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On Schopenhauer's Theory of the Unconscious Choice of Fate

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Abstract

We propose to investigate Schopenhauer's hypothesis of transcendent fatalism, namely, his conjecture that there seems to be a secret force that guides us better than ourselves, as he explains in Transcendent Speculation on the Apparent Deliberateness in the Fate of the Individual *(1851). In this investigation, we will highlight his interpretation that this invisible force, called by the ancients Destiny (ειμαρμεχη), Demon (δαιμόν), or Providence (προνοια), symbolizes nothing other than our own nature or unconscious Will. Finally, we will also seek to contextualize that this interpretation of Schopenhauer, according to Marcel Zentner and Stephen Atzert, gives reason for Freud to cite that essay, in* Beyond the Pleasure Principle, *in connection with the psychoanalytic thesis of the unconscious choice of fate (*unbewußten Schicksalswahl*).*

Keywords: fatalism, demon, Providence, suffering, Freud

1. Introduction

A text by Schopenhauer that is quite important not only for philosophy but also for Freudian metapsychology is *Transcendent Speculation on the Apparent Deliberateness in the Fate of the Individual* (hereinafter abbreviated as *Transcendent Speculations*). It belongs to *Parerga and*

Paralipomena – Vol. I (1851), and its fortune on psychoanalysis can be seen in the fact that Freud cited it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (hereinafter abbreviated as *BPP*), in a footnote. In this essay, Freud claims that organic instincts can be divided into life and death instincts, which, respectively, seek to agglomerate living substances into increasingly larger units (Freud 2010b) or to destroy them and reconduct them to the inorganic realm. After presenting this theory, Freud (2010a: 220) [1] states that he entered 'the harbor of Schopenhauer's philosophy, for whom death is 'the authentic result' and, thus, the purpose of life, while the sexual instinct is the embodiment of life'. In a footnote, he cites the *Transcendent Speculations*. The specialized comment, however, is quite divided on whether or not these words correspond to the Schopenhauerian text.

Marcel Zentner (2018) claims that Freud proceeds from a flawed interpretation of Schopenhauer, since the sense in which the philosopher wrote the phrase that death is ''the authentic result' and, thus, the purpose of life' (Schopenhauer 2008), in *Transcendent Speculations*, is very different from that used by Freud in *BPP*. He also claims that Schopenhauer mentioned death only once in this essay; it is not an end of life, for this author, but a means, among several others, to the 'true end' (Schopenhauer 2015), which is the denial of the Will. The death instinct still has, in Freud, a biological meaning, and is an organic instinct, which we share with other animals; while the denial of the Will is exclusively human, it arises from special knowledge and is characterized more by being a 'suppression of instinct' (Zentner 2018) than an instinct. Finally, Freud also supports an instinctive dualism, while Schopenhauer exposes a monism of the Will. For Freud, the death instinct is the 'most powerful obstacle' (Freud 2010b) of civilization, while Eros is its creator 'along with necessity' (*Ib*.). In Schopenhauer

[1] All quotations in this text are our translations of the works.

(2005), this valuation is reversed: 'no opponent of the life instinct is necessary', whose summit is Eros, 'to explain evil in the world, for the Will to live is, *in itself*, *destructive*. The phenomena of aggression, cruelty, selfishness, and injustice can be deduced immediately from that' (Zentner 2018: 168). The denial of the Will consists of 'salvation and redemption' in the face of our 'inborn error' (Schopenhauer 2015), that is, the search for happiness. Due to these divergences, Zentner claims that, 'in connection with the psychoanalytic thesis of the *unconscious choice of fate* (unbewußten Schicksalswahl), Freud would have every reason to cite this text by Schopenhauer [*Transcendent Speculations*]. However, the link with his late dualism of instincts remains unclear here' (Zentner 2018: 162).

Another much-respected position on Freud's reference to *Transcendent Speculations* is that of Stephen Atzert. For him, not only is Freud's reference not mistaken, but it deserves even more attention. Atzert objects that Freud begins *BPP* by stating that what he develops in this text, namely, an analysis of the meaning (*Bedeutung*) of the sensations of pleasure and displeasure, was not made by any previous philosophy and psychology. However, Freud himself recognizes the 'open' nature of the evidence that supports his speculation and cites Schopenhauer as an important precursor. Furthermore, 'the structural connection of both texts is clear' (Atzert 2005): both explore the idea of a fate that seems to guide us like an invisible force, associated with the ancient myth of the '*daimon*' (Freud 2010a), although this force comes from ourselves (our unconscious or Will). The fact that, in Schopenhauer, this fate is guided not by the intellect, but by a metaphysical and irrational Will, which prepares us for death (*Todesvorbereitungswillens*), would also have '*without great efforts – only stripped of metaphysics – to be able to become a biological death instinct*' (Atzert 2005: 185). Therefore, 'the instinctive aspect of the death instinct theorem corresponds to the 'foreign power' (*fremde*

Macht) of the Will experienced passively in the individual's preparation for death' (Atzert 2005: 187). Finally, Freud does not present an equipollent dualism, but a 'hierarchical dualism' (Atzert 2005), in which there is a 'subordination of Eros to the death instinct' (191) – an idea that can also be deduced, without major problems, from Schopenhauer's essay (Atzert 2005)[2].

Due to these similarities, Atzert claims that Freud is not fair to Schopenhauer when he writes that 'no philosophical theory offers anything useful to the signification of sensations of pleasure and displeasure' (191). We agree with his line of thought, but as there were many concepts used here, I intend to focus on the one with which both Zentner and Atzert agree: that of the 'unconscious choice of fate' (Zentner: 2018), explored by both Schopenhauer and Freud[3]. More specifically, both thinkers believe that, in the course of human beings' lives, an apparently transcendent (therefore 'demonic') destiny is manifested; but which: (1) was chosen by us, unconsciously, (2) brings us an enormous amount of pain, (3) this suffering, however, is as appropriate as possible for each of us, according to our character or personality, and (4) it leads us along the path that is most appropriate for us, towards the great purpose of life: the denial of the Will, for Schopenhauer, or the 'return to the inorganic', for Freud (2010a). As Schopenhauer defends this idea in a more original way than Freud, we will address his exposition of it here, saving Freud's investigation of this notion for another time.

[2] Eduardo Ribeiro da Fonseca (2020) also questions whether Freud presents an instinctive dualism in *BPP*, or rather, a monism of the death instinct – which would bring him even closer to Schopenhauer.

[3] Atzert expresses his agreement with Zentner in the following words: 'My opinion is that the structural connection of both texts is clear when one considers the choice of fate – which also in Freud appears briefly in the compulsion to repetition by non-neurotics – in the conceptual lines of the meaning of death in Schopenhauer, according to *Transcendent Speculations*. There is, indeed, an association between the unconscious choice of fate and the orientation towards death, which Freud reproduces in a way devoid of metaphysics' (Atzert 2005: 185).

2. Demonstrable fatalism and transcendent fatalism

Both *Transcendent Speculations* and *BPP* are speculative texts. Freud begins the fourth chapter of the last with this warning: 'What follows is speculation, sometimes extreme speculation, which each person can enjoy or dismiss, depending on their attitude. It is an attempt to explore an idea, out of curiosity to see where it will lead' (Freud 2010a: 184). *Transcendent Speculations* also begin with a similar warning:

> Even though the reflections expressed here do not lead to any definitive result, and one could even describe them as mere metaphysical dreams, I could not decide to fade them into oblivion. Therefore, they can be welcomed by anyone who has thought something about them (Schopenhauer 2008: 3–4).

Schopenhauer admits that what he intends to communicate in his essay has something 'uncertain', 'doubtful', and 'conjectural', and that he will only use an assertive tone in his writing to avoid the reiterated remembrance of its speculative nature making it very verbose. Having clarified this issue, the philosopher summarizes the main ideas of the essay with the following words: although chance and error are the 'two tyrants of the world', there is universal acceptance (present in myths, superstitions, and religions of the diverse peoples, as well as in the individual experience of all of us) of the fact that there *seems* to be an intentional and transcendent hand that guides us, knows us, and takes care of us better than we ourselves. This feeling is very ominous, and also this strange caution often leads us in a direction contrary to what we wanted at the moment, and only in the long term do we realize that it was the most favorable one for us. The essay begins with this statement, and then Schopenhauer starts to test the possibility that it

has some meaning. And it seems so: the first clue that this premonition is founded is what the author calls 'demonstrable fatalism', namely: there is no chance. When he said that chance and error are the two tyrants of the world, we only think about the fact that the Will does not have a concrete and positive end: the much-desired happiness, which responds to the 'end of the individual Will' (Schopenhauer 2015: 760), is nothing more than a negative and fleeting state, a brief interval between two needs, or between that and boredom (Schopenhauer 2005).

Furthermore, the idea that the universe would have a creator, owner of infinite intelligence and goodness, from which all the harmonies of the world would be derived, is an unusual dogmatism. The essence of the world is, rather, a blind and contradictory Will, prior to all representation and cognizing subjects. In this sense, the author states that chance and error are the despots of the world. However, 'chance' – in the meaning of a phenomenon that takes part in the empirical reality spontaneously, indeterminately, and without sufficient cause – is precisely what the philosopher seeks to refute, with the doctrine of demonstrable fatalism. The two pillars of this doctrine, therefore, are the following: 1) 'Everything that happens, happens from the strictest necessity' (Schopenhauer 2005: 6), and 2) 'Everything is predetermined in advance' (10). Schopenhauer believes that both truths can be proven both *a priori* and *a posteriori:* the *a priori* foundation is found in his essay *On the Freedom of the Will* (1839), as he indicates in *Transcendent Speculations*. The *a posteriori* proof was based on the latter: it consists of indicating some parapsychology phenomena, with an emphasis on clairvoyance. In that first essay, Schopenhauer claims that the *law of causality* is 'the most universal form' of understanding, 'since even the intuition of the real external world occurs only through its mediation' (Schopenhauer 2021: 76). This occurs when we immediately apprehend 'the felt affections

and modifications in our sensitive organs as ‘effects’, and instantly move from them to their ‘causes’’, which we represent in space (Schopenhauer 2021). From this, it is clear that the *law of causality* is known *a priori*, therefore as something *necessary* concerning the possibility of all experience in general. Thus, it is the ‘general rule to which all real objects in the external world are subject, without exception’ (76). And what does it establish, more precisely? ‘That wherever and whenever in the objective, real, material world something *changes* something else, it must necessarily have changed itself first’ (77). The previous change is called *cause*, and the subsequent one is the *effect*: given the cause, the effect must occur. The law of causality, therefore, is the first root of the *principle of sufficient reason*, which is not only the ‘most universal form’ of all ‘our faculty of knowledge’, but is also the principle of all necessity: ‘Being necessary and being a consequence of a given reason are interchangeable concepts’ (*Ib*.). Beyond this definition, obscurity prevails.

In *Transcendent Speculations*, Schopenhauer explores two complements of this doctrine: (1) that it is also confirmed *a posteriori* by the ‘unquestionable fact’ (Schopenhauer: 2008) of clairvoyance, among other similar phenomena; and (2) that alongside demonstrable fatalism, there is another fatalism: the transcendent, which involves a certain moral valuation. The first one is exemplified by the author with the following news item from the *Times* newspaper, dated December 2, 1852: a person named Mark Lane dreamed of his brother’s death next to a fish. The next day, upon being informed of his brother’s disappearance, Lane went down to the river near his house, and when he saw a fish jumping, he intuited that his brother had drowned there. To his sadness, his brother’s body was found in those mediations. After mentioning the news, Schopenhauer recalls that ancient mythology and history also abound in similar accounts. The tragedy of Oedipus

illustrates this phenomenon very well: his parents were warned by clairvoyants of the family's tragic fate, as was Oedipus himself. However, all they did was, precisely, create the necessary conditions for the fulfillment of the prophecy, even though they believed they were escaping it.

Another myth mentioned by the author as an important reference that the ancients greatly respected fate as an 'invincible enemy' (Schopenhauer 1986) is that of Croesus and Adrastus: Maurice Bowra believes that it has a real foundation[4]. As for the second new complement of the demonstrable fatalism, namely, that which goes together with transcendent fatalism, the philosopher introduces it, initially, distinguishing that the latter is not demonstrated as easily as the first (Schopenhauer 2008); after all, if the demonstrable fatalism is deduced 'from a strictly theoretical judgment', the transcendent 'is gradually decanted from the experiences of one's life course' (11). Furthermore, transcendent fatalism is a perspective from a 'higher level', because if, on the one hand, it lacks *a priori* necessity, on the other hand, it involves another, even deeper need: 'moral or internal' (Schopenhauer 2008). But what establishes transcendent fatalism? We saw that Schopenhauer introduces it with a reference to the popular idea that perhaps there is an entity that leads, knows, and cares for us better than we do ourselves. Next, he goes on to express this feeling more philosophically: 'The course of an individual's life, however

[4] After pointing out that the story of Croesus and Adrastus was exposed in the 'first part' of Herodotus' work, and summarizing it, Bowra claims that it seems to derive from a historical fact: 'Cresus, king of Lydia, tried to stop the fulfillment of a prophecy that predicted the death of his son by an iron weapon. And with the hope of saving him, he kept the boy apart from men's occupations. However, a man named Adrastus arrived and begged Croesus for asylum, who granted him asylum. Shortly after, Adrasto convinced the king to let his son participate in a hunting expedition against a monstrous boar. The boar was killed, but Adrastus also accidentally killed Croesus' son, thus fulfilling the prophecy. In this case, Herodotus may have followed a real tragedy' (Bowra 2007: 223).

confusing it may seem, constitutes a whole in harmony with itself. And it also has a determined [moral] tendency, and an instructive meaning' (11). This instruction acts on the individual with a tone of 'consolation' (Schopenhauer 2008). As this moral and instructive tendency is only perceived through a very panoramic view of life, which escapes the consciousness stuck in the present, we tend to feel it as an intervention by a transcendent being (in psychoanalytic language: we tend to project it). However, a closer examination reveals that this supposed transcendent being, in reality, is ourselves: we are the ones who lead ourselves to the path that is most suitable for us, and in accordance with the great purposes of life, *unconsciously*. Throughout the essay, and thanks to several explanations and metaphors presented by the author, this idea becomes increasingly clear.

Initially, Schopenhauer uses, in this attempt to clarify transcendent fatalism, some expressions collected from the fields of art, mysticism, and teleology: he writes that, from the point of view of the whole, human life resembles a 'meticulously planned plot' (12), in which all other people seem to act as actors, each with their own determined role, in order to contribute to the unity and coherence of the drama. He mentions some lines from an old man who is convinced that life develops from a 'plan drawn up by nature', in which it is worth noting the 'hand of a determined destiny', which acts secretly. In short: 'totality', 'concordance', 'harmony', 'foundation', and 'orientation' are some of the aspects that life acquires for those who observe it from a distant point of view. Based on this perspective, he writes that there seems to be a point in seeing existence as endowed with coherence, unity, and meaning. He adds that this is because of two fundamental reasons: one is the already mentioned moral tendency that arises from the contemplation of our fate, with its consoling effect on the individual. This will only be discussed in depth at the end of the essay.

The other reason for that conclusion is that every life path derives

from an immutable and innate character, possessed by each human being. As every character has a certain unity, it also lends it to the whole of life, which is nothing but its empirical manifestation, which also ends up being unitary, coherent, and cohesive. Character, according to the author, always shapes the life of its owner in an immediate, unconscious, and instinctive way: 'It always returns a man to the same path', it is his 'inner compass, a secret traction that accurately places each one of us on the path that suits us, exclusively and whose uniform direction can only be discovered after having left it behind' (14). Although this character is an *a priori* condition of all human action, the fact that its peculiarities are only known *a posteriori* activates our projection mechanisms, so we tend to attribute it to a transcendent entity, which guides and knows us better than we do ourselves. Therefore, the course of life of every individual obeys two basic units: the internal need, which is the character, and the external circumstances, which can be considered 'random' only in the sense of being unrelated to the ends of the character. However, they are not random in the sense of occurring without determining causes, as nothing is random – according to the demonstrable fatalism. Therefore, the course of our lives is reduced to a unit, produced from two other units: character and phenomenal becoming. Thus, it is not unreasonable to see our lives as something coherent, cohesive, and unitary: Schopenhauer (2008) compares it, therefore, to a 'well-finished work of art'. He adds that like every work of art, when it is being created, its unity and meaning do not appear, but after its completion, it presents itself 'as a work of the most reflective foresight, wisdom, and perseverance' (Schopenhauer 2008: 17). The same happens with our lives: from an external point of view, countless events seem chaotic or random (even when they conform perfectly to a very appropriate unity). However, when experienced and contemplated from a certain distance, one perceives in them the most

intimate 'unity between the random and the necessary, which rests on the deepest foundation of things' (16). What foundation would that be? The fact that there is no abyss between the great surprises of 'fate' and what we want and need. Character and fate are not separated as they seem, but are in the most intimate connection. For the author:

> Is it possible to have a total disagreement between a person's character and fate? Or does each fate adhere to its corresponding character? Or also that, ultimately, a secret and inconceivable need, comparable to that of an author of a drama, ends up always tied to one another? There is, however, no great clarity on these issues (17).

After these questions, Schopenhauer begins a new period in the text, in which he seems to focus on the symbolic counterparts of transcendent fatalism: first, he analyzes the myths and allegories of the ancients that seem to suggest it; and then, he elaborates some analogies of his own, which also seek to illuminate this doctrine.

3. The symbolic correspondents of transcendent fatalism and their moral meaning

Approximately halfway through the essay, Schopenhauer details that it has always been a consecrated theme among ancient poets, philosophers, and historians the idea of a:

> *Secret and inexplicable power* [that] guides all the changes and upheavals of our life, and even, sometimes, against our own intention of the moment, although it always adjusts both to the objective totality and to the subjective purpose of the mentioned vital course (Schopenhauer 2008: 22).

To confirm this reference, Schopenhauer (2008) mentions several excerpts from ancient authors, such as Menander, Plato, Lucian, Horace, etc[5]. According to his interpretation, transcendent fatalism appears very significantly in the ideas of 'Fate' (ειμαρμεχη) and 'demon' [δαιμόν] of the ancients. The Christian version of 'Providence' (προνοια) loses a lot of strength: because if, on the one hand, it presupposes a quite unbelievable divine intelligence, on the other, with its anthropomorphism, it also deprives transcendent fatalism of its poetic 'mystery'. However, this position is resumed by modern poets, such as Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller[6]. There are, therefore, three main allegories that the Western imagination uses in the representation of the supposed secret power, which seems to guide us better than ourselves: Destiny, Demon, and Providence[7]. After that, Schopenhauer presents three new metaphors, of his own authorship, which also clarify transcendent fatalism: that of the teleology of nature, of the organic

[5] According to Plutarch, Menander claimed that: 'At birth a daimon stands by each man, the good mystagogue of life' (Plutarch, *De tranquillitate*, 474b, *apud* Schopenhauer 2008: 24). Plato also imagined that all souls, before their renewed birth, choose a vital fate appropriate to their personality, and states: 'When all the souls had chosen their form of life, maintaining the rank that they had drawn by lot, they advanced in order before Lachesis; she gave to each one as a companion the demon he had chosen, as guardian of his form of life and fulfiller of the things that have been chosen' (Plato, Republic, X, 620 dce, *apud* Schopenhauer 2008: 24). Schopenhauer gives several other examples of this feeling, using ancient philosophers and poets.

[6] Goethe writes, for example, that: 'Man believes he leads his life and guides himself, when in reality the innermost part of his being irresistibly follows the course that marks his destiny' (Goethe, Egmont, act V, scene 6. *Apud* Schopenhauer 2008: 20).

[7] More specifically, Schopenhauer (2008: 19) writes that the 'supreme power of destiny' predominated in ancient 'verse and prose', and received 'multiple meanings in Greek: ποτμος (fatal luck, fortune), αισα (Fate), ειμαρμεχη (Destiny), πεπρωμεχη (fados), μοιρα (goddess of destiny or death), Αδραστεια (the inevitable), etc.'. Among the Romans, it appeared under the term '*fatum*'. 'The idea of a demon [δαιμόν] or daimon, associated with each individual and which precedes their vital course, may have Etruscan origins, but [it was also] universally propagated among the ancients' (23). It differs from the previous image because 'while the *fatum* is conceived as something blind', the demon (δαιμόν) has something anthropomorphic. Finally, Christian Providence (προνοια), being an even more anthropomorphic image and endowed with a 'νους' (understanding), which is taken as the principle of the universe, appears as an allegory 'as shallow and comprehensible as it is superficial and false' (19).

cohesion of phenomenal becoming, and of dreams. The first of them addresses what the author calls 'unity between the random [external] and the necessary [internal]' (16). Thus, he proceeds from the reference to the great 'spectacles' of nature: in them, there is the possibility that certain phenomena happen 'in accordance with a purpose, however, outside the knowledge of that purpose' (29). The most evident example of this are living organisms: composed of very different elements, it is very admirable to see how 'they conspire in favor of a purpose and go completely towards it, without being guided by any knowledge, but by a kind of sublime necessity prior to any cognitive possibility' (*Ib*.). Schopenhauer also gives other examples of these natural masterpieces, which seem to have been created by the most skillful intelligence, although they arise from 'chance' (in the sense that they are the result of a blind, contradictory, and unaware Will): 'The circumstance that the mainland of our planet tends towards the north pole, whose winter is eight days shorter than that of the south pole, and therefore milder' (*Ib*.); the power play of the planets of the solar system, which balance each other with such perfection, that they manage to be the stage for the miracle of life, etc.

These spectacles deserve 'teleological' emphasis, because, in them, we see an incredible coincidence between what is the result of 'chance', master of the external world (in the sense that there is no previous knowledge, which has created everything architecturally), and what arises from such urgent internal needs, which are only satisfied with such complex phenomena, which, from a certain perspective, makes nothing seem to be the work of chance. Faced with these natural spectacles, the thinker writes that there must be unity between both perspectives: external 'chance' and internal necessity (at the etiological root of these phenomena). He adds that a very similar unity appears in the lives of individuals: their vital paths also seem to be 'guided by events that, often constituting a capricious game on the part

of blind chance, end up being as if planned as befits the authentic and posterior good of the person' (*Ib*.). That is, it is necessary to recognize that not only 'chance' engenders the events of nature, but also certain internal needs, which interfere with it, in the creation of natural spectacles. Similarly, when we deal with the spectacles of destiny in people's lives (for example, the fact that certain accidents conform so well to what we actually needed or wanted at a certain moment, although without knowing it), we have to recognize that, here, the thought of *unity* between chance and internal necessity (character) is also imposed.

The second metaphor used by Schopenhauer in the representation of transcendent fatalism is called here organic cohesion of phenomenal becoming. It rests on the following conception: 'Nothing is absolutely fortuitous, but even the most accidental is still something necessary' (32). The idea behind this conception is that objective reality consists of an endless chain in which all elements are intertwined; therefore, either one of them is necessary for the other to become. Some signs that help us to better understand this notion are, for example, the facts that, sometimes, two simultaneous, but very distinct, events have a common (perhaps remote) cause; or, conversely, two very different events can come together as causes (remote or not) of the same effect. In both cases, the two different events are intertwined with each other, thanks to a third, and with necessity: our limited vision is unable to perceive this connection, but not only does it exist, as if we were better endowed, we could perhaps infer one of the three elements of this connection, from the other two (or two of them from one). In this sense, Schopenhauer (34) states that 'man's unbreakable propensity to value *omina* (augury), *praesagia* (omen), and *portenta* (prodigious signs)' is not unreasonable. After all, if every phenomenal becoming is in intimate interconnection, a bird's flight, the random meeting of a passage from the Bible, a card taken by the fortune teller, etc., can

have a necessary relationship with another distant event, past or future (Schopenhauer 2008). Thus, one could very well decipher one of them thanks to the other, as long as one has the true key to this secret decoding (*Ib*.).

Regarding the relationship of this perspective with transcendent fatalism, the philosopher states that if nothing happens by chance, then, if some apparently casual event enters the scene and turns out to be very suitable for another event with which it has no evident connection, it is plausible to assume that there is a link between them, either because they arise from common remote causes, as in the previous example, or due to any other form of necessary relationship between the elements of the causal chain, which is little comprehensible to the ordinary eye. For example: when Europe fell into barbarism, in the Middle Ages, thanks to a convenient 'chance', the excellent works of ancient sculpture were buried. In the Renaissance, when it was once again inhabited by a 'more forgiving and noble' people, by an illustrious *coincidence*, these works 'came back to light, as instigating displays of art and the authentic canon of human beauty' (33). Now, was this, in fact, a coincidence? Was such a convenient connection – between two apparently disconnected causal chains (one more physical and linked to the burial and digging of works, and the other more human and related to the civilizational level of the European people) – the result of 'chance'? For Schopenhauer, it is unlikely that this was a mere coincidence, after all: 'Nothing is absolutely fortuitous, but even the most accidental is still something necessary' (32). As much as certain causal links are quite complex, when two apparently unconnected events occur (and, in this sense, seem to be 'random' to each other), but jointly meet an important internal need, it is worth questioning whether there is not a causal and necessary relationship between them, even if very indirect, so as to go unnoticed by the human eye. And what is true for the great events of natural and human

history is also true for the ephemeral history of individuals.

The last metaphor presented by the author, which, in his view, clarifies transcendent fatalism, is that of the dream. Briefly, Schopenhauer states that, as in dreams, the circumstances that lead us to execute our actions and pursue our ends are only apparently external and accidental, but even when we detest them, they were created by our will and are in intimate connection with what it pursues: in the 'great life-dream', 'fate' – which guides events in an apparently fortuitous way but often along paths that are very suitable for us, although it does not seem so to the 'individual consciousness that it represents' – is also none other than our own will; it, whether in dreams or in real life, acts as a 'secret theater director' (Schopenhauer 2008). The only imperfection of this metaphor, which is then recognized by the philosopher, is that while in the dream 'there is a *unique* self that wants and feels' (40), the course of our lives is the result of a necessary relationship between what suits our will, as an immutable and innate character, and what suits the phenomenal course of objective reality. Since in the construction of the latter not only my character participates but also that of all human beings, Schopenhauer ends this analogy with the beautiful image that:

> In the great life-dream, a mutual interrelation occurs, in which not only does each person participate in the dream of the other, as necessary, but the latter also participates in the dream of the first. In this way, and thanks to an effective *pre-established harmony*, each person dreams only of what suits them, according to their own metaphysical foundation; and all the dreams of life are so artistically intertwined, that each one experiences how beneficial it is for them, fulfilling, at the same time, what others need (*Ib*.).

The ‘great life-dream’, therefore, is the dream that we all dream together, called reality. But, from a metaphysical perspective, the difference between my dream and someone else’s dreams disappears when we realize that all reality is the expression of one and the same Will to live. For the author: ‘The Universe is a great dream dreamed by a single dreamer where all the dream characters dream too. Therefore, everything fits together and ends up matching’ (41). In this ‘grand finale’ of the text, Schopenhauer returns to the idea that there is a *moral tendency* in the effect that the ‘great life-dream’ has on us: this is the moment to evaluate what is the nature of the ‘good’, to which the supposed ‘fate’ leads us. Will it be happiness? William Mattioli questions whether it is not a rhetorical option for the philosopher to give the impression, throughout the text, that, indeed, it is happiness:

> In the course of practically the entire argument, these terms [‘good’, ‘well’, and ‘the best’] are used in a sufficiently indeterminate way to leave the reader free to understand them in the most intuitive sense to him. Despite characterizing transcendent fatalism as always having a metaphysical-moral meaning, this characterization is not sufficient to provide a more precise determination of the meaning of the 'good' that is intended there. As the most intuitive meaning that the minimally enlightened reader associates with this term is an eudaimonistic and prudential meaning, linked to the conditions favorable to a good life in the sense of a happy and virtuous life, this is the connotation that ends up implicitly prevailing, illuminating good part of the argument through which Schopenhauer seeks to convince us of the existence of a type of 'cosmic conspiracy' in our favor (Mattioli 2020: 362).

We agree with Mattioli that the text gives rise to this impression. However, we also agree with this author when he states that this 'more intuitive' interpretation, that 'good' is happiness, 'does not match the metaphysical and truly moral meaning of human existence' (363), which is distanced, by the philosopher, from any eudaimonistic purpose[8].

According to the thinker, happiness is something negative and fleeting, its pursuit is not recommended from a rational point of view: it consists of our 'inborn error' (Schopenhauer 2015: 755), which can only be corrected by denying the Will. In Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation* (hereinafter abbreviated as *The World*), Schopenhauer practically identified the denial of the Will with asceticism. In Volume II, and very explicitly in Chapter 49 – *The Order of Salvation*, he expanded this concept by claiming that the suffering that fate brings to 'most people' also causes a slow and gradual 'euthanasia of the Will' (759): after many years of living and suffering, it is not without relevance that almost all elderly people show on their faces the great effect that life has had on us, namely: 'disappointment'. With aging, it is almost a general rule that the addiction to pleasures decreases, along with the ability to enjoy them; sexual drive and self-love also cool down; vanity gives way to love for children and young people; individuality shrinks, etc. And if this does not happen, and the man remains ambitious and avaricious, he was then 'cast into the last fortress from which only death can still expel him. The end of existence is lost' (760). Now, what is the 'end of life' – which the author makes very clear in this chapter? The 'resigning of the will', its 'mortification', 'turning and redemption'. But how can death free him, who has not learned to 'recognize the futility and vanity of all' (759) pleasures, and

[8] For Schopenhauer, 'Kant has the great merit in ethics of having purified it of all *eudaemonism*' (Schopenhauer 2001: 19).

the fact that 'life is deeply submerged' (757) in suffering, 'and cannot escape it'? Schopenhauer ends *Transcendent Speculations* with this same question, therefore deepening what he had already presented in *Chapter 49*. In the latter, he wrote that if suffering already has a force capable of enabling the denial of the Will:

> Then this will reach a greater degree even at the time of death, the most feared of all suffering [...] Death must certainly be considered as the end of life: at the moment death occurs, it is decided everything that in the entire course of life had only been prepared and introduced. Death is the result, the *résumé* of life, or the final sum that expresses at once all the instruction that life had given partially and fragmentarily, that is, that every aspiration, whose appearance is life, was something vain, futile, contradictory to itself, and renouncing it consists of redemption (758).

In the last paragraph of *Transcendent Speculations*, Schopenhauer rewrites that death is the 'true result and purpose of life', and adds that it presents itself as a 'final judgment', because at a certain moment, 'all the mysterious powers that determine the eternal fate of man urge together and come into action. From their conflict, the path that one must take now results, preparing for their palingenesis' (Schopenhauer 2008: 46), which can be followed by rebirth or the definitive denial of the Will. Being this last option also possible, he states, in *Chapter 49*, that only man empties 'the cup of death, humanity is the only step on which the will denies itself and can completely renounce life' (Schopenhauer 2015: 759). Before making these statements about death, which were resumed by Freud in *BPP*, the philosopher also makes it clear, in *Transcendent Speculations,* that 'our most authentic and optimal good', to which this 'secret and

inexplicable power [that] guides our life, and against our own intention of the moment' (Schopenhauer 2008: 22), is not happiness, but the slow and gradual 'euthanasia of the Will' (Schopenhauer 2015: 759):

> As we come to know that the abandonment of the Will to live constitutes the final purpose of temporal existence, we can then assume that each one finds himself guided step by step *towards this purpose* in the most convenient way for him, even though there are often big detours. And since happiness and enjoyment are strictly opposed to this purpose, we see that, in accordance with it, displeasure and suffering are indefectibly intertwined in the course of each life, which makes it seem as if the will felt compelled in some way, and by force, to deviate from the path of life (Schopenhauer 2008: 45–46).

Therefore, it is through 'abandonment of the will to live' that we correct the 'inborn error' of seeking happiness, in a world and life in which, 'in both big and small things, we have to experience that in no way they were constituted to have a happy existence' (Schopenhauer 2015: 755). This renunciation can be achieved 'through [1] mere suffering and then appropriation of everyone's suffering' (760), which occurs in asceticism; but also [2] 'for the majority of human beings', there could be 'no hope of salvation' if there were not this other 'more frequent case' of 'purification, turning of the will and redemption', namely, the cases in which these are 'caused by the suffering', which we attribute to fate. Therefore, if Schopenhauer stated, in *Chapter 49*, that 'fate and the course of things take care of us better than we ourselves', by bringing us continuous frustration and leading us to a 'bitter death', in *Transcendent Speculations*, he identifies who this 'secret theater director' is (Schopenhauer 2008), who we call fate:

ourselves. Our immutable character and unconscious Will.

4. Conclusion

The idea of a demonic destiny reappears in *BPP*, by Freud, in a very similar connotation: it is a fate that we also choose unconsciously, but which seems to be the result of an external power, therefore, of a 'demon' (*daimon*). This destiny also brings us pain – it is the main evidence of the compulsion to repeat (unpleasant experiences)[9], which is a psychic function prior to and preparatory to the pleasure principle. However, this destiny leads us, in the most natural way possible, to the great purpose of life: for Freud, death, for Schopenhauer, the denial of the Will. Zentner is absolutely right when he clarifies that both ends of life are not identical. However, Atzert also seems to be right when he states that one is not fair to Schopenhauer when one denies his anticipation of *BPP's* main argument:

> His conception – namely, that these sensations [of displeasure] exist to promote the denial of the Will to live – is distinguished by the metaphysical foundation; not, however, due to the structure of the argument followed by Freud's reflections (Atzert 2005: 191).

On the other hand – and this was the focus of this article – I agree with Atzert and Zentner that the 'unconscious choice of fate' (Zentner 2018 & Atzert 2005), which is also a central argument of Freud in *BPP*, was anticipated by Schopenhauer, in *Transcendent Speculations*. Indeed, Schopenhauer had already drawn attention, in *Chapter 49*, to the 'end of fate, blatantly aimed at the destruction of

[9] To verify that 'demonic destiny', together with transference neurosis, are the two main pieces of evidence of the compulsion to repeat see Freud (2010a).

our happiness and thus at the mortification of our will and the suppression of the illusion that has bound us to the chains of the world' (Schopenhauer 2015: 760). However, it is only in *Transcendent Speculations* that he clarifies *who* this fate is: ourselves; however, from an instance that escapes the momentary vision of the 'individual consciousness that represents' (Schopenhauer 2008: 38). This instance is our immutable character, and, ultimately, the one metaphysical Will: both instances are unconscious. This seems to us to be the main novelty of *Transcendent Speculations*. As for the other fundamental ideas of this chapter, they were already in a certain way in *Chapter 49* or other texts by Schopenhauer: 'fate', in general, tends to bring us suffering, and through it, we move towards the 'true end of life' (Schopenhauer 2015), the denial of the Will. Although every aging process is accompanied by a slow and gradual 'euthanasia of the Will' (759), even for those who resist this, death can still free (as it always prepares us for palingenesis, which is followed by rebirth or the definitive denial of the Will). Above all, it is because Schopenhauer sees death as a final judgment, that he considers it to be the 'true result and purpose of life' (Schopenhauer 2008). Another fundamental role that the philosopher also attributes to death appears at the end of another text by *Parerga and Paralipomena – Vol. I*, namely, *Aphorisms on the wisdom of life*. However, this role already seems to refer to the affirmation of the Will:

> The beginning refers to the end; therefore, Eros has a secret connection with Death, whereby Orkus is not only the taker (*der Nehmender*), but also the giver (*Gebender*), and Death is the great reservoir of life. Therefore, everything comes from Orkus, and this happens, indeed, with everyone who

now has life (Schopenhauer 1986: 540)[10].

Given this centrality of Death in Schopenhauer, both concerning the affirmation of the Will (as seems to be the case in the previous excerpt), and about the denial of the Will (as in the essay discussed here), we believe that Atzert is right when he writes that 'the theorem of the duality of Eros and the death instinct/Thanatos, and the designation of Orkus as the greatest and oldest force, are not differentiated from each other' (Atzert 2005: 192). In agreement with him, it also does not seem to us that Freud necessarily 'proceeds from a flawed interpretation of the philosopher' (Zentner 2018: 158), in *BPP*: either because of the very 'open' nature of the words with which he quotes Schopenhauer or because of the countless agreements that exist between their texts and ideas.

We hope to have clarified one of these anticipations of Schopenhauer, with which both Atzert and Zentner seem to agree: in *Transcendent Speculations*, cited by Freud, Schopenhauer masterfully interprets what is behind the universal and popular idea that there is a transcendent destiny that leads us better than ourselves: an '*unconscious choice of fate*' (Zentner 2018) that is carried out by our most original essence: our nature or Will[11].

[10] Atzert teaches that Orkus is 'the god of the indigenous underworld to the romanic religion', who 'seems to have been regarded as the properly consummating God of death' (Atzert 2005: 192).

[11] I have not evaluated here the Freud's second reference to Schopenhauer in his published work on the theme of the dualism of the death and life instincts. It occurs in lecture 32 of *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis,* where Freud is much more controversial than in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle:* he seeks to distance himself from Schopenhauer by claiming that this author postulates a single goal of life. In his words: 'What we have said is not exactly Schopenhauer. We do not affirm that death is the sole goal of life; we do not fail to see, along with death, life. We recognize two fundamental instincts and admit for each its own goal' (Freud 2010b: 258). I hope to have shown here that Schopenhauer *does not* argue that human behaviour reveals a single goal, but two contrary ones. Therefore, I agree with Ribeiro da Fonseca when he criticizes this last reference by Freud to Schopenhauer and seeks to uncover the similarity between both authors, with the following words: 'Contrary to what the Viennese psychoanalyst imagine, the meaning of the reference to Schopenhauer

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would also need to be added by the reference to complementarity, exactly as the psychoanalyst himself postulates at that moment: 'Birth and death, two accidents that belong equally to life; they balance each other; they are, mutually, the condition of each other' [Schopenhauer 2005: 358]. That is, according to what is written in the *Metaphysics of Death*, the similarity is greater than that supposed by Freud. If the philosopher does not postulate a death drive in the sense itself, yet he says that the body's waste and aging are anticipations of death, which is merely a secretion to the second power, an excrement of the Will, and therefore only part of the greater structure which engenders individual life. Circularity, within the scope of supra-individual forces, makes the fear of death as absurd as it would be the fear of being born' (Fonseca 2012: 42).

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