



Peter Strohmayer

Freedom and the way to Christianity

I drank from a glass of water. At first I wasn't sure I wanted to reach for the glass. I sat in front of it. I looked at it for a long time. I thought to myself, I'll just wait until I seriously want it, until I really reach for it, now I don't want it yet. I wait a long time.

Do I decide or does something inside me decide? When will a decision be made? And when it has fallen, will that have been the freedom of the will? Do I bear responsibility for all my previous decisions because I always made them of my own free will? Were they therefore good or evil?

The answer in the world of cognition is: there can be no free will, and thus no morality, in the world of appearance as conceived by us intellectually. Every will, insofar as it is the object of cognition, cannot be thought otherwise than caused and thus unfree. After all, we recognize only the shadows of things. We also recognize only the shadow of our own will.

But perhaps our will is free in itself, independent of our cognition?

I paused in front of my glass. The pause was thrown down to us at the same time as the fire from the seat of the gods. It is a great faculty to be able to pause, not always to be immediately carried away to action. Without pausing, no act of will would be possible.

Now comes the lingering. So I linger in front of my glass and wait without moving.

After some time it suddenly happened by itself. I see myself reaching for the glass. The final decision of will, that is, an action or a linguistic decision, happened without my intervention. Only afterwards did it come to my consciousness. The act of will came out of nowhere. It was suddenly there, and with it the act or the valid decision. It is not I, but something that decides when and how the act of will is before me.

In simple, self-evident acts of will in everyday life, such as spontaneously - not as consciously as I have now done - reaching for a glass of water, the pausing, the dwelling (deliberation) and the decision flow into one another so quickly that there seems to be no

difference between conceptually grasped intention and actual execution. One can give oneself seemingly immediate commands. This gives one a sense of freedom.

But this feeling of freedom is deceptive. One can want what one already really wants. You can also first wish for what you want. But one cannot bring to will what one just wishes but does not yet really want. The courage to do noble deeds is not at our service if we wish it. No matter how the motives may pile up: they belong to the world of knowledge and, no matter how long one waits, are never sufficient alone to trigger or "release" the actual act of will.

The emergence of an act of the will out of nothing does not mean that the will, as a rationally conceived phenomenon, has no cause. Our cognitive faculty, inescapably bound to the form of causal thinking, "demands" the operation of causality in space and time even in the setting of an act of will. So I - or this other in me - can by no means will what I will freely, without depending on a cause. There are - as we inevitably see it - chemical reactions going on in our brain and then surprising our perception with a result.

But we can reach beyond this limited horizon of our cognitive faculty. For self-consciousness experiences its own will on the one hand - like other things of the external world - as an appearance, as a shadow. On the other hand, however, self-consciousness also finds its own will directly - from the other side, so to speak - as a "thing in itself". To no other thing in the world is there such immediate access. One's own inner being has for man a presence independent of his cognitive faculty, which is beyond all doubt.

What seemed unattainable we find in ourselves. The will, as it reveals itself in us as part of the "world in itself," could, in the same way as I found it in me, be the essence not only of me, but of all other appearances. This is Schopenhauer's and Fichte's German idealism. Through the access to our own interior penetrates the light of the intelligible world, in which our human forms of thought, that is, causality, space and time, have no meaning. Self-consciousness perceives its own will in a causality-, space- and time-free realm.

Our own self-consciousness thus bears witness in perfect certainty to a being that is always already what it wills. The will here can be called neither free nor unfree. These terms have lost their meaning in this sphere. The will as a thing in itself has neither space nor time. It is neither changeable nor unchangeable, because outside of time. It is neither unity nor multiplicity, because outside space. It is a self-defining fluid with a "transcendental aura".

Self-consciousness, as said, is able to look at the will, which is outside the concepts of time and change, as a "thing in itself" in its own interior. In the outer world, it is subject to change as an appearance, that is, as seen through the faculty of cognition, and it makes up the

course of human history - reckoned among all beings. In the inner world, it sees in its own transcendental will the source of all volition, the secret of the all-encompassing divine counsel that stands outside of a time, which was, is, and will be the basis of our world of phenomena in the past, present, and future.

This access to the most mysterious area of our existence is denied to the realist. He assumes the infallibility of his cognitive faculty. In his inner being, too, he always reckons only with appearance and cognition, with causally explicable things in space and time, thus always only with shadows, not with the divine. Since for him there is no world behind things, he cannot see it in himself either. He always saw only shadows and became blind to the light.

I just wanted to reach for my glass of water. If I "want" to jump into the water from a ten-meter tower or be brave, the same will underlie and I will have the same experiences.

Transcendentally, then, I am free. My will is rooted in the time-, space- and causality-less primal ground of will. It is called upon anew at every moment of my life to find the right path by grace and to renew creation.

The realist, on the other hand, comes to the conclusion that he is ultimately not responsible for his actions because his will is based on chemical processes, unconscious imprints and injuries. He lets his will be maintained and straightened out by doctors and psychologists. He relies on them, not on the God within him. Thus he must remain a slave.

And one step further: there is indeed the longing to experience in God not only the freedom of one's own will, but to shape the world with one's individual decisions of will, with one's own life.

It would be rash to assume that the emanations of the transcendental will follow an unchanging trail through a unique temporal history. The transcendental will is outside of space, time, and causality. It is thus always already that which is attained by us.

Just as one takes the relation of the second to the third as a parable for the understanding of a fourth dimension, so one could also understand every act of will as an event that does not refer to a particular point in history but to the world as a whole. The individual human faculty of cognition - in its constant punctiform perception of a present (past and future are our imaginations) - oscillates like a needle in the grooves of a revolving plate of wax. This plate corresponds to the will. It plays out our lives in time, space and causality. The peculiarity of this record is that, as life plays out, it remakes itself, along with the past and future embedded in it, as a whole with each act of the will, and truly remakes

itself, not just in the imagination. Every "good" and "bad" act contributes to the "aura" of the record and thus to the content of life. The farthest past and the farthest future event are shaped as a whole by the will of the living, who are always already what they will.

We who are alive are substitutes, entrusted with discipleship and responsibility. We are up to this task by grace. Every moment we live, the past, present and future world is at stake anew. Through the unfolding of our will we shape it. In the shaping we come to know who we are. In the self-seen interior, our freely shaping will is found by our self-consciousness according to the grace granted to us, attained as given. In this timeless sphere we are already eternally what we desire to be. There is the kingdom in which we follow Christ and find the nearness of God.

As an appearance, on the other hand, it is still the being embedded in the causal flow, unchanging from beginning to end, which never was and never will be different. It is always only this one, familiar world. The fact that it could be retroactively and retroactively different from beginning to end is not comprehensible to the faculty of cognition.

People who have the grace that this will is done in them according to prayer take responsibility like Christ and, like Christ, encourage others in their attitude. The common participation in the kingdom of God works beyond time and enables history to take a different course at every moment, both retrospectively and prospectively, even though the causal course of the world seems to be finally decided for our faculty of knowledge.

The grace of our own will granted to us at every moment benefits all those before, now and later, just as the grace granted to others before times, now and in the future benefits our own being. That we often fail to achieve this attitude in the absence of grace is another matter. So we stand by or against one another, across all time, even by our smallest action.

The sacrifices of others, no matter when they have been made in history or will be made in the future, work for us, and our sacrifices work for others, as the greatest sacrifice ever made in absolute freedom, free from all purposes, intentions and calculations, free from self-interest and free from "meaning" that can be comprehended intellectually, out of pure and therefore secretive love, raises us up, that of Christ, whom we follow unceasingly.

One must bind oneself to and believe in a metaphysical worldview. If we thus become one with all people and their wills, then every activity and every suffering has a meaning. It is true that to cognition every activity appears to be caused and thus egoistic. A truly good, non-egoistic decision seems only its omission. But this conclusion of reason cannot hold for the transcendental world. Out of the narrowness of egoism or renunciation leads the free act.

Thus, in German idealism, I can confidently serve my star, even if it only shines for people - of whatever origin - with a German soul and a German Christ.

Grado/Vienna, from August 2009 to September 2010