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## «Waiting-Hall of Perceptions»:

### O. Weininger's Critique of Mach's I-Definition

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*The present article is devoted to analysis of the anti-essential "I"-definition given by Ernst Mach in his work "The Analysis of Sensations" and shows Mach's influence on the contemporary philosophers in the whole and on Otto Weininger in particular, using the methods of interpretation and reconstruction. The benefit of this article is that it proves that O.Weininger's critique of Mach's "I"-definition is based on monad theory of the German philosopher G.W. Leibniz. Moreover it also shows to a considerable extent a key element of Austrian philosophical tradition regarding German concept of individuality and history, which is in religious confrontation of Protestantism and Catholicism. Consequently Weininger's approach is one-of-a-kind, because after he converted to Protestantism he denied in such a way Austrian idea and made his choice in favor of German philosophy which united him with Kant's ideas who established ethical principle of unlimited freedom of mind.*

*Keywords: Austrian philosophy, «I»-definition, complex of perceptions, elements, monad, genius, principle of ethics.*

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The period since 70-s of XIX century is related to blooming of philosophy in Austria, empirism and positivism became widespread, focus on psychical plane led to that it was often considered as the only reality. Austrian positivism was characterized by anti-metaphysician approach and it inspired physicists to apply to philosophy. Ernst Mach was the best known and famous among them, he was one of the most outstanding and influential thinkers in Austria at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries.

Although the name of Ernst Mach has become famous due to his profound contribution to physics connected with ballistic shock-waves in aerodynamics as well as due to outstanding

achievements in thermodynamics, optics, acoustics and mechanics and the scientist himself did care about his reputation first of all among natural scientists, he worried less about the opinion of professional philosophers, it is considered that at the turn of XX century he developed a real philosophy of human knowledge. Due to his works in philosophy Mach has become very popular and gained great influence not only on professional philosophers, but also on contemporary poets, writers and literature critics.

Ernst Mach's ideas had a profound influence on philosophy development at the end of XIX-beginning of XX century not only within Austria, but also outside the former Habsburg

Monarchy. However, the reason for such great Mach's influence is first of all connected with the fact that his ideas corresponded to mentality of the epoch and reflected that identity crisis which Austrian culture and Austrian self-consciousness experienced within the period preceding collapse of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In this sense Weininger's critique of the "I"-definition shows to a great extent this polemic and identity crisis with potential German projection of the future of Austria which can be found in many works.

Probably no other publication of expanded version of the doctoral dissertation has become so popular and gained so much fame as it happened to the main work of Otto Weininger's "Sex and Character: a principal investigation", in which 23-year old author comes to global and quite discouraging conclusions. Since its publication in 1903 the book has gone through so many editions nearly thirty by 1940 and in 1980 it was republished again. And at the same time no other book stirred so much controversy as this diatribe against women and Jews because of the author's vagaries about deadly enmity of male and female nature.

Otto Weininger was born in a rich Jewish family of a gifted goldsmith Leopold Weininger and received a very good education. At the age of 18 he spoke fluently Greek, Latin, French and English languages, as well as Spanish and Italian. Later he also acquired passive knowledge of Swedish and Norwegian languages. Weininger studied philosophy and psychology at the University of Vienna. The doctoral dissertation entitled "Eros and Psyche" he wrote under scientific supervision of Friedrich Jodl, who deemed Weininger personally repugnant, Friedrich Jodl confirmed it himself in his private correspondence. Considering Otto Weininger's work to be abound in extravagancies and crudities, Jodl was astonished to see its overwhelming success after it was published as a book entitled

"Sex and Character", because he considered a dissertation to be purely a scientific investigation, while its appearance in the book form "smacked of wish-fulfillment in its speculations about Jews and women"<sup>1</sup>.

In summer 1902 on the day he was awarded with the doctoral scientific degree Weininger converted to Protestantism. In October 1903 less than a year after the book "Sex and Character" was published in the consequence of the deep depression Otto Weininger committed a suicide by shooting himself in the chest in the hotel room where Beethoven had died.

In his book "Sex and Character" Weininger proceeds from principal opposition of male and female nature. By equating sexuality with women and diagnosing hysteria as a malady solely peculiar to women caused by conflict between exclusively sexual nature of women and chastity ideal, Weininger assumed that women are free to choose between motherhood and prostitution; for a third is not given "tertium non datur"<sup>2</sup>. Since the former merely disguises the latter, the only way for men to elude harmful influence of women is simply to cease procreation. "Such vagaries notwithstanding, Weininger embodied something pure and edifying. Even Freud conceded that the young man had about him a touch of genius"<sup>3</sup>.

According to Weininger in contrast to women primitive consciousness model, their non-productivity and sensuality, males are characterized by high level of consciousness development, creation and asceticism; in the book Weininger "identifies- up to absurdity- male nature with intellect, creativity, free will, but at the same time male nature is more and more separated from body, instinct, life and nature"<sup>4</sup>.

In the chapter named "Logic, Ethics and the Ego" of the book "Sex and Character" Weininger sharply criticized anti-essential "I"-definition given by Mach according to the tradition

established by David Hume (1711-1776) and Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799). D. Hume's theory is based on the idea that knowledge begins with experiment which consists of perceptions and which in their turn are divided into impressions (sensations and emotions) and ideas (remembrances and imagination images). "In accordance with English tradition Hume analyses knowledge as external and internal experience. Consequently the experience generates in us ideas which are divided into simple ideas-impressions and ideas-reflections in relation to emotional states (pleasantness-unpleasantness). D. Hume raises a question what influences on imagination activity, why in the end different languages and different objects are learned and described in a similar way"<sup>5</sup>.

D. Hume defines his philosophical concept of the "I" in the following way "... when I investigate in the most intimate way something named by myself as my "I", I always face some or another individual perception of warmth or coldness, light or shade, love or hate, suffering or delight. I just can not catch my "I" as something existing beside perceptions and I can not possibly capture anything else than some perception. If my perceptions are temporally ceased as it happens in a deep dream then during all this time I do not realize my own "I" and thus the I can be really considered as not existing"<sup>6</sup>.

Ernst Mach acknowledged that Hume was his forerunner in "I" critique: "... well ahead of me David Hume introduced in this "Treatise of Human Nature" analysis of "Self" and destroyed the illusion of some remaining "I"<sup>7</sup>. In this relation E. Mach follows Austrian philosophical tradition according to which "... almost all philosophical works of Austrian thinkers contain analysis of sensations as a source of knowledge, substantiality of the "I", possibility of the thing-in-itself. In the light of these assumptions D.Hume's philosophy seemed to be promising, fruitful and

prospective for inheritance and development of ideas"<sup>8</sup>.

According to Weininger D.Hume's critique of "I" are reduced to the result that the "I"-definition is only a "bundle" of different "perceptions" which are in a continuous ebb and flow. Weininger emphasizes that the "I"-definition is abolished due to Hume, because Hume being himself quite certain that he had none "Self" "proposed to say nothing about a few metaphysicians who appeared to rejoice in another kind of ego; ... he dared to suppose that the majority of mankind, leaving the few peculiar and metaphysicians out of the question, were, like himself, mere bundles"<sup>9</sup>.

Weininger finds the "I" critique of the German satirist and author of aphorisms of XVIII century Lichtenberg to be bolder than Hume's critique. Lichtenberg was an outstanding German scientist and publicist, who was very popular among many Austrian thinkers due to his philosophical sayings written in the form of posthumously published aphorisms. In his philosophical fragments Lichtenberg "throws doubt upon power of traditional word formulas, claims to prove attitude to the most remarkable events and calls to look for grounds not to believe"<sup>10</sup>.

In his work Weininger defines Lichtenberg as the philosopher of impersonality, who corrects the conversational expression "I think" (ich denke) into an actual "it thinks" (es denkt), as more corresponding to the reality. Weininger writes: "He regards the ego as a creation of the grammarian. In this Hume had anticipated him, in as much as he also had declared, at the end of his analysis, all disputes as to the identity of the person to be merely a battle of words"<sup>11</sup>.

Ernst Mach in his "Analysis of sensations" determines the "I" or "ego" as "a relatively permanent complex of memories, moods, feelings, joined to a particular body (human body)"<sup>12</sup>. The border dividing the "I" from the external world

is changeable according to Mach, the boundaries of the "I" can be so extended that they involve the whole universe. However being without exact boundaries and remaining undetermined these boundaries are exposed to permanent external changes.

In order to step out of the "I" boundaries Mach enters a definition of the elements, which are primary to the "I". "The primary fact is not the ego, – Mach writes, – but the elements (sensations)... The elements constitute the I"<sup>13</sup>. Mach demonstrates this interconnection by the example of the sensation green: "What does it mean that I have "the sensation green"? It signifies that the element green occurs in a given complex of other elements (sensations, memories). When I cease to have the sensation green, when I die, then the elements no longer occur in the ordinary, familiar association. That is all"<sup>14</sup>. On Mach's opinion the introduction of the elements let us to eliminate "controversy between the "I" and the world, sensation or appearance or object"<sup>15</sup>, because we treat only the interconnection of the elements.

While the "I" interpreted by Mach is a part of the world and can be determined just as an "abstract idea", as "empirical construction" or an "assumption" consisting of particularly ordered groups of the elements such as sensations, views, memories and thoughts joined to an organism, then the "I" interpreted in such a way happens to be in danger to be isolated in itself. There is a certain difficulty to accept sensations, feelings and views of other humans on the base of sensations and feelings of your own "I". Mach supposed that this problem can be resolved if the physical, the psychological and the intellectual are equated to each other, then the problem of someone else's "I" does not appear any more, because the own "I" and someone else's "I" are considered to be only changeable com complexes influencing each other: "As my neighbor's sensations are not

directly transferred to me as well as mine to him, thus I'm entitled to consider the same elements in which I dissolved the physical as elements of the psychical. The physical and psychical contain therefore the common elements"<sup>16</sup>.

Mach similar to many other philosophers of his time considered the psychical as a sensation, that is why when he equates the psychical and the physical, he proceeds from the assumption that the psychical can be described similar to the physical. The physical phenomenon represents a wave, but a human does not perceive it as the wave, but he or she hears it as the sound. The color is light refraction, but a human sees it as the color but not the light. Therefore there are no grounds to distinguish the physical understood as waves from the psychical, because both can be described in the form of waves. Thus according to Mach everything outside sensations does not possess the status of the reality to the full extent, and any representation even such a general representation or definition like the "I" is actually a result of the intellectual activity in which perception experience is used. Perceptions consist of complexes of sensations which in their turn consist of individual sensations-elements. That is why the psychical and the physical represent in fact all the same.

In the words of the French researcher of Viennese Modernity Jasques Le Rider the "I" represented by Mach as to be "beyond redemption" (das unrettbare Ich) expressed in the form the functional interconnection of the elements has actually become "methapsychological crown of the natural scientist's philosophy who proposed the Viennese public a new version of the monistic doctrine of Positivism"<sup>17</sup>. Mach's reductionism reducing the "I" and the world to "the complex of sensations" and allowing to analyze them as elementary biophysical processes has significantly damaged the belief in the presence of some permanent identity, and the poets, critics

and writes responded on it variously. If we speak about the negative reaction, then we have to state that Weininger showed the tendency to overcome Mach particularly brightly.

His protect he expressed on the pages of his book "Sex and Character". Weininger disproved Mach's theory which represented the universe in the form of a coherent mass, while the individual "egos" are represented as points in which the coherent mass has of greater consistency. He critically considers that Mach refuses the presence of any reality beside sensations, according to Mach the only realities are perceptions which are connected in one individual relatively strongly. Therefore Weininger concludes that the "I" is not a real but a practical reality, which "can not be isolated, and therefore, the idea of individual immortality must be rejected"<sup>18</sup>. That is why Weininger characterizes mockingly Mach's definition of the "I" as "a mere waiting-hall of perceptions".

Weininger either does not agree with Mach's opinion that the "I" as a complex of the elements is in a permanent stream of changes. "It is clear that to be able to say that A is A, to establish the permanence of the conception through the changes of experience, there must be something unchangeable, and this can be only the subject. Were I part of the stream of change I could not verify that the A remained unchanged, had remained itself. Were I part of the change I could not recognize the change."-Weininger wrote<sup>19</sup>.

When he speaks about ethics, Weininger recognizes "truth, purity, faithfulness, uprightness with reference to oneself"<sup>20</sup>; he states that "duty is only duty to oneself, duty of empirical ego to the intelligible ego"<sup>21</sup>.

In the Chapter named "The "I" Problem and Genius" Otto Weininger sets chaos of sensational perceptions in opposition to "such spiritual unity of the "I" with the world whole under which the "I" does not disappear, but containing within

itself the whole universe it asserts its absolute transempirical value"<sup>22</sup>. Under genius Weininger understands a particular state of absolute freedom from the reality laws. According to Weininger only the man of genius is able to recognize clearly his own "self", because the man of genius is capable to distinguish all the finest details between himself and other people. That is exactly why the man of genius "is enabled to distinguish the fact that others are different, to perceive the "ego" of other men, even when it is not pronounced enough for them to be conscious of it themselves"<sup>23</sup>.

Weininger states that the man of genius has Kantian ethical consciousness. He writes: "The man of genius is he whose ego has acquired consciousness. ... It is only he who feels that every other man is also an ego, a monad, an individual centre of the universe, with specific manner of feeling and thinking and a distinct past, he alone is in a position to avoid making use of his neighbors as means to an end, he according to the ethics of Kant, will trace, anticipate and therefore respect the personality in his companion (as part of the intelligible universe) and will not merely be scandalized by him. The psychological condition of all practical altruism, therefore, is theoretical individualism"<sup>24</sup>.

When Weininger speaks about the I-monad he means the theory of the German philosopher G.W.Leibniz (1646-1716) "whose ideas gained for a long time a foothold in Austrian culture as opposed to German, where the authority of Leibniz's followers was shaken by Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason"<sup>25</sup>.

In accordance with the theory of Leibniz the world represents a united building, its integrity is provided by the principle of pre-defined. The central definition of the theory, written by Leibniz during his stay in Vienna in his best know philosophical work "Monadology", is a monad, which is a simple spiritual substance.

The monad is closed, it has “no windows”<sup>26</sup>, and even God, having created it, cannot change its pre-determined goal. Meanwhile each monad is considered to be a mirror of the whole huge universe and thus all the laws of this universe, no matter if they are physical or chemical, are reflected and applied to the monad.

God is the greatest and the most complicated monad which brings the world into harmony. Leibniz wrote on this occasion: “God is also said to be a simple substance but it is the only one which is necessary and without a body attached. Creation is a permanent state, thus [monads] are generated, so to speak, by continual fulgurations of the Divinity. Any perfection comes from being created while imperfection is a limitation of nature”<sup>27</sup>.

The monad is inherent to each element of the universe particularly ordered in the form of the monad hierarchy. Both humans and animals have monads, however, if animals have a capability of perception, then humans are capable not only to perceive but also to apperceive, which means reflection capability. It is not possible to know God, but a human is able to know himself. “But knowledge of necessary and ageless truths distinguishes us from simple animals and gives us possession of mind and sciences, raising us up to knowing ourselves in God. And namely this is called reasonable soul or spirit in us”<sup>28</sup>.

The human “I” is exactly one of the monads and it is given a particular meaning in German culture based on Protestantism from which in its turn German individualism originates. In this connection it becomes clear that in his choice between the Austrian catholic idea and the German protestant idea Weininger prefers the latter and actually he confirms it by his conscious converting to Protestantism more than one year before his suicide.

Weininger comes to a conclusion that the denial of the subject (or the I) does not lead

to improvement of the ethical position. On Weininger's opinion a human must see and psychologically recognize his own singularity and that he is entitled to have his own “I”. “Ernst Mach is in great error when he denies the subject, and thinks it is only after renunciation if the individual “I” that an ethical relation, which excludes neglect of the strange “I” and overestimation of the individual “I”, may be expected... The I is the fundamental ground of all social morality. I should never be able to place myself, as an actual psychological being, in an ethical relation to a mere bundle of elements. It is possible to imagine such a relationship; but it is entirely opposed to practical conduct; because it eliminates the psychological condition necessary for making the moral idea an actual reality”<sup>29</sup>.

Wieninger's critique shows to a great extent characteristic of the Austrian philosophical tradition in relation to German personality concept, history and direction of development in general. This tradition is based on religious confrontation of Protestantism and Catholicism which is manifested already not at the level of religious beliefs, but at the level of world views, philosophical discussions and as a certain religious culture determining attitudes and representations. Weininger is unique in the sense that he converts not to Catholicism, but to Protestantism. Weininger by consciously accepting christening according to Lutheran ceremony being Austrian of Jewish origin has symbolically renounced in such a way Austrian idea and become a cosmopolite. As Protestantism supposes a relation to German spirit, German philosophy, thus it connects Weininger with Kant's ideas who established ethical principle of unlimited freedom of mind.

In this case certain social and political situation is also opposed to some extent. At that time the social structure and political relations in Austrian and in Vienna in particular were

far not simple. Having Jewish origin Weininger as a representative of the Vienna intellectual elite did not feel free and first of all he did not feel intellectually free, because there was a bureaucratic censorship and certain limitations. Having chosen Evangelic confession Weininger renounced his official motherland Austria and that culture those social conditions in which he lived.

He chose another confession, but this choice was not so much religious as philosophical. Weininger has chosen in such a way more freedom in philosophy which is without squabbles and public fuss. Weininger embodies in his fate the identity drama and shows brightly that escalated conflict which right originates in Austrian history and philosophical tradition.

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## **«Зал ожидания ощущений»:**

### **критика махистского понятия «Я»**

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*Статья посвящена анализу критики Отто Вейнингером анти-эссенциалистского понятия «Я», данного Эрнстом Махом в его работе «Анализ ощущений». Отмечается, что критика О. Вейнингером махистского понятия «Я» основана на учении немецкого философа Г.В. Лейбница о монадах, а также что она в значительной мере отражает особенность австрийской философской традиции относительно германского концепта личности и истории, которая заключается в религиозном противоборстве протестантизма и католицизма. Уникальность Вейнингера состоит в том, что, приняв протестантизм, он таким образом отказался от австрийской идеи и сделал выбор в пользу немецкой философии, объединившей его с идеями Канта, который утвердил этический принцип предельной свободы разума.*

*Ключевые слова: австрийская философия, понятие «Я», комплекс ощущений, элементы, монада, гений, гениальность, этический принцип.*

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