

*Schopenhauer's pessimism:
The trial of existence*

*El pesimismo de Schopenhauer:
la prueba de la existencia*

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ABSTRACT

I attempt to present a more holistic and more detailed account of Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophical premises and their implications. The discussion begins with Schopenhauer's claim that the world is representation and with the discovering of the Will. It continues by examining the implications of the Will, which leads to the argument against existence itself.

KEYWORDS

METAPHYSICS, THE WILL, SUFFERING, JUSTIFICATION, PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

RESUMEN

Intento presentar una descripción más holística y detallada de las premisas filosóficas pesimistas de Schopenhauer y sus implicaciones. La discusión comienza con la afirmación de Schopenhauer de que el mundo es representación y con el descubrimiento de la voluntad. Continúa examinando las implicaciones de la voluntad, las cuales conducen al argumento contra la existencia misma.

PALABRAS CLAVE

METAFÍSICA, LA VOLUNTAD, SUFRIMIENTO, JUSTIFICACIÓN, FILOSOFÍA DE VIDA

INTRODUCTION

THE ANALYSIS IS DIVIDED into three parts. The first takes an epistemological approach to Schopenhauer's argument as to how knowledge is acquired and the limitations and obstacles to that process. The second takes a metaphysical approach by examining Schopenhauer's elucidation of the Will and his argument that the Will is a thing in itself and the essence of the world. The third and final part examines Schopenhauer's pessimism of which there are four types: metaphysical; epistemological; moral, political and historical; and finally eudemonological. All four lead to the all-encompassing pessimism that results from the description of the Will and its rule over the individual and the world. Finally, I discuss the implications of the aforementioned pessimism and how to contend with it according to Schopenhauer.

I. EPISTEMOLOGY

Schopenhauer's philosophy starts where Kant's ends. In other words, Schopenhauer posits that through our experience (or at least not our «regular» experience) we cannot know a thing itself – all we can know is phenomena. Thus, Schopenhauer accepts the distinction that Kant makes between a phenomenon and the thing itself. He also accepts and even admires Kant's transcendental aesthetics which declares that time and space are *a priori* senses of the human mind and that the thing itself is free from them.¹ This starting point is important in understanding Schopenhauer's method of finding the thing itself. For Schopenhauer, the main obstacle to knowing the thing itself is the principle of sufficient reason, which rules all our forms of thinking and actions and as a result of which he differentiates completely between Understanding and Reason.²

Understanding is nothing but intuitive perception in the form of cause and effect, i.e. causality. Schopenhauer adds causality as a third sense to the other two *a priori* ones of time and space. But he goes even further by making the first two subject to the third (where time and space constitute one of the four forms of the principle of sufficient reason).

With the understanding that the principle of sufficient reason rules our experience and thinking, and therefore the entire condition of our cognition, we can put into perspective the bold statement that opens Schopenhauer's magnum opus, «The World as Will and Representation», which states that our world is for us like subjects since we are the ones experiencing it, and

1 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 1), p. 437.

2 Schopenhauer, 1974, p. 79., pp. 147-151. Also, Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 1), p. 431.

therefore the world and everything in it is representation.³ It is worthwhile elaborating on this statement and then constructing the argument that everything is representation. For the world to *be* in the first place, it has to be *known*. Knowing means first to be *perceived* (which means to be someone's representation, as we will see below). The subject is the one who perceives, and he or she perceives only through the functioning of the understanding (with the senses supplying the data). Understanding has only one mode, i.e. that of cause and effect, which gives objectivity to the world and everything in it. This mode is one of the forms of the principle of sufficient reason which governs our cognition. Therefore, the subject is the conditioning of the world and he or she is what gives it objectivity. Thus, if the principle of sufficient reason is the condition for perception and it is an *a priori* function of the subject (with regard to perception as the form of causality) that gives objectivity to the world—and in simple terms gives it existence—then for the subject the world is only representation and therefore the subject is the condition of the world. In what follows, I summarize this idea and delve further into the argumentation, with the goal of reinforcing Schopenhauer's statement.

It is important to clarify the argument presented above because it is the starting point. What does it mean to say that existence depends on knowing, or in other words perceiving, a question that Schopenhauer himself acknowledged?⁴ At first glance, it appears to be a statement that can easily be disproved since something has to be perceived before it can be known. However, the «precedence» of knowing over being is logical—odd as that may sound—since from the moment we perceive something or make a judgment or ascribe something to an object, we are already conscious of it, which is equivalent to knowing it to some degree. Something doesn't have meaning or relevance if there is no one (a Subject) that perceives (knows) it. It is not a physical dependency; rather it is what makes it possible to «speak» about the thing and therefore to give it meaning or relevance. This goes beyond even the famous sentence from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: «Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent».⁵ It is not that we think of or wonder about something but cannot really know or perceive it; rather in this case we can't speak or wonder about it because we didn't think about it in the first place. We cannot speak about it because there is no one to point at it,⁶ which means that there is no one who can know it. Therefore, it is not that there is a thing that is

3 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 1), p. 3.

4 *Ibid*, p. 30.

5 Wittgenstein, 2002, p. 89.

6 Dale Jaquette compares it to the process of the creation of the universe, from the Big Bang until the first eye saw it; but he is still thinking that the problem of the primacy of existence is not solved by Schopenhauer's argument. See Jaquette, 2005, pp. 36-37.

not intelligible and that we can't keep wondering about and therefore we must be silent, but rather without the knower nothing is intelligible and no more than that. There is not even something to wonder about. Schopenhauer goes even further by claiming that the world itself (namely, the world of phenomena) does not in fact exist. «And yet the existence of this whole world remains for ever dependent on that first eye that opened, were it even that of an insect.»⁷

We can't imagine a world without a knower or a subject because if we could then we would realize that we are the ones imagining it.⁸ We can't imagine a world without a subject, despite claims by people like Julian Young that we can.⁹ It could also be argued that this is still not ontologically so;¹⁰ however, as we saw above there is at least a logical precedent for doing so.

Since the object depends on the subject, so the subject depends on the object. A subject is always derived from an object and vice versa. The two concepts always exist in relation to each other.¹¹ The knower can't be a knower without something that is known, and the known can't be known without someone knowing it. Each depends on the other. We can see that even though space, time and causality are *a priori* senses of the subject, they actually are what is behind the assertion that a subject cannot exist without an object, which can be demonstrated as follows:

To say that there is a knower (i.e. a subject) is to say that there is consciousness and to say that there is consciousness is to say that there is knowledge of something; whereas to say that there is a knower without consciousness is meaningless. Consciousness is possible only within the context of space, time and causality. Therefore, if space, time, and causality are *a priori* conditions for the consciousness of the subject, then they are the same thing as the subject. Furthermore, space consists of relations between locations, time consists of consecutive units and causality is a state in relation to another; and when the three exist or «occur», there will necessarily be something (an object), in some location, in some unit of time and in some state (thought, imagination, physical memory, etc.); otherwise, there is no possibility of consciousness. When consciousness has an object, there is a mind, which is the constitution of a subject. Therefore, if to know (i.e., to be a subject) is to have a mind, and if the *a priori* conditions of consciousness are space, time and causality, and if the conditions of consciousness necessitate that there be something in a location, time and state, and in the case that there

7 Schopenhauer 1966 (Vol 1), p. 30.

8 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), p. 5.

9 Young, 2005, pp. 26-27.

10 Vandenabeele, 2011, pp. 40-41

11 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 1), pp. 5-6. Also, Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), pp. 3-17.

is such a thing it becomes an object for the consciousness and only the object of consciousness can be its content – then without an object there is no subject.

The relations between the two are «pre-cognition» or «pre conceptual», that is, they are the platform that enables cognition and the relation of knower and known to begin with. Therefore, there is de facto no real differentiation between the two as objects of knowledge (as some would claim¹²) because one entails the other and vice versa; without one there would not be the other and we wouldn't be able to understand it.

The «punchline» of Schopenhauer's account of the relations between subject and object is twofold: First, it implies that because the relations between subject and object are prior to our cognition, they are also prior to the principle of sufficient reason. These relations are the platform that enables the principle of sufficient reason to be viewed first of all as causality. Therefore, since causality is an *a priori* condition of our cognition (through the functioning of the Understanding), and is the form of our cognition, the only kind of relations that the world of objects can have are those of causality and the other three forms of the principle of sufficient reason. Second, if there is no subject without an object and the relations between subject and object are prior to our cognition and the principle of sufficient reason, and the principle of sufficient reason is an *a priori* condition or function of our cognition, then the subject can never know itself as subject. This is because he himself or she herself is the generator of the only inquiry tool, since he is prior to the principle of sufficient reason and he is what gives reality its objectivity. Thus, the knower cannot know himself or herself.

Moreover, there are moral implications as well. The intellect is constituted from subject-object relations only, and they are based a priori on the principle of sufficient reason. In this case, In this case, it would be *petitio principii* to employ Intellect - which belongs to the subject only such that its faculties are subjective as the foundation for morality. We conclude that there cannot be any independent foundation outside the subject-object relations. To arrive at an objective foundation for morality that is not based on the ego, i.e., the interest of the subject, would be to undermine the Kantian notion of the possibility of the intellect. It would also undermine the Kantian concept of «the other», i.e. the other subject as an end in itself, because the intellect can perceive the other only as an object. Finally, the intellect is only an organizing tool; it does not

12 Gardiner, 1997 p. 84. Gardiner also claims that Schopenhauer's account of these relations adds nothing new. Ibid, p. 82. I claim that this is not relevant because Schopenhauer is not claiming to add new information here, but rather he wants to «set the record straight, i.e., to establish a foundation that will be the starting point of the new information that will come later. Secondly, he also wants to point out the mistakes of previous philosophies and methods, which started from either the subject or the object.»

provide a foundation for anything (such as morality), nor is it an end in itself (namely, free from the ego).

In conclusion, As I see it, the transcendental idealism version of Schopenhauer is to idealism and materialism what Kant's transcendental aesthetics is to empiricism and rationalism.

II. THE ESSENCE OF THE WORLD

The key to understanding the world is our own experience. We discover the world of objects first of all by perceiving our body as an object (a representation), and identifying ourselves as subjects. However, at the same time we can «look» inward and can «see» what moves our body and what is expressed by its movements. What we see is a will according to which the body acts and which has been evoked by a range of motives. At the same time, we are subjects of willing and subjects of knowing – willing when we are willing something and knowing when our body acts under causality and therefore as an object.¹³ In other words, our body is the objectification of our will. We apprehend the will immediately, without a delay, which is the dimension of *time* in its weakest form. Furthermore, the body which receives impressions from the outside either reacts or acts according to whether the response is repulsion or attraction, respectively. Thus, the Will is the least immediate thing we are able to comprehend.¹⁴ Since the will is free from the dimension of space and from causality, it is not a representation and therefore not an object to begin with. It is only the acknowledgment and the investigation of its process that spreads over time; in other words, the will is indicated by the movement of the body and by the body itself, while the apprehension of the will is immediate.¹⁵ Therefore, the will is not our object in the way that we are the subject, but rather the subject apprehends himself as a subject of willing (and obviously not as an object of willing). We don't need to differentiate here between «regular» time that has past, present and future and the «Eternal Present»;¹⁶ rather it is sufficient and also more appropriate to use Henri Bergson's concept of «Pure Duration» which we experience when we act, rather than perceiving it reflectively. When we reflect on our action or are conscious of it we are introducing succession and causality which

13 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 1), pp. 99-102.

14 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), p. 35., p. 197.

15 As a response to Hamlyn's criticism that if the acknowledgment of the will starts with the movement of the body, then the apprehension of the will is not immediate. Hamlyn, 1980, pp. 83-84.

16 As Robert Wicks does. It seems to me unnecessary and too strong of a claim because it has an ontological implication. Wicks, 2008, pp. 73-76.

complicate our perception of time.¹⁷ In our context, «Pure Duration» is the same immediate apprehension of our will. However, when we try to point to it or talk about it we have no choice but to do so using the concept of succession, which implies causality. It is also worth considering George Berkeley's insight that we need to apprehend things as they are and not to complicate them with conceptual abstraction.¹⁸

We find our essence by revealing our will. Our actions express our will and therefore the will is prior to knowledge of the body. In other words, our body is an objectification of the will and its actions are the expression of the will. This is because we must assume that will is expressed concretely rather than just floating around unexpressed; otherwise, it would not be will and would be meaningless. Even the unwanted or purely stimulated movements of the body (which have no motive) are still the expression of the will, a claim made by Schopenhauer that may sound odd or even absurd to some. Nonetheless, I claim that it indeed makes sense because the *whole* body is the objectification of the will. The will is pure willing though it is right to ask what it wants; however, by going back through the chain of motives we finally get to the pure willing, that which causes something to be willed in the first place. Schopenhauer «asks» the prior question of why we will in the first place.

The above discussion brings us to the argument regarding the rest of the objects and the rest of the world and at the same time to the thing itself, which in my opinion is a single argument composed of two stages, rather than two separate arguments. The first stage is that, after finding our essence, we can recall that we, as human beings, are unique creatures, in that we are a subject and also an object like any other.¹⁹ Therefore, there is no justification in asserting that objects have an essence that differs from our own; on the contrary, the subject and the object have the same essence. We are the only objects that can also look inward, in order to know ourselves and our essence from within and that understanding brings us to the «argument of expansion». Thus, it is not that we are A and objects are B, but rather that we are A and B at the same time. This relationship is for Schopenhauer between the ideal and the real—which is apprehension of the inner will—rather than between existence and the concept or the abstract, because existence is already a given.²⁰ If that is the case, we cannot just claim to find our essence and therefore be sure that we are real (as the objectification of something). We cannot just claim that we are real and that the rest of the objects in the world are an illusion simply

17 Bergson, 2001, pp. 217-218.

18 Berkeley, 1996, pp. 66-67.

19 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 1), pp. 103-104.

20 Schopenhauer 1966 (Vol 2), p. 192.

because we cannot know them from within. We can only know an object from without, as a representation, and therefore the object is always subjective for us rather than real, i.e., it is only a creation of the subject's mind. For Schopenhauer, to say that only we are real and the rest is not is pure egoism, or «theoretical egoism» as he calls it (today we would call it «solipsism»), a premise that belongs in a madhouse.²¹ Schopenhauer comments on this as follows: «Therefore we, who for this very reason are endeavoring to extend the limits of our knowledge through philosophy, shall regard this sceptical argument of theoretical egoism, which here confronts us, as a small frontier fortress. Admittedly the fortress is impregnable, but the garrison can never sally forth from it, and therefore we can pass it by and leave it in our rear without danger.»²² This denial of the premise of «theoretical egoism» and the necessity of expansion (which is different from the argument of expansion itself) form the link between the two stages of Schopenhauer's argument.

The second stage of the argument (the first was the expansion and overcoming of solipsism) is the analogy argumentation. We are a subject of willing, a pure willing that is our essence; on the other hand, we are a representation because our body is an object to us (as we have seen, the action of the body and of the will are one and the same and hence the body is the objectification of the will). By that duality, we know that we are real and also that we can infer that duality for the rest of the objects in the world. In other words, they are objects but their essence is will.²³ Therefore, if we cannot add to the realness of ourselves any more than representation and will, then the realness of the world (and what within it) is provided by what gives us realness, i.e. the will. «If, therefore, the material world is to be something more than our mere representation, we must say that, besides being the representation, and hence in itself and of its inmost nature, it is what we find immediately in ourselves as will.»²⁴ The point here is that it is absurd to assume only one's own existence and that the rest is an illusion. I am also being perceived and represented by others; does that mean that I am an illusion because they are assuming their own realness, but no else's? Obviously not. Therefore, I can assume my essence just as I can assume theirs because I am a subject like all others. Furthermore, I am an object to the rest of the subjects just like all the rest of the objects in the world, but I am still aware of my realness as an object (to them). Therefore, this realness also belongs to the rest of the objects in the world. Finally, if we are subjects and thus different from all the objects, and at

21 Schopenhauer A., 1966 (Vol 1), p. 104.

22 Ibid. / Schopenhauer, 2019, location: 1935-1947.

23 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 1), p. 105., p. 109.

24 Ibid, p. 105. / Schopenhauer, 2019, location: 1959.

the same time we are objects like all the other objects, then we can say that we are the microcosmos of the cosmos itself.

Some might claim that Schopenhauer did a disservice to his argument by calling it an analogy.²⁵ This is because an analogy is something that attributes predicates of something (humans in our case) to other phenomena (objects) while the argument of theoretical egoism is strong enough on its own. In my opinion, using the term «analogy» is not a genuine problem, since the analogy in this case is not about predicates, but about essence, and essence cannot be a predicate. By definition, there is no plurality of essences, because an essence is something that is shared by all; it is one and only one.

The will is the «condition» prior to the world of phenomena and all that is in it. It is important to mention here that the relation between the thing itself, i.e., the will, and the world of phenomena is not one of causality (because the thing itself is free from causality, space and time), but rather of objectification of the one by the other, just like our body is the objectification of our will. In other words, the world is the embodiment of the will, or its expression as we like to call it. This is because the world is activity. It is worth noting that matter is something that carries changes of states, which is cause and effect, i.e., activity, the world is made of matter, therefore the world itself is activity, and activity is the expression of a will and therefore the world is the objectification of that will. A claim of a metaphysical dualism can be made at this point. Thus, the Will and the intellect have equal primacy, or at the very least the Will doesn't have a primacy over the intellect. This is because the Will cannot manifest itself without the faculties of the intellect, i.e. space, time and causality.²⁶ A two-part response can be provided: The primacy of the Will is ontological, but that of the intellect, i.e. the subject, is logical or epistemological. This is because the phenomenon of the Will is perceived only if there is space, time and causality, namely a representation. But from where do these faculties of the subject come from? If they are from the start part of the Will, can the Will be blind (as Schopenhauer indeed claims later on)? Here we can employ Freud's concept of the «id» to illustrate. If we view the id as a blind and unconscious force, then we can understand it as something that can contain the conscious and can be presented as such. Even if it is then argued that the content of the id comes from the outside, by way of the conscious mind, we can respond that the id has to be there first for the content to be received.

Schopenhauer emphasizes that his metaphysical claim only concerns the

25 As Robert Wicks claims. Wicks, 2008, p. 55. John Atwell claims that the two components of the analogy are not identical and therefore the analogy is inappropriate. Atwell, 1995, p. 89.

26 A claim made by Lauxterman. Lauxterman, 2000, p. 199.

Will in relation to the world of phenomena.²⁷ Furthermore, in one of his letters he writes that he never referred to the Will as being detached from the world of phenomena.²⁸ The Will alone is something that the subject cannot speak of or have knowledge about. In short, the Will itself is independent of the subject.

Everything is an embodiment of the will according to the grades of objectification.²⁹ The lowest grade is comprised of the forces of nature, such as electricity, magnetism, gravity, rigidity, chemistry and so on. They are the first embodiment in the world of phenomena and are the platform for the object's activity. These forces are «timeless» in that they themselves do not change, but through them the objects are able to change. Furthermore, they are the «end of the line» for the principle of sufficient reason (i.e. science), beyond which it cannot go; they are «qualitas occulta». The next grade is the inorganic, where the body (matter) persists, but its form changes. It does not have consciousness or senses. It is followed by the organic, the first form of which is vegetation. Plants only respond to stimulation from elements such as water, sunlight, heat and so on. The next grade up is the animal world. Animals have senses and the faculty of Understanding, and therefore in this category the will acts not only as a result of stimulus but also as a result of motive, since they have representations. The last and most complex grade is the human being. A human being acts as a result of stimulation and has the faculty of Understanding and so acts as a result of motives (representations); however, human beings have something no animal has, namely an intellect, and therefore mental motives as well.

All of these embodiments of the will come to be through some medium, which Schopenhauer claims is the Platonic concept of ideas. The idea is the universal and eternal through which the individual comes to be; it is the form through which matter gets molded. It is the mediator between the thing itself and world of phenomena. Therefore, it is the closest thing or closest stage to the thing itself.³⁰ It is worth noting here that for Schopenhauer only natural things have ideas (contrary to plato's concept of ideas). Ideas are free from space, time and causality. Therefore, they are the immediate embodiment of the will and the lowest form of its objectification.

What does it mean to be the idea of something? It is what the object is in itself, regardless of the interests of the subject and the questions concerning the (causal) relation between the object and its surroundings. These are only questions concerning the object's essential predicates and its form and matter

27 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), p. 183.

28 Atwell, 1995, p. 116.

29 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 1), p. 105., p. 159., See also pp. 212-255.

30 Schopenhauer 1966 (Vol 1), pp. 174-176.

and its development; not as an individual, but as one of many individuals which share the essential characteristics that ascribe all of the individuals to the same unique species, i.e., an idea by which all of them have been formed.³¹ For example, the tree as a tree in itself and not a particular tree in a particular space, time and chain of causality that brought it into being.

At this point, it would appear that we can celebrate the discovery of our essence and that of the world and its structure. From within ourselves, we provide reality to the world. The ability to find the thing in itself that holds and provides the reality of our existence seems to be like a gift. But we must be cautious here. When we ask what is the will and what are its implications, this gift—which we discovered in Schopenhauer's fortress—is also the destroyer of all the aspects of our existence and will bring the fortress down upon itself.

III. THE WILL AS THE PROBLEM

When we try to investigate the Will and its implications, we often find that it would have been better not to do so in the first place since all we find are its implications. This section will examine what can be said about the will, and how that leads to Schopenhauer's pessimistic conclusions about life, which spill over from the purely philosophical sphere. It will describe the characteristics and implications of the Will and its overwhelming effect on all three planes of our existence: our own, that of the people with whom we share the world and that of the objects surrounding us.

The overwhelming effect of the Will and Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy are the result of the following arguments and insights. These arguments and insights can be classified according to four types of pessimism: Metaphysical; epistemological; moral, political and historical; and eudemonological.

III.1. METAPHYSICAL PESSIMISM

Blindness – The Will itself is blind. It has no consciousness or logos or anything of that kind.³² It is only a pure urging; it wills because it wills and not because of the thing that it wills. Furthermore, because we are the objectification of the Will and the Will is blind, then we as individuals have no worth in relation to the whole, i.e., the Will, and moreover, we exist to serve the Will. As individuals, we are born and we die – something that is characteristic of phenomena but not of an essence. We are just a passing thing and have no relevance to the Will, which is eternal and blind. Furthermore, nature—which

31 Ibid, p. 129. See also, Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), pp. 365-366.

32 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), p. 643.

is the objectification of the Will—doesn't «care» about the individual; all it is concerned about is the species and not any particular individual that is a part of it. Nature is just the perishing and renewal of individuals (through ideas), which ensures that the species continues to exist and prosper,³³ and the only connection between the old and the new is the Will. What we can say is that it perhaps provides an understanding of the world, but no meaning whatsoever. Another implication is that we are the only creatures that possess the concept of the past and the future, while existence is simply in the present. Reality is only in this moment but no other and therefore the Will (through nature) only «cares» about the present, since it cares only about the species and its renewal. It is a continuous present, and therefore everything is repeating itself because the individual is the reproduction of the same eternal ideas. The fact that we live only in the present and are final creatures means that we are constantly dying, since the past has no reality and the future is unknown and does not yet have reality. Our lives are simply the constant warding off of death which will eventually arrive.³⁴

Our life is suffering – The experience of our existence can be summed up in one word: «suffering».³⁵ This is because of its own essence and that of the world, for willing is first a lack in itself—regardless of whether something is lacking—and lacking is a need and a need is suffering. The Will as essence is eternal and so it is always suffering (to one degree or another).

The Will has no final end – As pure willing, the Will is always striving for something, no matter what it is; otherwise, it would not be a will in the first place. It may have goals, but no telos, no final end.³⁶ Thus, as pure willing and nothing else, it can never be truly satisfied because that would contradict its «nature». It is just an endless striving (which some claim is the true cause for Schopenhauer's pessimism³⁷). If someone would claim that striving to live is the telos,³⁸ Schopenhauer would respond that conceptually something can't be an end in itself and that an end is always something external towards which something moves; otherwise it would be a meaningless concept. It is always a relation between two different things. To say otherwise is absurd; it is like saying that something is striving towards itself. In contrast to Kant's argument in «the Critique of Judgment», Schopenhauer maintains that teleology can be asserted in the world of phenomena in the form of goals or ends, though not

33 Ibid, pp. 483-503

34 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 1), p. 311.

35 Ibid, p. 310.

36 Ibid, pp. 163-165. See also, Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), p. 332.

37 Jacquette, 2005, p. 115. Also: Jordan, 2009, p. 191.

38 As Berger suggests. Berger, 2004, p. 31.

final ones.³⁹ Thus, we cannot project our intellect's complexity on the world itself, i.e. the thing which itself is the Will. It is our intellect that necessitates a final end, but nature is not characterized by an intellect or reflection.⁴⁰ But this has a dismaying implication: if, as we saw earlier, willing is always a state of need and is therefore suffering, and for that need to be filled it must be satisfied, and if an end is always something external to it, then the Will itself has no final end or final satisfaction. There is only a vicious cycle of lack and brief satisfaction that never ceases and therefore it is just suffering.

The world is struggle and has no meaning – If everything is an embodiment of the Will which is its essence, then each phenomenon wills other phenomena, such as the relations between sunlight and vegetation, between water and animals and so forth. The relations between all phenomena involve endless activity and therefore continual renewal, where renewal implies struggle between one thing and another that feeds it, such as between life and death, between the forces of nature, between old and new and so on. Everything is composed of contrasts and opposition, even if we strip everything down to its core, i.e., down to matter itself which is composed of attraction and repulsion. If struggle and opposition constitute the world of phenomena and its objects and allow them to be and exist as phenomena, then there is no final end to it. There can be no final «settlement» between the phenomena and there can be no «farewell to arms». This perpetual struggle is a fundamental condition of being, rather than achieving an end, and it is not even a tool for the renewal of nature. It is a cycle—an infinite one—and therefore cannot have an end. The world does not allow us to think of it as a medium nor as a final end. It is not a medium because time is infinite and therefore has no ending; neither is it an end because it is only suffering (namely, infinite struggle), and therefore it is better that it would never have existed in the first place.⁴¹ A world that is meaningless (in the absence of a final end) and has even the slightest suffering—no matter how much good and enjoyment there is in it—should never have come into existence. Although this claim would appear to go too far,⁴² an attempt can be made to defend it. Even the smallest amount of pain, i.e., some sort of suffering, that has no justification is enough to disqualify a world which allows it to exist. Analogously, if there is a judicial system that sentences even one innocent man or woman to jail, then it is undesirable and there is no point in its existence in the first place. In my opinion, at the core, the extreme pessimism of Schopenhauer's philosophy is based on the

39 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 1), p. 161.

40 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), pp. 327-332.

41 Schopenhauer, 1974 (Vol 2), pp. 15-16.

42 As Janaway claims. Janaway, 1994, p. 116.

pointless and meaningless suffering, and not because the world is bad since it is Will and therefore is suffering. The thing that leads to this pessimism and the conclusion that the world should not have been created in the first place is that the suffering is meaningless. If we could say that if there was an end to it and therefore meaning, we could bear the suffering by justifying it and so have meaning by its coalescence into something. Perhaps it could be argued that, in the spirit of Aristotle, the goal or destination or final cause can be the final end of something. However, this is not the case, since it is actually the motive that is promoted and it is itself the goal or destination, i.e., it is both the motive and the end at the same time. However, there is nothing external, and the end of something has to be external to it; therefore the motive cannot also be an end. This is illustrated by Schopenhauer's theory of the development of an animal and its organs. The organs of an animal must fulfil such functions as eating, drinking and hunting and are developed for those purposes. Thus, for example, the trunk of an elephant was not developed for eating, but rather it was developed consequent to the *motive* to eat, and therefore the motive and the purpose (end) are one and the same. There are only goals; there are no ends. The world does not have any destination; it simply drifts.

No faith, no divinity—Schopenhauer rejects the idea of some transcendental being, both conceptually and based on our experience. He presents a number of arguments for this which can be summarized as follows:

The world is full of sorrow, evil, violence, struggle, disease, the harshness of nature and its scarceness of resources and finally death. These contradict any concept of a God that is good, wise, caring, powerful and perfect.

Schopenhauer also disproves both the cosmological and ontological arguments. He provides seven arguments to disprove the former: it leads to an infinite regression; it is only an induction; causality is only to do with a change of matter and not the matter itself; it is a result of confusion between causality and force; causality is immanent in the world, rather than transcendental; true existence is free from causality; and causality in all its forms of activity applies only to matter.⁴³ He rejects it as simply a game of words and states that the argument defines concepts and logic as the essence of things, which in his opinion they clearly are not. And there is also Kant's argument that existence is not a predicate.

Morality and the eternal soul – With regard to morality, determinism and self-interest empty it of any worth or meaning. The commands and duties of religion are fulfilled out of fear of punishment or the promise of reward and benefit (in this world or the next). Thus, they are fulfilled for egotistical and

43 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), pp. 42-47.

narrow personal motives, which empties them of all worth.⁴⁴ (Schopenhauer, like Kant, argues that intention is the criteria for determining the moral worth of a deed.) The other factor is determinism, for which the argument is simple: For an act to be moral, it must be done out of free will. However, we are the creation of another (in this case, God) and are created with a particular nature or character which determines how we act. Therefore, we have no real free will.⁴⁵ Finally, Schopenhauer employs Hume's argument which is set out in his «Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion».⁴⁶ According to that Hume's argument, just as the order, laws and harmony observed in nature cannot be used to conclude that human beings create things that are characterized by design, harmony and law with the help of their Reason, so in the same way we cannot conclude that the world was created by a being with Reason. The analogy doesn't hold because it is arbitrary to choose reason, which is a human predicate, as something that parallels the structure of the universe, rather than choosing the predicate of some other creature, such as an animal or even a plant.

Schopenhauer also rejects the concept of a soul in general and an eternal soul in particular. First, it is more reasonable to argue that if we are born after an infinite time of nothing, than after our death we are going back to that nothing.⁴⁷ Second, the distinction between body and soul is ludicrous because all phenomena are the embodiment of one thing (assuming we accept that), and so to say that we have a soul is like saying that a stone has one as well. In short, anything that is created cannot be eternal.

This world is the worst of all possible worlds – Schopenhauer vehemently opposes Leibnitz' claim that our world is the best of all possible worlds and claims exactly the opposite, namely that this world is the worst of all possible worlds. He justifies his claim by elucidating the concept of the «possible».⁴⁸ Possibility is not some fiction of our imagination, but rather what has the feasibility to be. A world worse than ours doesn't have this feasibility, because every change for the worse would end it, since that world would consist of constant suffering and annihilation. Schopenhauer is in this case open to the criticism that a world with some differences to ours is indeed possible.⁴⁹ It is not unrealistic to think that Schopenhauer was aware of this obvious criticism. I would suggest that Schopenhauer felt that a small change wouldn't really create a substantially different world. For example, an additional color or one

44 Schopenhauer, 2010, p. 141.

45 Ibid, pp. 70-115.

46 Hume, 2007, pp. 93-94.

47 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), p. 467. See also, Schopenhauer, 1974 (Vol 2), pp. 268-281.

48 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), pp. 582-584.

49 Janaway, 1989, p. 146.

less color would not create a truly different world. A different world would be one with a substantial change, and it would involve constant and unbearable suffering.

III.2. EPISTEMOLOGICAL PESSIMISM

Master and slave – The will is prior to the intellect because the intellect is a product of the brain, so it is not even second tier (Schopenhauer lists twelve reasons to demonstrate how and why that is⁵⁰). In other words, the intellect is only a tool for the will to manage itself in the world. The intellect can speak all it wants, but it has no say.⁵¹

III.3. MORAL, POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL PESSIMISM

We don't design our own lives – The issue here is our freedom of the will, which, in short, Schopenhauer claims we do not have. This is because, as we have seen, what rules all phenomena is the necessity of the principle of sufficient reason in all its forms (including our inner willing which is ruled by motives that are awakened by what is external to us). We also born with an individual character and Schopenhauer embraces Kant's distinction between intelligible character and empirical character, where the latter is simply the manifestation and unwrapping of the former. The character acts as the motherboard in which the different motives are embedded and to which the Will responds and is drawn. Schopenhauer beautifully and powerfully laid this argument out in his most famous essay «On The Freedom of The Will», which he did *without* his metaphysics.⁵² If we examine the issue through the metaphysics of the Will things just «get worse». Since our essence is our willing, we cannot choose to will or not to will and it is the Will that chooses after being awakened by motives and «choosing» the strongest one. Our intellect and our mind have nothing do with it. The intellect is just a servant that serves up a tray of different dishes from which the Will will choose for «us». Thus, the world and reality are a given – they are already designed and decided upon and we simply act according to «someone» else's will and rules. The Will controls and manages us and our lives and we are simply witnesses.

Morality and free will – The nail in the coffin—at least in my view—is the undermining of the foundation of morality and free will. This was touched on above in the context of religion, but the point is worthy of further elucidation. Schopenhauer demolishes morality in his two essays: «*On the Freedom of the Will*» and «*On the Basis of Morals*». I have already shown above why there

50 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), pp. 202-244

51 Ibid, pp. 202-244.

52 Schopenhauer, 2010, pp. 70-115.

is no freedom of the will. As for morality, Schopenhauer attacks and destroys Kant's moral theory in a long and methodical critique appearing in the first of the two essays.⁵³ In a nutshell, he criticizes Kant's theory as being just a play on words and as abstract thinking that has no foundation or support in reality and experience. Moreover, reason and the concepts of the categorical imperative and duty have no ability to control our ego and character, which are expressions of the Will, and are powerless, relative and empty. Indeed, all of Kant's imperatives and concepts are based on the ego and on Judeo-Christian religious concepts and commandments in a «philosophical» wrapping. The ruler of our deeds is the Will, and it is the ego that determines our conduct. We are moved by motives, from both within and without. Good and bad are relative concepts and are determined by their relations to the ego.

Moreover, from the metaphysical point of view, we are all victims and criminals. There is no real difference between the torturer and his victim since we are all Will. Thus, they are both guilty and both of them suffer (to one degree or another). We are guilty and our punishment is suffering, which arises from our mere existence as embodiments of the Will. Guilt and punishment are concepts borrowed by the ontological domain from the moral and judicial domain. There is no punisher, whether human or divine, but rather punishment is an autarkic system of self-lashing that derives from the guilt of its own existence. The crime is the infinite and constant willing, and the punishment is the suffering that results from that willing, which always circles back to needs and desires that can never really be satisfied. In Schopenhauer's words: «In this sense we can say that the world itself is the tribunal of the world. If we could lay all the misery of the world in one pan of the scales, and all its guilt in the other, the pointer would certainly show them to be equilibrium».⁵⁴

III.4. EUDEMONOLOGICAL PESSIMISM

The knowledge and repression of death – Human beings are the only creatures that are aware of their own impending doom, namely the cessation of life. In order not to be anxious about this all the time we repress the thought by thinking of ourselves as part of nature and of the world itself. This anxiety is awakened by the Will, which is first and foremost the Will to live. The essence of this insight is that we live under an illusion by not «noticing» death. This repression may appear to be a blessing since without it we could not go on living. On the other hand, the knowing of death can achieve a good death, since this awareness of death can bring us to fully appreciate every day we are alive. However, most of us are for most of our existence neither here

53 Ibid, pp. 136-163.

54 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 1), p. 352.

nor there. We live as if we will never die and so don't fully appreciate life. The anxiety and the fear of death flood over us and leave us helpless – until they reside and we can go back to repressing them and then later repeat this miserable cycle.⁵⁵

At the top of the suffering scale – Humans possess intellect and therefore greater knowledge than any other animal. The more knowledge a creature has, the more aware it will be of its will, its needs and its consequent desires, and the more motives it will have (such as mental motives like love, affection, curiosity, positive feedback, etc.). Every motive (in the case of the Will) is a desire for something, which means that there is a lack of something (a need), and therefore there is suffering. Even if we are satisfied with the present and wish for some future state, this constitutes a lack, because such a wish (say the wish to stay healthy) is based on the assumption (or essentially the imagining) of its absence.⁵⁶ Therefore, humans beings suffer more than any other creature.

The pendulum of suffering and boredom – We have seen that the will is the desire to fill a need for something (a motive). But what happens when our will is satisfied – after it has attained what it wants? Then we feel boredom and that is also suffering since boredom is a lack of activity, which implies emptiness.

Our essence is will and its activity and therefore we can't bear to be idle or in other words, not «willing». If there was some final satisfaction, i.e., a final end, then there would be no boredom, but there is no such thing, and as a result the world has no intrinsic value.⁵⁷ Therefore, when boredom arrives, it immediately induces more willing and the whole cycle repeats itself. We swing between the pain of lacking something and willing it into boredom and emptiness, and we are never at rest. We are always in a pointless motion from one extreme to the other. Any expectation of a result resembling some final rest as the last thing willed or attained can be described using Einstein's definition of insanity: to keep doing the same thing and expecting a different result.

15. No happiness – just suffering and a lack of suffering – Schopenhauer identifies happiness as satisfaction. When we feel satisfaction, we feel joy or, in other words, happiness, caused either physically or mentally. If so, happiness is, by definition, something negative rather than positive since satisfaction is the filling of a need, and that sensation or feeling can only arise if there was a need to be filled in the first place. Thus, happiness is not just the sensation of

55 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), pp. 281-284, 498-499.

56 In response to Cartwright's criticism that there is a will without a lack, as mentioned in Atwell, 1990, p. 160.

57 Schopenhauer, 1974 (Vol 2), p. 287.

filling a need, but also knowing that the need has been filled.⁵⁸ The movement is not from A to B, that is, from lacking to happiness, but rather it is always back to A, the original state (at least logically, since in our experience we are probably first aware of the need). So, we always start from A and end up back at A. There is no happiness – there is only suffering, and a lack of suffering (when the need is filled). We make no progress, but are trapped in a viscous cycle that we can never stop nor step out of. To make things worse, «happiness» is not a final end either, because something can't be an end in itself, as we have seen.

16. False love – In my opinion, an important component in Schopenhauer's philosophy of life and the pessimism resulting from the metaphysics of the Will is the subject of love and sex.⁵⁹ Schopenhauer rules out any concept of romantic love and sex as a possibly lofty connection between people. Essentially, he argues that the goal of nature is the preservation of species, and that involves the constant renewal of their members. This is accomplished through procreation, and it is sexual attraction and the sex drive—the epitome of the Will to live—which ensure that this happens. Sexual desire is by far the strongest of all desires and human beings are a concrete objectification of that desire (which actually is the Will to live). This undercuts every notion of romantic love and sex as something other than animalistic instinct. Love is actually a game of interests and a cost-benefit analysis, expressed in various ways. That is what love and sex are truly all about in all their aspects – physical attraction (beauty, compensation for our own physical and character flaws and age); the benefit derived from offspring (in the context of marriage, for example); the differences between men and women regarding fidelity and promiscuity, genetics, physical strength and fitness, character and intellect; and so on. All of these are simply ways to serve the Will to live and to ensure the preservation of the species.

CONCLUSION

Schopenhauer declares that existence is the manifestation of the Will and thus is meaningless suffering. By doing so, he sentences existence to be annihilated by its essence (the Will). The endeavor is simply not worthwhile. Pessimism encompasses all aspects of human existence: the metaphysical; the epistemological; the moral, political and historical; and finally the eudemonological. How should we live once we understand the nature of the Will?

58 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 1), p. 320.

59 Schopenhauer, 1966 (Vol 2), pp. 511-551.

Schopenhauer doesn't avoid the imperative to provide an answer. He presents three ways of life (or four according to my interpretation of Schopenhauer's writings) in order to coexist with the Will or to eliminate it. The first is the aesthetic way of life which involves the suspension of the Will through the experiencing of art. It is personified by the artists who give expression to the ideas in the world of phenomena. The second is the moral life, which is driven by compassion and seeking to ease the suffering of others by means of confronting the Will. This way of life is embodied in the noble man. The third is asceticism, which is manifested in the saint who withdraws from life and from the needs of the Will. The fourth is that of the ordinary man who simply wants to live a life with the least suffering, one that is as balanced as possible. These various ways of life are beyond the scope of this paper, but they are nonetheless worth noting as part of the overwhelming pessimism of Schopenhauer that threatens to swallow us whole.

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