy is quite incapable of altering [the innate dispositions that determine] human conduct, and disowns all prescriptive intent in his writing. There can be no truck between the cognitive and the ethical». At the same time, Eagleton correctly reminds us that Schopenhauer's description of how life usually is and of how the good life differs from it, implicitly works as a prescription of a way of life based on nonegocentric consciousness or at least guided by practical reason. His philosophy «is at once descriptive and prescriptive —an account of the way the world is, as well as, indissociably, the recommendation of a certain style of [...] behaviour»¹¹⁸. On the other hand, Eagleton reads the nonegocentric subject's detachment from the world as nothing but a narcissistic fantasy of the egocentric subject: «the [...] ego fantasizes some state of triumphal invulnerability», its aloofness becoming a way of «wreaking Olympian vengeance

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

on the sinister forces which would hound it to death»¹¹⁹. On this view, «the dissolution of the grasping ego [...] is also, unavoidably, the ego's exultant fantasy of securing an eternal, uninjured existence for itself». Therefore, «The dream of transcending one's own petty subjecthood [...] turns out to involve a flight into some higher, deeper form of subjectivity, with a corresponding gain of omnipotent mastery»¹²⁰. For Schopenhauer, this only works in the individual sphere, where the subject has cornered itself by turning its back on all social concerns. In this sense, «even though it remains faithful to the aesthetic as some ultimate redemption», Schopenhauer's thought is «the ruin of all [...] high hopes which bourgeois idealism has invested in the idea of the aesthetic»; the «disinterestedness which promised, among other things, the possibility of an alternative social order» ends up as a «flight from corporeal existence» and as «an alternative to history itself». By bringing centre stage the «embarrassing rift» between aesthetic disinterestedness and society, Schopenhauer's escapist praise of the former contributes to lay bare the ideological basis of the idealist belief in «any practical connection between the two spheres»¹²¹. Among other things, Schopenhauer's philosophy is a reminder that some respite from capitalistic competition may be found at the individual level through nonegocentric states of mind; yet it also reveals that, contrary to the tenets of bourgeois ideology, there can be no solution to social problems through aesthetics—indeed through any kind of nonegocentric consciousness— alone.

III

According to Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio's essay *Non Olet* (first published in 2003), the birth of the current stage of capitalism, so-called *consumer society*, can be precisely dated in the late 1920s. Whereas Schopenhauer would have us believe that excessive consumption is the spontaneous and almost inevitable result of insatiable human nature, Sánchez Ferlosio claims that consumerism was born «from a fully conscious, deliberate and programmed decision» on the part of a group of businesspeople that needed an outlet for excess production¹²². According to this argument, consumer society was born in the USA between late 1926 and October 1927.

Sánchez Ferlosio refers to consumer society as *production society*¹²³, for he thinks that what characterises it is the fact that now buyers are produced by the *invisible hand* of the advertising industry¹²⁴, in parallel to commodities¹²⁵. The paradigmatic result of this new process of

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 169, 170.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.

¹²² *Vid.* Sánchez Ferlosio, Rafael, *Non Olet*, Barcelona, Austral, 2010, p. 17 (all translations from Sánchez Ferlosio's book are mine).

¹²³ *Vid. idem.*

¹²⁴ *Vid. ibid.*, p. 296.

¹²⁵ *Vid. ibid.*, p. 15, 294.

production is the figure of the perpetually *dissatisfied* consumer, which is first of all the invention of Charles Kettering, of General Motors, in the early 1930s, and which nowadays continues to exist by virtue of a concerted, incessant and all-pervading advertising campaign¹²⁶. For Sánchez Ferlosio, it is no longer the case that production is designed to fulfil the needs —or whims— of consumers, or that consumption is designed to fulfil the needs —or whims— of producers; rather more crucially, consumption has become the only thing that can fulfil the current needs of production itself.¹²⁷ Abstract, autonomous production (it no longer matters of what) has become the engine of the economy (at least, we could add, in so-called developed countries), and abstract, indiscriminate consumption is the only *fuel* that can keep it going¹²⁸. It is by virtue of this change that *homo sapiens* —the wise person— becomes *homo emptor* —the buying person—¹²⁹.

On this view, the consumerism of *homo emptor* is by no means an innate, immutable behaviour; instead, compulsive consumption takes advantage of the pliability of human nature, whose specific qualities are more dependent on cultural factors than on anything else. Taking for granted «the economic determination of society, of culture, and of people themselves»¹³⁰, Sánchez Ferlosio argues that today's consumers are just the dupes of capitalistic ideology. For the sake of contrast, he reminds readers that in the pre-Columbian Americas, for example, there existed cultures whose members were somehow free from any productive and consumerist impulses —much to the annoyance of Spanish conquerors that could not understand why their entrepreneurial ambitions were not shared by the locals—.

At first sight, Schopenhauer's and Sánchez Ferlosio's analyses could not be more divergent. As already shown, Schopenhauer never offers a fully-fledged theory of wealth, capital or consumption; but his scattered comments on the matter show that he sees the latter phenomenon as rooted in human nature and, ultimately, in the essential will shared by humankind with all things and beings in the world. As against Sánchez Ferlosio's consumers, Schopenhauer's are not in thrall to ideology but to their own essence. This is in keeping with what Sánchez Ferlosio calls the liberal «tradition» of «knowing everything about human nature»¹³¹, and of «proofing economic configurations with the final authority of Nature»¹³². Such an attitude often leads to presenting the act of buying as being instinctually and/or genetically motivated, hence as so deeply engrained in human nature as to be universal¹³³. To

¹²⁶ *Vid. ibid.*, pp. 21-22, 292.

¹²⁷ *Vid. ibid.*, pp. 125-126.

¹²⁸ *Vid. ibid.*, pp. 289-296.

¹²⁹ *Vid. ibid.*, pp. 271 ff.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 307.

¹³³ *Vid. ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

some extent, this is too what Schopenhauer does when he insists that the ascendancy of the essential will over human behaviour is innate and immutable.

As it turns out, the different approaches of the two authors cannot conceal a striking similarity between both: they agree in locating the roots of consumerism beyond the isolated individual—in the essential will in one case, in ideology in the other—. As Sánchez Ferlosio shows, some commentators strive to reduce consumerism to the *individual pathology* of *consumer addiction*. By contrast, he asserts that, far from being isolated cases, the most serious examples of individual consumerism are just the clearest tokens of a compulsive (both impulsive and compulsory) behaviour to which we are all encouraged by advertising—symptoms of a collective disease from which most of us suffer to a greater or lesser degree (at least in developed countries): «the pathological character is only defined quantitatively, that is, as the exaggerated, excessive degree, of a common behaviour regarded as normal» because rooted in human biology—. So much so that any attempt to curb this behaviour is considered a subversive gesture, an attack on the smooth operation of the economic system (an attack, we could add, discouraged by the postmodern superego)¹³⁴. For Sánchez Ferlosio, this characterisation of consumerism as an individual evil is a way of shielding it from social criticism: excessive consumption is thus seen as an illness that «can only be fought and defeated in the individuals themselves *and nowhere else*»¹³⁵. Insofar as «the individual manifestation of social phenomena is perceived as a mere defect of individuality», he argues, «the surrounding environment, that is, the concrete socio-economic milieu where the activity of consumption is carried out and made possible, is [...] exonerated»¹³⁶. Thus social change is out of the question (much as in Schopenhauer, though for other reasons).

Another similarity between the German and Spanish authors is that they both envisage alternatives to the behaviour that they denounce. Contrary to what is often suggested, Schopenhauer does not believe that it is totally impossible to change society. True, he goes a long way towards rejecting the idea of ethical progress. He argues that, save by what he deems a Utopian recourse to eugenics¹³⁷, it is impossible to alter the ethical character of the individual and of the human species as a whole. The comments made by the British writer William Golding, in the sense that «With good people, loving, co-operative, unselfish people, any social system will work», are apposite here, as long as we do not forget that, from Schopenhauer's perspective, Golding's dream of producing «*homo moralis*» might never come true¹³⁸. And given that the human species does not change, and that egoistic and malignant characters invariably outnumber virtuous ones, it is necessary to «recognize the identical in

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 272-274.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 284-285, 286.

¹³⁷ *Vid.* Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 256.

¹³⁸ Golding, William, *A Moving Target*, rev. ed., new York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984, p. 184.

all events, of ancient as of modern times, of the East as of the West»; what the past continuously reveals, Schopenhauer adds, is an invariable reality of natural rapacity and sadism under different names and in a slightly different guise. Thus he recommends that the motto for human history should be «*Eadem, sed aliter*», the same but otherwise¹³⁹. Yet Schopenhauer's position is not so clear concerning other aspects of historicity and social progress. On the one hand, he does reject the notion of economic progress, and justifies the existence of the inequalities caused by slavery and, more generally, by poverty¹⁴⁰. On the other hand, he does not reject the idea of legal progress, pointing to «a perfect State» where repression «might prevent every crime» and thus virtually abolish this source of suffering.¹⁴¹ Though historicity and progress are only apparent, for the essential foundations of the world cannot be changed, this does not detract from their importance: after all, Schopenhauer's philosophical project arises from the need, and has the ambition, of doing justice to these appearances and to the suffering that they are bound with: this is what he means when he says, for example, that denying the sorry state of the world constitutes «not merely an absurd, but also a really *wicked*, way of thinking, a bitter mockery of the unspeakable sufferings of mankind»¹⁴².

At the same time as he asserts the primacy of the essential will and of egocentrism, Schopenhauer reminds us that there are nonegocentric —hence neither egoistic nor malignant— solutions: aesthetics is one, the ethics of compassion is another. These solutions put an end to suffering, but only temporarily and on an individual basis. Other solutions that Schopenhauer mentions have a clearer collective dimension: thus, he argues that the suffering caused by egoistic self-interest and malice can never be totally avoided, but only palliated by implementing moral and, above all, legal constraints. One's innate character cannot be altered, and so ethical virtue cannot be taught. Far from embracing any kind of utopian hope, he suggests that what society needs is a repressive legal system, and not only because «the boundless egoism of almost all» and «the malice of many» lead to an outrageous amount of mutual aggression, but also because this is a situation that the weak restraining power of morality cannot prevent.

Schopenhauer believes that the law is necessary because the moral appeal to «conscience» has «little effect» on most people's conduct¹⁴³. Though a repressive state can certainly alter the behaviour of individuals, it cannot do so by transforming the citizens' innate egoism and malice into compassion¹⁴⁴. In Schopenhauer's conception, the state exists basically «for

¹³⁹ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 444.

¹⁴⁰ *Vid.* Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 244-247.

¹⁴¹ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 369.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 326.

¹⁴³ Schopenhauer, *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

¹⁴⁴ *Vid.* Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 597.

compelling» its citizens not to harm each other¹⁴⁵. As far as egoists are concerned, this goal can be attained through hope for recompense or fear of penalty, by dint of which they will be careful not to cause suffering to anyone. Schopenhauer believes that every successful state relies on and promotes whatever egoism there might be in its members. The protection that the state offers «is by no means directed against egoism, but only against the injurious consequences of egoism arising out of the plurality of egoistic individuals, reciprocally affecting them, and disturbing their well-being»¹⁴⁶. To the extent that society «has placed the protection of the rights of everyone in the hands of a force which, infinitely superior to the power of each individual, compels him to respect the rights of all others», the state can be regarded as a collective «masterpiece» resulting from «the self-comprehending, rational, accumulated egoism» of the majority¹⁴⁷.

The way in which society can make the most of the majority's innate egoism is by threatening them and by offering them suitable objects through which they can realise their aspirations without causing their neighbours any harm. For Schopenhauer, a just law is a law that takes advantage of (the fear of) suffering in order to minimise suffering. In the perfect legal system, the law-abiding egoist must learn, much like a stoic sage, to let practical rationality guide their conduct. Thanks to the law, society achieves a semblance of virtue without ever altering the inner source of ethical behaviour. Even if the state succeeds in channelling its members' passions so that they will not threaten each other's weal, this achievement does not increase the number of compassionate citizens. In a memorable passage, Schopenhauer compares the law-abiding citizen to «a carnivorous animal with a muzzle» that «is as harmless as a grass-eating animal»¹⁴⁸.

The threat posed by the law to the criminals' well-being can prevent egoists from doing any harm. Insofar as ethical differences tend to be a matter of degree rather than kind¹⁴⁹, the same threat can also work with those among malignant individuals that nevertheless display some measure of egoism. With those individuals whose malice is more intense the solution has to be different, as they will show little or no concern about their own weal. This is a case that Schopenhauer overlooks. Arguably, even these people's sadism can be rationally channelled in a profitable way, by persuading them to harm others only when this behaviour is socially desirable (for example in the exercise of lawful repression and punishment). The key lies in offering malignant individuals alternative ways of fulfilling their desires. Here it can once more be useful to recall William Golding's opinion: «If you can give a boy a box of paints and if he does go along with the box of paints, instead of smashing shopwindows he will paint pictures.

¹⁴⁵ Schopenhauer, *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

¹⁴⁶ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 345.

¹⁴⁷ Schopenhauer, *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

¹⁴⁸ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 346.

¹⁴⁹ *Vid.* Schopenhauer, *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

You have diverted him». Though this diversion can certainly be in the form of moral prescriptions, Golding immediately shifts the focus of his remarks from morality to legality. If one writes out rules for children, he says, «they will abide by the rules, provided the rules give them, perhaps, authority»; and if children are induced to satisfy their desires «legally, that is a triumph for everybody». It is thus that even the sadistic behaviour of «pathological killers» can be «canalized in a good direction or, at least, in a possible direction». In this way even «the hangman *can* be integrated into society». Golding further intimates that sadists could become police officers, perhaps members of the riot squad: «you give a cop with sadistic views a club and you give him laws to go by, and he will become a good member of society instead of a bad one»¹⁵⁰. In Schopenhauer, the malignant desires of sadistic police forces would still be morally reprehensible. However, what matters is that—in a democratic system at least—their actions would be under strict legal control and at the service of a greater good.

In contrast to the relative peace achieved through legal repression, Schopenhauer offers a bleak picture of what human life would be without an adequate legislation enforced by the state:

At bottom, man is a hideous wild beast. We know him only as bridled and tamed, a state that is called civilization; and so we are shocked by the occasional outbursts of his nature. But when and where the padlock and chain of law and order and once removed and anarchy occurs, he then shows himself to be what he is.¹⁵¹

It is because there is a state, founded on the collective desire to minimise violence and suffering, that the egoism of the majority and the malice of many others does not give rise to harmful actions: «compulsion has bound all».¹⁵² So convincing is the illusion of meekness created by the influence of the state that when it is broken we can hardly believe the consequences:

... in individual cases where the power of the state is unable to protect or is evaded, and we see the insatiable greed, [...] the spiteful malice of human beings appearing, we often recoil in horror and raise a hue and cry, thinking we have been attacked by a monster never before seen; but without the compulsion of laws [...] such occurrences would be the order of the day. You have to read crime stories and descriptions of states of anarchy to recognize what, in a moral respect, the human being really is. The thousands that swarm around one another before our eyes in peaceful intercourse should be regarded as just so many tigers and wolves whose bite is made safe by a strong muzzle. So if we think of the power of the state being removed, i.e. that muzzle being thrown off, anyone with insight recoils trembling before the scene that we could then expect.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ In Biles, Jack I., *Talk: Conversations with William Golding*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970, pp. 46-48.

¹⁵¹ Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 211.

¹⁵² Schopenhauer, *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

¹⁵³ *Idem*.

In Schopenhauer's view, so eloquently conveyed by this passage, there is no realistic alternative to this social order whose legal organisation, based on the fear of repression, takes advantage of the individual's egoism rather than putting an end to it. What he could not have envisaged from his central position in the modern philosophical tradition is a postmodern society that not only encourages but actively demands rapacious consumption.

IV

The discussion carried out in the preceding pages has shown that, in comparison with Sánchez Ferlosio's approach to consumerism, Schopenhauer's criticism of impulsive accumulation has an obvious individualistic bias, as is clear from the cures for egoistic consumption that he describes and from the fact that he cannot envisage any antidote at all at the collective level. One of the temporary solutions that he mentions comes in the guise of aesthetic contemplation, a nonegocentric state of mind that precludes the undue excitation of the appetites operating inside each and every person. Another solution, the saintly vision leading to ethical compassion, also involves the adoption of a nonegocentric form of awareness. By contrast, a third solution, the stoic use of practical reason, is linked to egocentrism and to the judicious management of desire. Schopenhauer's remedies either afford a temporary respite from the egocentrism and egoism on which capitalism and consumerism turn (in the case of aesthetics and ethics) or take egocentrism and egoism for granted, simply teaching reason how to cope with them (in the case of the stoic stance). What they never provide is a lasting, shared solution to egocentric self-interest. When we turn to Sánchez Ferlosio, we realise that his description of social systems whose members are somehow free from the consumerist condition functions both as a reminder of the limitations of Schopenhauer's model and as a welcome corrective to it.

This does not mean that Schopenhauer's thoughts on consumption are irrelevant. Far from it. First of all, Schopenhauer calls indirect attention to the terrible conditions of exploitation that —much like the early-19th-century industrial capitalism whose devastating impact on many the lower classes he so graphically depicts— early-21st-century global consumerism imposes on workers all over the world. Moreover, his discussion of the psychology of impulsive consumption, including the anxiety that accompanies it, throws light on our own experience as shoppers. It is undeniable that today's consumerism is much more voracious than Schopenhauer could have possibly foreseen; however, his comments on the behaviour of his contemporaries have the advantage of allowing us to see that the seeds of today's habits of consumption, whose official birth Sánchez Ferlosio dates in the early 20th century, can already be found in earlier stages of capitalist organisation. And while Schopenhauer's account of consumption is marred by an excessive emphasis on its innate roots and on the individual character of the alternatives, these very shortcomings are good examples of the bias of the liberal capitalist ideology that, today even more than in Schopenhauer's times, prevails in so-called developed societies. At the same time, Schopenhauer's model, which

treats the acquisitiveness on which the capitalist ethos rests as a cosmic force whose pressure can hardly be resisted, is an indication that the roots of consumerism extend well beyond the individual. Finally, Schopenhauer's analysis proves that remedies for consumerist behaviour are not only conceivable but available to everyone. In this sense, the aesthetic, ethical and stoic cures that he proposes have in common that all three involve avoiding not just physical pleasure but also —and this is what really matters to Schopenhauer— much potential suffering. We have seen that this ascetic emphasis on renunciation is in stark contrast with the postmodern superego's command to enjoy ourselves as much as we can —a command that contributes to preserve a capitalist economy and to render any alternative unimaginable—.

In conclusion, Schopenhauer is relevant to us for several reasons. The ideological mistakes of Schopenhauer's analysis are a precedent to the ones that we make still today. As in a mirror, in his texts we can get a better idea of how we are now than by looking directly at ourselves. And identifying his errors —and the reasons for them— can help to identify and correct ours. His description and condemnation of the impulses at work in what we call consumerism is a reminder that the problem of impulsive consumption exceeds the individual sphere and that, despite the image that we usually get from advertising, there can be more to life than shopping. Last, but not least, though his solutions are beset by the same ideological problems as his diagnosis —for which reason they do not necessarily have to be *our* solutions— they nevertheless evidence that the existence of alternatives can still be envisaged and that, now more than ever, the search for them is a worthy effort.

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