

DARKLIFE: NEGATION, NOTHINGNESS, AND THE WILL-TO-LIFE IN SCHOPENHAUER

Eugene Thacker

...he will be least afraid of becoming nothing in death who has recognized that he is already nothing now...
Arthur Schopenhauer

1. DARK NIGHTS OF THE SOUL

In the depths of labyrinthine caves, embedded in gigantic rocks, buried in the hottest geothermal vents, and in the cold stellar dust of space, life is stealthily creeping. In environments in which it was previously assumed that life could not exist, scientists have discovered a whole range of microscopic life forms that not only survive, but actually flourish under conditions of extreme heat, cold, acidity, pressure, radioactivity, and darkness. Their very existence suggests to scientists scenarios that for we human beings can only ever be speculative: the emergence or the extinction of life on the Earth, the adaptation of life forms to extreme environmental and climate changes, the existence of life on other planets or in outer space.

Dubbed “extremophiles,” such organisms have been recently discovered by scientists working in a range of fields, from microbiology and oceanography to lesser-known fields such as abiogenesis and astrobiology. Their discoveries have garnered attention both within and outside the scientific community, primarily because in many cases their findings end up questioning the basic premises of the life sciences.¹ A recent report, *Investigating Life in Extreme Conditions*, provides the decidedly non-human setting for understanding extremophiles:

...that part of the Earth’s biosphere permanently inhabited by human beings is rather small and most of the planet, its deep core or mantle, will clearly never see a living organism. In between these two zones (inhabited and uninhabited), a variety of environments exist where human beings cannot live permanently, or physically access, although other forms of life exist within them.²

The report goes on to define an extreme environment as “a given environment, where one or more parameters show values permanently close to the lower or upper limits known for life.”³ Generally speaking, extremophiles are united by the fact that they constitute novel forms of life that exist in extreme conditions – conditions that would be unfavorable if not fatal to most life forms. In some cases scientists have discovered microbes that appear to live without either sunlight or oxygen: a group of bacteria called autolithotrophes, for example, live deep within rock formations and derive all their nutrients entirely from granite, while the bacterium *Desulfotomaculum* thrives in the darkness of radioactive rocks: “The bacteria exist without the benefit of photosynthesis by harvesting the energy of natural radioactivity to create food for themselves.”⁴



Mono Lake in California, the site of the recent discovery of “alien life” – an arsenic-based bacterium.

As living beings whose existence questions life, extremophiles pose interesting problems for philosophy – they serve as philosophical motifs, or philosophemes, that raise again the enigmatic question, “what is life?” On the one hand, extremophiles are forms of life living in conditions antagonistic to life. Microbes existing in the conditions of the absence of light – indeed, feeding off of the absence of light – are an anomaly for biological science. And, in their anomalous existence as scientific objects, they also serve as reminders of the anomaly that is the concept of “life itself” – everywhere in general, and yet nowhere in particular.

In the science of extremophiles, two factors – hyperbole and contradiction – intersect to produce a concept of life that ends up questioning the very idea of life itself. The hyperbolic nature of extremophiles highlights the relativistic character of the organism-environment relation. The boundary between an organism living in conditions of low light and one living in conditions of no light becomes blurry. Either one chooses to recuperate the extremophile back within the ambit of traditional science, in which “no light” really means “very very low light,” or one chooses to accept the anomalous condition of “no light” as is, with the implication that light is in no way essential for life.

Tied to this hyperbolic factor is another one, namely the contradictory nature of the extremophiles – or of any example of biological life that fundamentally challenges the premises of the life sciences. Extremophiles are anomalous, not simply because they live without light, but because their living-without-light sets them apart from the existing epistemological qualifiers that ground the ability of human beings to identify and know what life is. In the case of the extremophiles, the hyperbole is the contradiction, or is the paradoxical ground of the contradiction; light and darkness define any environmental condition to some degree, and it is the hyperbolic nature of the environment that leads to the contradictory nature of the extremophile. Biological science, in so far as it is rooted in systematic description and classification, relies on its own principle of sufficient reason, namely that life and logic bear some basic relation to each other – in other words, the principle that all that can be identified and known as life, is ordered or organized in such a way that it can live. The extremophiles are,

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in a way, examples of living contradictions, a living instance of the inverse relationship between logic and life.

2. ON ABSOLUTE LIFE

However, we need not delve into the deepest caves to discover hyperbole and contradiction at the heart of life. It is a core part of philosophical reflection on life, from Aristotle to Kant to contemporary biophilosophy. For instance, Aristotle's enigmatic *De Anima*, rendered more enigmatic by generations of commentary and translation, is perhaps the first systematic ontology of life that hinges on contradiction – namely, one between a general life-principle or life-force (*psukhē*) and the manifold instances of the living, so exhaustively catalogued in works such as *Historia Animalium*. The former (Life) is never present in itself, only manifest in the diverse concretions of the latter (the living); the latter serve as the only conceptual guarantee of the former. But it is Kant's treatment of the teleology or purposiveness of life (*zweckmäßigkeit*) that not only revives Aristotle's problematic, but adds another dimension to it – any instance of life is always split between its purposiveness in itself and its purposiveness for us, the beings who think life. In the Kantian paradigm, the possibility of knowing the former always compromised by the presumptions of the latter.

On the one hand life is phenomenal since we as subjects are also living subjects. Life is amenable to the manifold of sensation, is given as an object of the understanding, and results in a synthetic knowledge of the nature of life. Life is an object for a subject. On the other hand, the Aristotelian problem – what is the life-in-itself that is common to all instances of the living? – returns again in Kant's critical philosophy. Life-in-itself is neither the knowledge nor the experience of the living (be it biological classification or the subjective phenomenon of living), and life-in-itself is also not the living being considered as such (e.g. the object given to science as an object of observation).

In short, it would seem that the life common to all living beings is ultimately enigmatic and inaccessible to thought, since any given instance of the living (as subject or object) is not life-in-itself, but only one manifestation of life. It seems there is some residual zone of inaccessibility that at once guarantees that there is a life-in-itself for all instances of the living, while also remaining, in itself, utterly obscure.⁵ It is precisely as living subjects, with life given as objects for us as subjects, that we are cut off from, and yet enmeshed within, life in itself.

Schopenhauer once noted that Kant's greatest philosophic contribution was the division between phenomena and noumena, the world as it appears to us, and the enigmatic and inaccessible world in itself. Whereas for Kant this division served a critical or regulatory function, providing philosophy with ground to stand on, for Idealism this division is an impasse to be overcome – by and through philosophy itself.

We know that, for the generation immediately following on the coattails of Kant, the important task was to identify this split as the key impasse in Kantianism, and to provide ways of overcoming that impasse.⁶ This is a significant project, because for Kant, the critical philosophy was not, of course, a problem, but rather a solution to a whole host of metaphysical quandaries that pitted empiricists against rationalists, materialists against idealists, and so on. In a sense, German Idealism's first and most important gesture is to restate Kantianism as a problem to be overcome. The concept of the Absolute, and the various avatars of the Absolute proposed by Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel (Spirit, the Infinite, the World-Soul), have to be understood as the outcome of this initial gesture.

But this split between phenomena and noumena can only be overcome if it is in some way collapsed – or rendered continuous. Since we as thinking subjects cannot have access to noumena, we must begin from phenomena, and in particular the phenomena of thought. Hence thought must not be taken as split from the world in itself, but as somehow continuous with it. But this itself is a difficult thought, precisely because thought is presumed to be specific to living, rational, human subjects – thought is internalized, rendered proprietary, owned and instrumentalized. Kant's split implicitly relies on an internalist model of thought, one that begins and ends with the philosophical decision of anthropocentrism.

The key move that Idealism makes is to externalize thought, to render it ontologically prior to the individual thinking subject that thinks it. Only if thought is understood to be ontologically prior to the human, only if thought is ontologically exterior to the human, can it then become that continuum between the “for us” and the “in itself,” phenomena and noumena. The Idealist operation is, in a sense, to subtract the noumenal from the Kantian split, leaving only a continuum that stretches without demarcations between the world-for-us and the world-in-itself.

In place of the phenomena-noumena split, then, one has a new totality, which raises thought above its Kantian, anthropocentric bias, and establishes it as that which enables the very split between phenomena and noumena, as well as the split within phenomena between thought and world, and subject and object. Thought is raised to the Absolute, and, in this continuum, the thought of a subject and the world in itself are both manifestations of a single Absolute. If this is the case, then Kant’s epistemological framework is not just a reflection or representation of the world, but is itself a manifestation of the Absolute. What results is a new kind of philosophical drama, a drama of the Real and the Rational (and their co-mingling), or, in Schelling’s terms, a drama of Nature as the manifestation of the Absolute.

This continuum is neither a transcendent, static category of Being, nor is it simply an affirmation of an unbounded, immanent multiplicity of beings; it attempts to play the role of both an inaccessible noumena “outside” us, and a manifest field of phenomena that constitutes us from within. It is for this reason that Idealism turns to the concept of life-in-itself. *For post-Kantian Idealism, concept of life-in-itself establishes a continuum between phenomena and noumena*, but without reducing itself to either biology or theology. For the early Hegel, the Absolute is inherently dynamic, “the life of the Absolute,” moving, flowing, and becoming through the structured phases of the dialectic, with the living organism its exemplar.⁷ For Schelling, with his long-standing interest in natural philosophy, it is in and through the process and expressive forces of nature that the Absolute manifests itself – thus Nature is “manifest Spirit” and Spirit is “invisible Nature.”⁸ Even Fichte, otherwise a logician, attempts to account for the movement between the I and not-I, the Ego and non-Ego, by resorting to the vitalist language of life itself, commenting on the “Absolute Life” through which the I/Ego spontaneously manifests itself.⁹

In its attempts to overcome the Kantian problematic, Idealist thinkers exhibit a conceptual shift from a static to a dynamic ontology, or from being to becoming; they also effect a shift from a transcendent to an immanent concept of life, in which the framework of source/manifestation supersedes that of essence/existence. They turn their attention to conceptual models borrowed from natural philosophy and the philosophy of the organism, which has the broad impact of shifting the philosophy of life from a mechanist framework to a vitalist one.

Within Idealism “life” becomes an ontological problematic, and in the process becomes a metonym for the Absolute, resulting in what we can simply call, following Fichte, *Absolute Life*. This Absolute Life is monistic; it is a metaphysical totality that underlies all reality, but that is not separate from it. It is a totality that exists beyond any part-whole relation, but that is also only ever manifest in the particular. This Absolute Life is also immanence; it is an infinite process of becoming, flux, and flow, an infinite manifestation in finite Nature, an infinite expression of the living in an organic whole called Life. Finally, Absolute Life is paradoxical. It harbors a conceptual duplicity in which Absolute Life is at once omni-present and omni-absent, accessible and inaccessible to the senses, thinkable and an outer limit for thought. Absolute Life, while not a pure thing-in-itself, is only ever manifest in Nature (and thus indirectly knowable). At its core, Absolute Life must necessarily have the conceptual structure of negative theology.

3. THE ONTOLOGY OF GENEROSITY

If we had to give a name to this kind of thinking, in which life itself is ontologized beyond its regional discourses (e.g. natural philosophy, biology, zoology), and comes to serve as a metonym for the Absolute, we could call it the *ontology of generosity*. The ontology of generosity states, first, that the precondition of the intelligibility of life

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lies in its innate propensity for continually asserting itself in the living. This propensity applies as much to the upscale processes of growth and development as it does to the downscale processes of decay and decomposition; indeed, as Schelling often notes, life is never so strongly asserted than in the process of decay. Life, then, is generous, not simply because it always gives itself forth, but because it always asserts and affirms itself, even as it withdraws, withers, and returns to its inorganic foundations – where another life then continues. In the ontology of generosity, life is not simply present, but *overpresent*.

In post-Kantian Idealism, the ontology of generosity begins from these premises: the overpresence of life-in-itself, and the split between Life (as superlative to the living) and the living (as always in excess of Life). However, the generosity of life does not flow forth in a single, homogeneous manner. In a number of the *Naturphilosophie* works of Schelling and Hegel, one can detect several variations to the generosity of Life. Each variation is defined by a basic philosophical question that serves as its principle of sufficient reason. There is, first, *Life as genesis* (also generation; production). Life is generous because it is defined by an ontology of becoming, process, and genesis. Here the question is “why is there something new?”¹⁰ This mode is especially evident in Schelling’s work in natural philosophy, where a “speculative physics” aims to account for the flux and flows of the Absolute in and as Nature. Life is ontologically prior to the living, but Life is also only ever explained in the living. When Schelling discusses the “potencies” (*Potenz*) of Nature – forces of attraction and repulsion, dynamics of electricity and magnetism, organismic physiology – he is evoking the generosity of Life in terms of its geneses.

In addition to this, there is a second mode, in which *Life is givenness* (also gift, donation). In this case, Life is generous because it is defined by its being given, its giving forth, its being already-there, its affirmation prior to all being. Here the central question is “why is there already something?” The idea of givenness is the spectral backdrop of the concept of Absolute Life. It enables the thought of Life to pass beyond the regional philosophies of nature and obtain a superlative ontological status. That this or that particular instance of the living is given is no great statement; it only points to the need for a concept of Life to account for all possible instances of the living. That Life (as opposed to the living) is given is another issue altogether; it means that the Absolute is not only an intelligible totality, but that it is such within an ongoing process, an ordered flux and flow that is consonant with Absolute Life. In Hegel’s epic schema, Spirit can only realize itself through its successive stages (Idea, Nature, Spirit) by virtue of this “life of the Absolute.” Givenness is the necessary precondition for thinking Absolute Life.

The problem is that while Idealism provides a solution to the Kantian problematic, that solution often ends up being compromised by the Kantian framework itself. There is, to begin with, the problem of genesis – generosity demands genesis, if only as its minimal condition. Within the ontology of generosity, one must still posit a source of life, even if this source is self-caused or self-generating, even if genesis remains immanent to itself. There is also the rather nagging problem of teleology. The positing of a life-source necessitates the positing of an end or purpose to organization, in order to qualify and to justify the organization inherent in life – order demands an end. This is true even if the end one posits is the process of becoming itself, without end. The positing of a source and end dovetail into the need to accept a minimally causal distinction between source and end, and this remains the case even if one asserts an immanent relation between source and end, in which source and end persist in a kind of tautology.

The result is that the ontology of generosity inherited from German Idealism looks to be a compromised Kantianism, at once inculcated within the requirements of the Kantian framework and, at the same time, claiming to have absolved Kantianism of its own antinomies. In terms of the concept of life, the ontology of generosity must make do with a source that is self-caused, a process that is its own end, and an immanent distinction between essence and existence. The Idealist resolution of Absolute Life comes to resemble an ouroboros – a split that is rendered continuous, only to have the split swallow its own tail, and be recapitulated at a higher level.

With post-Kantian Idealism, then, we see the concept of life raised up, as it were, beyond the regional discourses of natural philosophy, such that it can serve as a continuum bridging the Kantian gulf between phenomena and noumena. But this requires that one think not just of this or that living being, but Absolute Life - that which is not reducible to, and yet not separate from, the fluxes and flows of life as we know it. Idealism's ambition is to put forth a concept of Absolute Life via an ontology of generosity, in which Life is conditioned affirmatively and positively by its overpresence. Absolute Life is thus overpresent in several ways - as genesis or as givenness. Note also that these two paths - genesis and givenness - also form the two major channels through which flow contemporary biophilosophies, with Life-as-genesis constituting the vitalist ontologies of Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and Gilles Deleuze, and Life-as-givenness constituting the phenomenological approaches of thinkers such as Edmund Husserl, Jean-Luc Marion, and Michel Henry.¹¹

4. SCHOPENHAUER'S ANTAGONISMS

At this point, the question is whether there is a post-Kantian response that does not adopt the ontology of generosity; and this is linked to a related question, whether there is a post-Kantian response that refuses refuge in a renewed concept of Being. When life is thought as life-in-itself, we seem to be driven to a fork in the road: either the framework of Being/beings or the framework of Being/becoming. There is, possibly, another approach, one that would think life-in-itself *meontologically*, as "nothing," though it too has its own limitations. The best exemplar of this approach is found in the work of Arthur Schopenhauer.

Schopenhauer's sentiments regarding German Idealist thinkers is well known. He despised them.¹² Certain passages in *The World as Will and Representation* (hereafter *WWR*) betray a profound personal distaste towards Fichte, Schelling, and above all Hegel, for whom Schopenhauer reserves his most vitriolic phrases:

...the greatest disadvantage of Kant's occasionally obscure exposition is that...what was senseless and without meaning at once took refuge in obscure exposition and language. Fichte was the first to grasp and make vigorous use of this privilege; Schelling at least equaled him in this, and a host of hungry scribblers without intellect or honesty soon surpassed them both. But the greatest effrontery in serving up sheer nonsense, in scribbling together senseless and maddening webs of words, such as had previously been heard only in madhouses, finally appeared in Hegel. It became the instrument of the most ponderous and general mystification that had ever existed, with a result that will seem incredible to posterity, and be a lasting monument of German stupidity.¹³

Metaphysical rants like these occur throughout Schopenhauer's writings, and there is an argument to be made for a certain charm behind Schopenhauer's curmudgeonly dismissals. Indeed, for many readers "obscure exposition" and "ponderous mystification" have come to define philosophy itself. Certainly Schopenhauer himself appears to be no stranger to the crime of obscurity, as demonstrated by his frequent uses of terms like *qualitas occulta* and *principum individuationis*.

Despite this, there is also a sense of clearing the air in Schopenhauer's writings, and no doubt "untimely" followers of Schopenhauer such as Nietzsche found inspiration in this tone. Not so fast, quips Schopenhauer, we have not even begun to address the problems put forth by Kant's antinomies. In the opening of *WWR* Schopenhauer's first step is to brush aside the entirety of post-Kantian dogmatism and return to Kant's problematic - the split between phenomena and noumena. As he notes, "Kant's principal merit that he distinguished the phenomenon from the thing-in-itself, declared this whole visible world to be phenomenon, and therefore denied to its laws all validity beyond the phenomenon." This is, notes Schopenhauer, an acceptable constraint to our metaphysical thinking. But why stop there? As Schopenhauer notes, it is "remarkable that he [Kant] did not trace that merely relative existence of the phenomenon from the simple, undeniable truth which lay so near to him, namely 'No object without a subject.'" If Kant had pushed his philosophy a few steps further, he would have arrived at the notion that "the object, because it always exists only in relation to a subject, is dependent thereon, is conditioned thereby, and is therefore mere phenomenon that does not exist in itself, does not exist unconditionally."¹⁴ Though inaccessible, noumena remain related - or correlated - to phenomena, with the former tending to

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become increasingly subsumed within the latter. When pushed a bit further, one ends up with something that looks a lot like Idealism, with a metaphysical continuum between phenomena and noumena that promises to collapse Kant's split between them.

For Schopenhauer, Idealism can only overcome this split by dropping out one of the two terms – the noumena – thereby allowing a phenomenal monism to fill the gap. “All previous systems started either from the object or from the subject, and therefore sought to explain the one from the other, and this according to the principle of sufficient reason.”¹⁵ Idealism attempts to think a continuum between phenomena and noumena that is not reducible to either. But what it really ends up doing – in Schopenhauer's opinion – is adopting a partial view (that of subject and object) and universalizing this in the Absolute.

What, then, does Schopenhauer propose? One must re-examine not only the Kantian framework, but the basic presuppositions of the Idealist response to Kant. For Schopenhauer, the principle of sufficient reason is primary among these presuppositions that must be re-examined. For the pessimist philosopher, that “everything that exists, must exist for a reason” must not be taken for granted. But this leaves a great deal open, too much perhaps: What if there is no reason for the world's existence, either as phenomena or as noumena? What if the world-in-itself is not ordered, let alone ordered “for us”? What if the world-as-it-is, let alone the world-in-itself, is unintelligible, not in a relative way, but in an absolute way? Once one dispenses with the principle of sufficient reason, what is left – *except a philosophy that can only be a non-philosophy*? It would appear that two paths are left open – materialism or idealism, nihilism or mysticism, the hard facts and the great beyond, “it is what it is” and “there is something more...” As we will see, for Schopenhauer, pessimism is the only viable philosophical response to such an abandonment of the principle of sufficient reason.

Schopenhauer dismisses the Idealist response to Kant's phenomena-noumena split as inadequate. In its place he proposes a simple move – that Kant's split be re-cast in a way that allows for a collapse between them to take place. There is, first, the world as phenomena: “Everything that in any way belongs and can belong to the world is inevitably associated with this being-conditioned by the subject, and it exists only for the subject.”¹⁶ This includes the subject-object correlation, as well as the finer distinction that Schopenhauer later makes between the representation and the object of representation, both of which are contained within the world of phenomenon. Put simply, “the world is my representation.”

Then there is, on the other side, the world as noumena, which is a pure limit that at once conditions thought and remains inaccessible to thought – “something to which no ground can ever be assigned, for which no explanation is possible, and no further cause is to be sought.”¹⁷ The concept of noumena can only ever be an apophatic concept. Schopenhauer enters deep waters here, not least because any attempt to conceptualize the noumenal world is doomed from the start. This never seems to deter the philosopher-curmudgeon, however. The challenge is how to think both the inaccessibility and the immanence of the world as noumena, and Schopenhauer glosses this via a concept of nothingness/emptiness that is at the same time not completely separate from the phenomenal world. One need not soar into the infinity of the cosmos or the inner depths of Spirit to discover such a concept. In *WWR* Schopenhauer discovers it in the mundane materiality of the body: “Thus it happens that to everyone the thing-in-itself is known immediately in so far as it appears as his own body, and only mediately in so far as it is objectified in the other objects of perception.”¹⁸ What results is a strange immanence of noumena: the correlation of subject and object that constitutes phenomena is the world considered as representation (*Vorstellung*), and that that which is absolutely inaccessible to this world-as-representation, but which is also inseparable from it, is the world considered as will (*Wille*). “[T]he world is, on the one side, entirely representation, just as, on the other, it is entirely will.”¹⁹

5. SCHOPENHAUER AND THE WILL-TO-LIFE

Like his Idealist contemporaries, Schopenhauer agrees that “Kant's greatest merit is the distinction of the phenomenon from the thing-in-itself.”²⁰ And, like his contemporaries Schopenhauer views this distinction as

something to be overcome. But whereas the Idealist response is to adopt an ontology of generosity to bridge this gap, Schopenhauer will adopt a different approach. Instead of asserting an Absolute Life (grounded by its own principle of sufficiency, and driven by an ontology of overpresence), Schopenhauer will drop the bottom out of the ontology of generosity. What remains is, quite simply, nothing. No overflowing life force, no pantheistic becoming, no immanent principle of life running throughout all of Creation. Just nothing. But nothing is, of course, never simple; it is also nothingness, or emptiness, or the void, and it quickly becomes a paradoxical and enigmatic something. So while Schopenhauer does not definitively resolve the Kantian problematic, he does provide a way of shifting the entire orientation of thought on the problem.

The new problem Schopenhauer is confronted with is how to overcome the Kantian split between phenomena and noumena, but without being determined by the ontology of generosity. This can be stated in even briefer terms: how to think “life” such that it is not always determined by overpresence (that is, by generosity, genesis, and givenness); *how to think life in terms of negation*. Certainly one would not want to return to a metaphysics of life, in which life obtains the quality of pure being that one finds in the concept of “soul,” common to both Aristotle and Aquinas. But Schopenhauer is equally skeptical of the diffuse theism in the Idealist notions of the Absolute, in which Absolute Life always radiates and flows forth, often finding its culmination in the heights of human life in particular. Schopenhauer notes, with some sarcasm, “life is thus given as a gift, whence it is evident that anyone would have declined it with thanks had he looked at it and tested it beforehand.”²¹

The remaining option for Schopenhauer is to consider the role that negation plays in relation to any ontology of life, especially any ontology of life that would attempt to overcome the Kantian split of phenomena and noumena. Life, then, is not simply subordinate to a metaphysics of presence (as in Kant), but neither is it consonant with an infinite overpresence of generosity (as with Idealism). In contrast to the ontology of generosity, which posits life as always affirmative, Schopenhauer will put forth a negative ontology, in which life is paradoxically grounded in nothingness (it is, perhaps, “underpresent”). In a striking turn of phrase, Schopenhauer refers to all these relations between negation and life as the Will-to-Life (*Wille zum Leben*):

As the will is the thing-in-itself, the inner content, the essence of the world, but life, the visible world, the phenomenon, is only the mirror of the will, this world will accompany the will as inseparably as a body is accompanied by its shadow; and if will exists, then life, the world, will exist. Therefore life is certain to the will-to-live...²²

Schopenhauer’s concept of the Will-to-Life is a response to an old dilemma concerning the ontology of life. It is found in Aristotle, and then in natural philosophy, before its recapitulation in Kant. We have seen it at play in German Idealism, in the ontology of generosity and its affirmative overpresence. Put simply, the dilemma is how to articulate a concept of life-in-itself that would account for all the instances of the living. If one is to avoid both the naïveté of epistemological classification, as well as the rhetorical games of nominalism, what is required is a concept of life that is at once synonymous with the living, and yet transcendently separated from it.

The Will-to-Life is, then, Schopenhauer’s attempt to overcome the Kantian split by asserting a subtractive continuity, a continuity paradoxically driven by negation. At the same time, sentences such as those in the citation above demand some unpacking, since in order to arrive at his concept of the Will-to-Life, Schopenhauer must make a number of steps (steps which many of his critics perceived as fallacious or untenable). With this in mind, we can briefly consider the three aspects of the Will-to-Life as presented by Schopenhauer in *WWR*.

The Riddle of Life

Early on in *WWR* Schopenhauer recasts the Kantian problematic through the example of the living body. His concern, however, is neither a “body” in the sense of physics, which would commit him to mechanism or atomism, nor “body” in the sense of biology, which would commit him to natural philosophy. Instead the body

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is for Schopenhauer a kind of crystallization of abstract anonymity, a “Will” that is at once energy and drive, but that has no origin or end, and leads to no goal. The body is that which is the most familiar and yet the most foreign to us as subjects. We are bodies, and we have bodies.²³ For Schopenhauer these are simply two ways of knowing the body – immediately as a living subject consonant with a living body, and mediately as a subject relating to or thinking about the body as object. Both of these are well within the domain of the phenomenal world that Kant describes.

But in the Second Book of *WWR* Schopenhauer will take Kant a step further. If the body, as both subject and object, is on the side of the world as phenomena (as representation), then what would the living body as a thing-in-itself be? If there is a phenomena of life, is there also a noumena of life, a life-in-itself? On the one hand, such a noumenal life could not be something completely divorced from life as phenomenal, for then there would be no point of connection between phenomena and noumena (a logical prerequisite for Kant). On the other hand, this noumenal life must retain a minimal equivocality with regard to phenomenal life, else we are simply back within the phenomenal domain of subject-object relations.

Hence Schopenhauer’s riddle of life: what is that through which life is at once the nearest and the farthest, the most familiar and the most strange? As Schopenhauer notes, “the answer to the riddle is given to the subject of knowledge appearing as individual, and this answer is given in the word *Will*.”²⁴ The Will is, in Schopenhauer’s hands, that which is common to subject and object, but not reducible to either. This Will is never present in itself, either as subjective experience or as objective knowledge; it necessarily remains a negative manifestation. Indeed, Schopenhauer will press this further, suggesting that “the whole body is nothing but objectified will, i.e., will that has become representation.”²⁵ And again: “My body and will are one...or, My body is the *objectivity* of my will.”²⁶

In reply to the riddle “what is nearest and farthest?” Schopenhauer answers with the Will – that which is fully immanent and yet absolutely inaccessible. As we noted, Schopenhauer’s first step is to re-cast Kant’s framework in new terms – for Kantian phenomena he will use the term Representation, and for Kantian noumena he will use the term Will. His next step is to describe the living body, and more specifically life, as the nexus where Will and Representation meet. Schopenhauer’s reply is that to each instance of the world taken as Representation there is the world as Will; and to each instance of life as Representation (whether as subject or object), there is a correlative Will-to-Life:

The will, considered purely in itself, is devoid of knowledge, and is only a blind, irresistible urge, as we see it appear in inorganic and vegetable nature...and as what the will wills is always life, just because this is nothing but the presentation of that willing for the representation, it is immaterial and a mere pleonasm if, instead of simply saying “the will,” we say “the will-to-life.”²⁷

Certainly life obtains a duality within the domain of Representation – there is the subjective experience of living, just as there is the scientific knowledge of the living, both inscribed within the world as Representation or phenomena. Schopenhauer’s controversial move here is to assert that there is life outside of and apart from the world as Representation, that there is a life which remains inaccessible to the phenomenon of life, and his phrase Will-to-Life designates this horizon.

Life Negating Life

However, at this point, the problem is that Schopenhauer appears to have only elevated the concept of life beyond ontology, to the realm of unthinkable noumena. There still remains a part of the riddle to be answered, which is how that which is nearest can – *at the same time* – be that which is farthest. For this the role of negation in the Will-to-Life becomes more important.

Schopenhauer notes that the Will is not simply a static, transcendent category of being, but a dynamic, continuous principle that is much in line with Idealist concept of the Absolute. But, as we’ve seen, Schopenhauer

distances himself from Idealism by opposing the ontology of generosity that it puts forth.²⁸ As Schopenhauer comments, “everywhere we see contest, struggle, and the fluctuation of victory, and...we shall recognize in this more distinctly that variance with itself essential to the will.”²⁹ Schopenhauer provides a veritable compendium of examples from the sciences, though they read more like scenes from a monster movie: insects that lay their eggs in the bodies of other host insects, for whom birth is death; the internalized predator-prey relationship in the hydra; the ant whose head and tail fight each other if the body is cut in two; invasive species such as ivy; giant oak trees whose branches become so intertwined that the tree suffocates. His examples continue, up through the cosmic negation of black holes, down to the basic chemical decomposition of matter in the decay of corpses, where life is defined by the negation of life.

Yet Schopenhauer is neither a Hobbes nor a Darwin; his emphasis here is less on the universalizing of struggle, and more on what it indicates for an ontology of life. If the Will is flow or a continuum, it is, for Schopenhauer, one driven by negation – or by a negative flow, a negative continuum. The Will asserts itself through contradictions, oppositions, subtractions, and its limit is the self-negation of life, through life. Thus “the will-to-live (*Wille zum Leben*) generally feasts on itself, and is in different forms its own nourishment, until finally the human race, because it subdues all the others, regards nature as manufactured for its own use.”³⁰

For Schopenhauer, there is an “inner antagonism” to the Will, one that is antagonistic at the level of this or that living being, as well as in the domain of inorganic nature, on through to the level of cosmic life. The Will-to-Life is driven by this process of “life negating life,” from the inorganic to the organic and beyond.

Cosmic Pessimism

In the inner antagonism of the Will-to-Life Schopenhauer comes upon what is perhaps his greatest insight, and that is its radically unhuman aspect. Schopenhauer here pulls apart the Kantian split, suggesting that all claims concerning noumena are necessarily compromised by concepts derived in some way from the phenomenal domain. And it is here that Schopenhauer most directly counters the furtive anthropocentrism in post-Kantian Idealism. In the same way that the domain of noumena does not exist for phenomena, so the Will-to-Life is utterly indifferent to any concept of life, be it “for us” or “in itself.” In the Will-to-Life “we see at the very lowest grade the will manifesting itself as a blind impulse, an obscure, dull urge, remote from all direct knowableness.”³¹

In statements like these, Schopenhauer is actually making two separate claims. The first has to do with the principle of sufficient reason, and Schopenhauer’s critical treatment of it. In so far as the Will-to-Life is noumenal as well as phenomenal, all statements concerning its causality, its teleology, its relation to time and space, and its logical coherence or intelligibility, must only apply within the phenomenal domain. In this sense “the will as thing-in-itself lies outside the province of the principle of sufficient reason in all its forms, and is consequently completely groundless, although each of its phenomena is entirely subject to that principle.”³² Schopenhauer admits that one can always recuperate any and all statements about the Will into the phenomenal domain, a recuperative move in which one is still able to articulate that which is inarticulable, to think that which is unthinkable. But in this paradoxical mode there is always something which, taken in itself, for which no sufficient reason can suffice, or for which there is only a negation of sufficient reason. We might even say that Schopenhauer’s concept of the Will-to-Life ultimately points to a principle of *insufficient* reason at its core.

If the Will-to-Life, considered in itself, has no sufficient reason because it lies outside the phenomenal domain, so can the Will-to-Life not be granted any anthropocentric conceits, least of all that life exists “for us” as human beings, or that it reaches its pinnacle in the human life. Like his German contemporaries, Schopenhauer posits a principle of continuity that would collapse the Kantian split between phenomena and noumena; but unlike them, he refuses to grant the human being, or the human perspective, any priority with respect to this principle. Certainly, as Schopenhauer readily admits, there are gradations and differentiations within the natural world. What remains, however, is this Will-to-Life that indifferently cuts across them all. “For it is indeed one and the same will that objectifies itself in the whole world; it knows no time, for that form of the principle of sufficient

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reason does not belong to it, or to its original objectivity, namely the Ideas, but only to the way in which these are known by the individuals who are themselves transitory...³³

Even as it is rendered hierarchical for Schopenhauer, the Will-to-Life maintains this cosmic indifference throughout the world. Indeed, Schopenhauer will go so far as to say that this constitutes the tragic-comic character of human life in particular: “The life of every individual, viewed as a whole and in general, and when only its most significant features are emphasized, is really a tragedy; but gone through in detail it has the character of a comedy.”³⁴

For Schopenhauer, pessimism is the only viable philosophical response to this radically unhuman condition. This pessimism is something for which Schopenhauer is popularly known (and often dismissed). The problem is that Schopenhauer’s pessimism is often understood to be about human life, for it is only human beings that sense the senselessness and suffering of the world. It is true that Schopenhauer’s pessimism has to do with a view of life as essentially “incurable suffering and endless misery,” an ongoing cycle of suffering and boredom. But this is only the case from the perspective of the individual, living subject, towards which, for Schopenhauer, the world-in-itself is indifferent. As Schopenhauer evocatively notes, very manifestation of the Will-to-Life is doubled by a kind of Willlessness (*Willenslosigkeit*), every sense of the world-for-us doubled by a world-without-us. Pessimism for Schopenhauer is not so much an individual, personal attitude, but really a cosmic one – an impersonal attitude. The indifference of the Will-to-Life thus stretches from the micro-scale to the macro-scale:

Thus everyone in this twofold regard is the whole world itself, the microcosm; he finds its two sides whole and complete within himself. And what he thus recognizes as his own inner being also exhausts the inner being of the whole world, the macrocosm. Thus the whole world, like man himself, is through and through will and through and through representation, and beyond this there is nothing.³⁵

In an enigmatic way, negation courses through Schopenhauer’s notion of the Will-to-Life. Evocations of the Will-to-Life as “nothing” or “nothingness” recur throughout Schopenhauer’s writings. Certainly Schopenhauer was influenced by his encounter with classical texts in the Buddhist traditions.³⁶ As we’ve noted, this type of cosmic pessimism stands in opposition to the ontology of generosity in post-Kantian Idealism, with its emphasis on overpresence, flux and flow, and the becoming of the Absolute. In response to the Kantian split between Life and the living, and in contrast to the post-Kantian ontology of generosity, Schopenhauer opts for a negative ontology of life.

However, that life is “nothing” can mean several things. The enigmatic last section of *WWR I* bears out some of these meanings. Here Schopenhauer makes use of Kant’s distinction between two kinds of nothing: the *nihil privativum* or privative nothing, and the *nihil negativum* or negative nothing. The former is nothing defined as the absence of something (e.g. shadow as absence of light, death as absence of life). For Schopenhauer the world is nothing in this privative sense as this interplay between Representation and Will; the world, with all its subject-object relations, as well as its ongoing suffering and boredom, is transitory and ephemeral. By contrast, the indifferent Will-to-Life courses through and cuts across it all, all the while remaining in itself inaccessible, and “nothing.”

The problem is that, at best, we have a limited and indirect access to the world as a *nihil privativum*, and “so long as we ourselves are the will-to-live, this last, namely the nothing as that which exists, can be known and expressed by us only negatively.”³⁷ For Schopenhauer the very fact that there is no getting outside the world of the *nihil privativum* hints at a further negation, one that is not a relative but an absolute nothingness:

...in opposition to this *nihil privativum*, the *nihil negativum* has been set up, which would in every respect be nothing...But considered more closely, an absolute nothing, a really proper *nihil negativum*, is not even conceivable, but everything of this kind, considered from a higher standpoint or subsumed under a wider concept, is always only a *nihil privativum*.³⁸

At this point it seems that one must say – or think – nothing more. It is as if philosophy ultimately leads to its own negation, to Wittgenstein’s claim that what cannot be thought must be passed over in silence. That *WWR* closes with an enigmatic affirmation of life as nothingness is indicative of the limits of Schopenhauer’s negative ontology. On the one hand the Will-to-Life is nothingness because, considered as the interplay between Life and the living, the Will-to-Life in itself is never something in an affirmative or positive sense. But Schopenhauer suggests that the Will-to-Life is nothingness for a further reason, which is that, in itself, the Will-to-Life indicates that which is never manifest, that which is never an objectification of the Will, that which is never a Will for a Representation. To the relative nothingness of the *nihil privativum* there is the absolute nothingness (*absolutes Nichts*) of the *nihil negativum*. While Schopenhauer is himself opposed to the post-Kantian Idealists, he is united with them in his interest in the concept of the Absolute, albeit one paradoxically grounded in nothingness. His contribution is to have thought the Absolute without resorting to the ontology of generosity and its undue reliance on romantic conceptions of Life, Nature, and the human. To the negative ontology of life, it would seem, therefore, that there is an kind of *metontology* of life. It is for this reason that Schopenhauer can close *WWR I* by stating that “this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is – nothing.”³⁹

6. CODA (THE SPECTER OF ELIMINATIVISM)

At a recent conference given at The New School in New York, Steven Shaviro characterized contemporary speculative philosophy as polarized between what he terms “panpsychism” and “eliminativism.” Such a polarization relies on a number of presuppositions. If one accepts that philosophy is broadly conditioned by the correlation between self and world (but also subject and object, or thought and the intentional object of thought), and if one accepts that this “correlationism” is a central problematic within philosophy (insofar as philosophy is by definition unable to think outside of correlationism), then for Shaviro this leaves one of two extremes open for philosophy. Either one must opt for a kind of diffuse immanence, in which some quasi-monist entity (thought, affect, object, life, etc.) is already everywhere - the view of panpsychism - or one must opt for an equally diffuse reductionism, in which all claims about existing entities are in themselves groundless, masking a potential void within everything - the view of eliminativism. In Shaviro’s presentation, current speculative philosophy is being polarized between, on the one hand, a view of everything-already-everywhere, and on the other hand, a view of nothing-ultimately-nowhere.

As I read them, Shaviro’s comments are meant more as a provocation than a proof. In his talk he also notes alternatives that avoid moving towards either pole: “I should also note though...that there is also the alternative of abrogating both eliminativism and panpsychism at the same time.”⁴⁰ Shaviro cites the work of Reza Negarestani, Ben Woodard, and yours truly as examples, noting that “these thinkers have a very negative view of the efficacy of thought, and in that sense they’re eliminativists. And yet they couldn’t find the universe as horrible as they find it, in this Lovecraftian way, without being kinds of inverted panpsychists...”⁴¹ However, what remains an open question is the way in which the work of Negarestani, Woodard, and myself arbitrates between eliminativism and panpsychism – whether it is in the form of a synthesis, an implosion, a double negation, or something else altogether. But it is worth noting how this alternative described by Shaviro, which would avoid both the plenum of panpsychism and the reductionism of eliminativism, results in a paradoxical plenum of nothing, or better, a notion of immanence that is indissociable from nothingness. In short, the implosion of becoming and un-becoming into Schopenhauer’s “will-to-nothing” or Willlessness.

Eliminativism is more commonly understood as a branch of analytical philosophy that also goes by the name of “eliminative materialism.” Often associated with thinkers such as Paul Churchland and Daniel Dennett, eliminative materialism questions the existence of “qualia” such as mental states, psychological behaviors, or subjective affects. At its most extreme, it challenges any claims for an independently-existing mind beyond a neurological and biological basis. As fields such as cognitive science progress, many commonly-held notions such as “belief” or “desire” will be discovered to have no viable scientific basis and may even be relegated to the dust heap of folk psychology. Eliminativism also has a broader significance, especially in the philosophy of science, where it questions the existence of any entity beyond its material basis (be it of the vitalist “soul” or the

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“luminiferous ether”).

Shaviro’s comments are, of course, meant to evoke a different type of eliminativism, one that would take up its fundamental challenge to philosophy’s principle of sufficient reason, while also departing from eliminative materialism’s fidelity to biological, neurological, or physical “baseline” concepts. In a way, traditional eliminative materialism doesn’t go far enough; or, put differently, given its critical questioning of basic philosophical premises, eliminative materialism’s reliance on positivist science can only seem as an arbitrary stopping-point. Why claim that subjective states or psychological categories like “faith,” “joy,” “despondency,” or “dereliction” can only be assessed to the degree that they reduce to the biological or neurological level, and then not continue on to “eliminate” that biological or neurological basis as well? It would seem that, for eliminative materialism, philosophy once again re-instates its Kantian, juridical capacity to regulate boundaries and re-establish grounds, precisely at the moment that it questions the concept of “ground” altogether. In short, this more ambiguous, “dark” eliminativism would suggest that any eliminative materialism must ultimately eliminate matter itself.⁴²

The trials and tribulations (mostly tragic) of “life” as a philosophical concept readily lend themselves to the eliminativist approach. Surely no other concept has been so vociferously asserted and questioned, from historical debates over vitalism in the philosophy of science, to contemporary evocations of “vibrant matter” and “the life of things.” Eliminativism haunts the ontology of life, constantly questioning its theological pretensions, while also maintaining a minimal baseline or ground that would enable fields like neuroscience to make scientifically sound claims about what is or isn’t living. At its extreme, the search for a material basis for life (be it in a molecule or even, ironically, in biological “information”) ends up reducing life to its material constituents - at which point there is no life at all...or there is nothing but life. Interestingly, eliminativist approaches to the ontology of life tend to split it along the lines that Shaviro describes: either everything is alive or nothing is alive; either everything is pulsating flux and flow, auto-affecting and self-transforming, or everything is silence, stillness, and the enigmatic, vacuous hum of nothingness.

For both Aristotle and Kant, the proliferating, generous, and over-present manifestations of life are always shadowed by a concept of life-in-itself that must, by necessity, enter the eliminativist abyss. Nowhere is the awareness of this duplicity more evident than in post-Kantian Idealism. In Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* and his concept of the World-Soul, in Hegel’s meditations on the organicist flows of Spirit, and in Fichte’s lectures on “Absolute Life,” one sees in Idealism a concerted attempt to ameliorate this shadowy aspect of life itself, while also refusing the options of either mechanistic science or a return to Scholastic theology.

In contrast to this tradition, one also finds thinkers like Schopenhauer, the misanthrope from Danzig who, again and again, rails against his contemporaries for not having adequately grasped the nothingness at the heart of life itself. But if there is nothingness at the heart of life, then how does one account for its prodigious generosity and overpresence? How does one think the negation at the heart of life, when life is commonly understood to be the concept of affirmation *par excellence*? Despite the animosities between them, this is the question that concerns both the Idealists as well as Schopenhauer; and it is a problem first fully articulated by Kant.

Post-Kantian Idealism did not end with Fichte, Schelling, or Hegel. In a way, its conceptual contours are resurrected by subsequent generations. A thread runs from the notion of life-as-generation to philosophical vitalism and biophilosophies inspired by Deleuze or Bergson, just as another thread runs from the notion of life-as-giveness to the phenomenology of life, the life-world, or the flesh, as found in Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, or Michel Henry. Are we, for example, witness to a contemporary post-Kantian Idealism today, in the correlationism of a neo-Fichteanism, in the transcendental geology of a neo-Schellingianism, or in the metamorphic plasticity of neo-Hegelianism?⁴³

One of Schopenhauer’s most contentious propositions is that all life is dark life, and thus even contemporary scientific fields such as those that study extremophiles recapitulate, through the methods of empirical science, this shift from life-in-itself as a regional problem of epistemology to a fundamental fissure within ontology. Its

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limit is one that Schopenhauer characterizes as life-as-nothing, life thought in terms of negation, ultimately leading Schopenhauer from a negative ontology to something that we can only call an *affirmative meontology* of life.

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NOTES

1. The widespread coverage of extremophile research is evidenced by pop science books like Michael Ray Taylor's *Dark Life: Martian Nanobacteria, Rock-Eating Cave Bugs, and Other Extreme Organisms of Inner Earth and Outer Space*, as well as a number of science documentaries, including *Journey into Amazing Caves*. There is a college-level textbook *Physiology and Biochemistry of Extremophiles*, and there even exists a number of professional organizations, such as the International Society for Extremophiles.
2. European Science Foundation (ESF), *Investigating Life in Extreme Environments – A European Perspective* (Strasbourg: European Science Foundation, 2007), p. 13. See also the recent press release from NASA (December 2010), announcing the discovery of an arsenic-based bacterium: http://www.nasa.gov/home/hqnews/2010/dec/HQ_10-320_Toxic_Life.html.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
4. "Gold Mine Holds Life Untouched by Sun," *New Scientist* (19 October 2006).
5. Kant never says so, but one is tempted to state it: Life is noumenal.
6. I will be using the phrases "post-Kantian Idealism" and "German Idealism" interchangeably, though arguably there are reasons for treating them as separate terms.
7. The most frequently-referenced example is in the opening sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, though the *Philosophy of Nature*, part of Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, also revisits these themes, from the perspective of Nature as manifest Spirit.
8. Schelling returned again and again to this relationship between Nature and the Absolute, from earlier works such as the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, to his later work *The Ages of the World*.
9. This phrase plays a key role in Fichte's lectures, some of which are collected in *The Science of Knowing – Fichte's 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*.
10. Here I borrow Steven Shaviro's paraphrase of Whitehead's process philosophy in *Without Criteria*, though used here in a different context.
11. On life-as-genesis, see Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, as well as nearly all of Deleuze's work, including *Bergsonism*, *Difference and Repetition*, and the two volumes of *Cinema*. On life-as-giveness, see Jean-Luc Marion's *Being Given: Towards a Phenomenology of Givenness*, and Michel Henry's multi-volume *Phenomenology of Life*.
12. There is an anecdote often told about Schopenhauer that, while lecturing in Berlin in 1820, intentionally chose the same time for his lectures as that of Hegel. Needless to say, the latter continued to draw huge crowds, while the former was faced with an empty hall.
13. *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume I, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), p. 429.
14. *Ibid.*, 434, italics removed.
15. *Ibid.*, §7, pp. 25-26.
16. *Ibid.*, §1, p. 3.
17. *Ibid.*, §24, p. 124.
18. *Ibid.*, §6, p. 19.
19. *Ibid.*, §1, p. 4.
20. *Ibid.*, 417, italics removed.
21. *Ibid.*, Volume II, p. 579.
22. *Ibid.*, Volume I, §54, p. 275. I have chosen to translate Schopenhauer's *Wille zum Leben* as Will-to-Life. However the Payne translation uses "will-to-live."
23. This is one of the greatest lessons of Cartesianism prior to Schopenhauer, and of phenomenology after Schopenhauer.
24. *The World as Will and Representation*, §18, p. 100.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, §18, pp. 102-103.
27. *Ibid.*, §54, p. 275.
28. Schopenhauer's negative approach is a position that is as much about being a curmudgeon as it is about critique – indeed the stylistic innovation in Schopenhauer's writings is to have rendered the two inseparable, culminating in a form of philosophical pessimism.
29. *The World as Will and Representation*, §27, p. 146-47.
30. *Ibid.*, §27, p. 147.
31. *Ibid.*, §27, p. 149.
32. *Ibid.*, §23, p. 113.
33. *Ibid.*, §28, pp. 159-60.
34. *Ibid.*, §58, p. 322.
35. *Ibid.*, §29, p. 162.
36. On Schopenhauer's complex relation to Eastern philosophy, see Peter Abelsen, "Schopenhauer and Buddhism," *Philosophy East and West* 43:2 (1993): 255-78; and Moira Nicholls, "The Influences of Eastern Thought on Schopenhauer's Doctrine of

the Thing-in-Itself,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 171-212.

37. *The World as Will and Representation*, §71, p. 410.

38. *Ibid.*, §71, p. 409.

39. *Ibid.*, §71, p. 412.

40. Steven Shaviro, “Panpsychism and/or Eliminativism,” paper delivered at the Third Object Oriented Ontology conference, 9 September 2011, The New School, New York. A video of the lecture is available at: <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/17269234>. Apparently some of the material from the lecture is taken from Shaviro’s work-in-progress, a science fiction novel entitled *Noosphere*.

41. Shaviro specifically cites Negarestani’s *Cyclonopedia*, my books *After Life* and *In The Dust Of This Planet*, and Woodard’s “dark vitalism” project – to which we might also add Ray Brassier’s *Nihil Unbound* and Thomas Ligotti’s *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*.

42. As contemporary philosophy seems to be particular fond of branding, one could coin new terms for this type of eliminativism: “dark eliminativism,” “black eliminativism,” “eliminative eliminativism,” “the Ab-human Eliminativism of the Watching Mists” and so on.

43. This is in no way meant as a dismissal, simply a provocation. Consider the following as case studies: the role of Fichte in Quentin Meillassoux’s *After Finitude*, the role of Schelling in Iain Hamilton Grant’s *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, the edited volume *The New Schelling* (ed. Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman); and the role of that greatest of resurrected corpses, Hegel, in works such as Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, and Catherine Malabou’s *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Time, and the Dialectic*.