

Review of: *Genius & Talent: Schopenhauer's Influence on Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy*
David Avraham Weiner Associated University Presses, London 1992. ISBN 0-8386-3441-9
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Michael O'Donovan Anderson, *The Philosopher*, April 1994

It has long been postulated that there were two ways to philosophize, each possibility being represented by one of the two preeminent philosophers of our century. Heidegger, for his part, philosophized from the standpoint of extreme erudition, giving the impression of having read and synthesized all of the works of western thought, while Wittgenstein made profundity out of ignorance, rarely acknowledging any acquaintance with the tradition of which he was part. By showing the extent to which Wittgenstein's early philosophy is indebted to his critical engagement with Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation*, *Genius & Talent* suggests, instead, that all philosophy confronts its own history. As such, this is a study not just in the value and necessity of historically contextualized interpretation, but also in the origins and nature of philosophical creativity: regardless of appearances to the contrary, not even genius creates *ex nihilo*.

Weiner's is a careful, self-consciously limited project, which takes the reader beyond the sweeping parallels sometimes drawn between the work of these two philosophers - which tend simply to note Wittgenstein's appropriation of such things as Schopenhauer's distinction between saying and showing, his critique of metaphysical language, or his metaphor of the self as limit of the world - by generating a detailed, if simple, exposition of Schopenhauer's "immanent metaphysics", and showing, with the support of Wittgenstein's pre-*Tractatus* notebooks, how Wittgenstein's selective acceptance of that position actually generates a number of the most important - and sheds light on many of the most obscure - claims of Wittgenstein's early philosophy. Of particular interest, because of its relevance to both early and late Wittgenstein, is the way in which a Schopenhauerean reading of the *Tractatus* can erase the apparent tension between Wittgenstein's critique of ethical and metaphysical propositions, and his claim that the main point of the *Tractatus* is an ethical one. On this reading, Wittgenstein inherits Schopenhauer's aestheticization of ethical life by insisting that any normative (ethical) proposition implies or utilizes a temporal relationship between action and consequence, and reinforces the expectation of reward or punishment characteristic of normative ethics. All ethical propositions, that is, contain advice about, and give rise to intentions regarding, the proper way to lead one's life, and thus inevitably project the will into the future; but it is precisely such anticipatory projection, which from the standpoint of the agent must repeat *ad infinitum*, that gives rise to the metaphysical (or metaethical) conundra which philosophy is supposed to solve. This *reductio* is meant to reveal the *Tractatus* not as a set of propositions on philosophy and language, but as a guide to the intuition, showing that the solution to the problem of life is to live in a way that will make the problem disappear. This way, of course, is to disengage oneself from the temporal projections of will and expectation, stoically living in the eternal present: to live in a way, that is, which perpetuates Schopenhauer's (and Kant's) vision of the aesthetic experience.

But the care necessary to convincingly reconstruct these influences means that no amount of summary can do this book justice; it is no longer than absolutely necessary to its task, and is written with such an accessible style as to require no clarifications. In the end, however, it is precisely its external limitations, imposed by both its task and subject matter, which leave the reader unsatisfied. Unlike Heidegger's Nietzsche, Wittgenstein's affair with Schopenhauer is not the full confrontation (and assimilation) of one philosopher by another; neither Wittgenstein nor Schopenhauer do justice to the full range of the other's concerns, and yet there is a much larger story to be told about their relation, a story which *Genius & Talent* passes over in frustrating silence. Still, if such frustration is a product only of the desire for more, then *Genius & Talent* is clearly a success, and one which, with any luck, will generate its sequel.