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On the Problem of Freedom of Will in
Schopenhauer

Bachelor Thesis

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Statement

I declare that I have created this Thesis by myself. All sources and works cited have been quoted accordingly. This thesis was not used to obtain another degree or title.

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Abstract:

This bachelor's thesis attempts to provide a meaningful discussion regarding the freedom of will in Schopenhauer's philosophy, the possibility thereof and Schopenhauer's treatment of it. In order to achieve this, firstly an overview of Schopenhauer's conception of subjectivity through "willing" is given to act as background for Schopenhauer's justification of his deterministic worldview denying any possibility of a *liberum arbitrium*. However, there are concepts within Schopenhauer's thinking that appear to require a certain amount of agency from the subject such as aspects of the aesthetic contemplation or operations related to renunciations of the will. After describing the apparent contradictions within Schopenhauer's thinking, this thesis will explore any possible reconciliations between them by examining interpretations of the noumenal dimensions of Schopenhauer's works.

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Introduction

The conception of this thesis started many months ago with, what at the time appeared to be, a relatively simple question. Or at least a question for which a conclusive and satisfying answer could be found. There appeared to be an issue of continuity to me in Schopenhauer's thinking easily summarized through this question: How is it possible that I can choose to look into the sun?

This act and what it stood for simply seemed incompatible with how I understood the thinking of Schopenhauer. My problem was this: if I am wholly nothing but a manifestation of the metaphysical will of the world, which includes everything from my body to my mental realm, how can I then choose to actively go against this will, by, for example, looking directly into the sun? People versed in Schopenhauer's philosophy will already see a problem with this question for I cannot choose any of my actions at all. Schopenhauer's worldview is entirely pre-determined seemingly without any place for free will rendering my question moot. The next logical step in my research was to find out what *does* cause my actions then if not me. Studying secondary literature I came upon a paradox in Schopenhauer's thinking. Even though he asserts his deterministic worldview, the way Schopenhauer describes the aesthetic experience and renunciation of will make it seem as if a degree of freedom and agency were necessary to bring those states of being about.

This paradox was the focal point of this thesis as a complete exploration of it required a complete description of Schopenhauer's deterministic worldview, his descriptions of freedom and where they are found, the processes which require a freedom to bring about and whether Schopenhauer's conceptions of freedom provide adequate grounds for those. To establish the theoretical framework of Schopenhauer's worldview, firstly the principle of sufficient reason shall be determined as *a priori* condition of experience. Secondly, through a

discussion of Schopenhauer's prize essay *On the Freedom of Will* the impossibility of a *liberum arbitrium* will be discussed. Finally, Schopenhauer's main work *The World as Will and Representation* will introduce the metaphysical will of the world and its pertinence to the topic. Further into the thesis, I shall describe two readings of Schopenhauer to paint a different picture of Schopenhauer's conception of character which brings a definite room for agency of the subject with it and a second reading which ties the entirety of his determinism into his claim that the world is nothing.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason as *a priori* condition for experience

As the topic of this thesis is a fundamental aspect of the human being the entirety of Schopenhauer's worldview becomes relevant. Therefore, to outline the whole picture of Schopenhauer's thinking, one must start at the beginning with his dissertation *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*. In his dissertation Schopenhauer develops causality through the lens of the principle of sufficient reason as *a priori* condition for any and all human experience. It is the "mechanism" behind the idealistic worldview. Regarding everything in the phenomenal world it is possible to ask the question "why is it so?", and for Schopenhauer, *eventually* after a series of "why?"s, one gets to a point where the only answer left is "it is so because that is how your mind presents it to you." This most basic premise is what constitutes the "roots" of the principle of sufficient reason.

Schopenhauer writes that the entirety of all subject – object relationships can be brought back to the four roots of the principle of sufficient reason, each corresponding to a mental faculty the four of which combined create the sensations and knowledge a subject has of the world they live in. This means that, for example, the intellect applies the Principle of Sufficient Reason of Becoming (the first root of the PSR) to interpret causal chains from sensory input between space-time relations, the forms of object which the intellect is able to understand, to form empirical reality to the mind.¹ However it is the fourth root which is of greatest importance to the topics of this thesis.

Human beings have the capacity to reflect upon themselves and their behaviour. From a purely epistemological viewpoint this implies that somehow the subject, that which cognizes, would need to become an object, something to be cognized by a subject. But the subject cannot be an object as this poses a paradox. Schopenhauer posits a solution to this by asserting that when a subject "objectivates" itself through self-reflection, the subject gains

¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, "Über die Vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde," (Zürich: Diogenes Verlag AG), 45.

insight into its inner realm by perceiving it(self) as a subject of volition.² When a person reflects upon themselves and the contents of their mind all knowledge is given to them as showcase of various degrees of willing. This will be one of the reasons causing Schopenhauer to develop his theory of the metaphysical will of the world but this topic finds its relevant section further down this thesis.

This self-reflecting of course also pertains to the actions of a human being. They are the final objects necessary of explanation regarding grounds of sufficient reason for Schopenhauer's dissertation as they cannot be explained through the other three roots. Schopenhauer designates the causes for human actions as "motives", which to him are the grounds for "acts of will". For any action that myself or another person executes, its cause cannot be found through applications of 'blind' causality which pertains to the other three classes of objects. This is because motives pertain to actions of something that is self-conscious; the motives of a person are the cognizance of direct knowledge qua their actions. "Motivation is causality seen from within."³ What the subject does is that which it wills, this will being the *raison d'etre* of a sufficient motive as willing is the nature of a subject which can be 'caused upon'.

Furthermore, the immediacy of motivations are what separates them from the causes of the other three roots of the principle of sufficient reason. Schopenhauer writes that the fundamental underlying forces behind all other causations that are perceived through the other three roots of the principle of sufficient reason are ultimately unknown to us. We do not have access to an *immediate* understanding regarding things such as physical causality between two lifeless objects. We only know that certain causal chains will occur, i.e. I can perceive and

² Ibid. 158.

³ Ibid. 161.

predict a rock falling onto the face of the earth after I drop it from my hand. But we do not know the inert qualities of the objects to explain why they behave thusly. Schopenhauer was aware of the existence of gravity as a physical force, but why exactly the rock which I drop reacts to the earth by being pulled towards it so; what inner quality does the rock have which makes it react according to what we call gravity? These further underlying mysterious forces remain “*qualitates occulta*”.⁴ However the knowledge from introspection, i.e. objectification of the subject through self-reflection is given to us immediately, allowing us to see the full extent of motivation as causal force as opposed to causality from the other three roots. When acting according to motive, the subject knows entirely what they will do / are doing and what exactly they expect to occur from their actions.

From an epistemological vantage point, the matter of “willing”, or to say what is behind it is sufficiently explained for Schopenhauer. He writes “it is just because the willing subject is immediately given in self-consciousness, that we are unable to further define or describe what willing is; properly speaking, it is the most direct knowledge we have, nay, one whose immediateness must finally throw light upon any other knowledge, as being very mediate.”⁵ Grounds behind the category of “willing” thus remain mysterious for now, yet Schopenhauer does not include it with the other *qualitates occulta* either due to our direct insight behind the nature of the causality as confirming of our willing. It has now been established that human beings understand – in the most fundamental sense of the word; i.e. erkennen – their actions as being the results of animating motives. These motives being the cause for an act of will and willing being the contextual horizon on which self-reflectory thoughts about the persona are projected onto.

⁴ Ibid. 162.

⁵ Ibid. 161

The impossibility of the *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*

In his essay on the freedom of will Schopenhauer discusses the consequences of matters of causality established in the dissertation for human life proper. The dissertation did not go into detail how a phenomenal world governed by strict causality shows itself in actual human life. The topic of debate is the possibility of a *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae* – a true free will for the human being.

Schopenhauer defines freedom as a lack of necessity, and necessary being that “which follows from a given sufficient ground...”⁶ A wholly free willed human then would, per definition, act out acts of willing which spawned somehow out of themselves or, even less conceivable, out of nothing. As Schopenhauer already wrote in his dissertation there are two dimensions to an act of willing; first the motive and second the act proper. In Schopenhauer’s system the motive is that which actually “stands in the mind” as abstract cause; the intentional content of the subject’s mind if you will, whilst the act is then that which physically occurs. Going with these definitions then, the question of the *liberum arbitrium* becomes one of strictness of causality between motive and act. The dissertation already assumes an irrefutable causal connection between the two but this was done from an epistemological and not ethical point of interest and, as was previously stated, Schopenhauer conceits that he could not say with more detail what willing *actually* is. This connection between act and motive therefore needs clarification first.

In his prize essay then, Schopenhauer opens the discussion by positing the following: if the object is there, must it always lead to the same act of willing, or can it lead to no act of willing or an entirely different one at that i.e. could it lead to no or a completely different or

⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, “The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics,” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 35.

even opposed reaction? Or put differently: “is the act of will called forth with necessity by the motive? or, as the motive enters consciousness, does the will rather possess total freedom to will or not to will?”⁷ To clarify – does a *process* of deliberation occur within the faculty of reason (*Vernunft*) that “weighs” a motive / between different motives and then leads to the subject *deciding* whether to act according to one motive or another or to just not act at all? Schopenhauer answers with a clear no stating that:

“The dependence of our doing, i.e. our bodily actions, on our will, which self-consciousness does indeed proclaim, is something quite other than the independence of our acts of will from external circumstances, which would constitute free will, but which self-consciousness can say nothing about because it lies outside its sphere, pertaining to the causal relation of the external world (given to us as consciousness of other things) to our decisions, while self-consciousness can make no judgment on the connection between what lies completely outside its realm and what is within it.”⁸

There are two things to unpack from this quote:

firstly; that it is self-consciousness which “proclaims” that our will is the decisive power over our actions, i.e. that which the subject’s actions depend upon. This is due to the fact that, as stated before, the principle of sufficient reason is the *a priori* condition for all experience.⁹ Let me remind the reader here that Schopenhauer already equated self-consciousness with our will in his dissertation. This posits a first reason for Schopenhauer to answer the previous question with no. How could my self-consciousness affect my will when they are one and the same thing? Schopenhauer proves this from a point of subjective experience by saying that a subject “can will” and when it does the body moves momentarily to do that which is willed.¹⁰ However this also means that there is no causal connection described here but simply the fact that “willing” and the movement of the body occur simultaneously. They are just two dimensions to the same occurrence, therefore Schopenhauer feels comfortable equating self-

⁷ Ibid. 40.

⁸ Ibid. 42.

⁹ Daniel Schubbe and Matthias Koßler, “Schopenhauer Handbuch: Leben – Wirkung – Werk” (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler), 27.

¹⁰ Schopenhauer, “The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics,” 41.

consciousness with will from a point of view of experience and thusly my self-consciousness and willing cannot stand in any causal relationship to one another.

Instead this causal connection is found between what Schopenhauer just broadly called “external circumstances” and the subject’s will. He writes that self-consciousness “can say nothing about” the causal connection between external circumstances and our doing as this lies “outside its sphere”. This also is ultimately just the simpler point that in self-consciousness, regarding a subject’s actions, lies only knowledge between motives and will but as Schopenhauer has just said, between motive and will is not where the animator of a subject’s actions lie. The origin of the subject’s actions for now remains mysterious other than those being “external circumstances”.

Self-consciousness’ inability to gain any knowledge about the causal impact of “external circumstances” onto our actions leaves the possibility of any meaningful “decision making process” in the sand. Schopenhauer explicitly denounces a scenario where such a process were possible as this would result in an awkward middle ground where different motives have an influence on the will to only a certain extent but the subject could somehow decide itself if it shall be ‘influenced enough’ to move through with the action.¹¹ The reason why a human might think otherwise is due to the principle of sufficient reason being the *a priori* condition for any experience whatsoever.¹² Since our self-consciousness, when focusing on the matter of our actions, amounts to us only understanding various degrees of willing it is an understandable mistake to believe that it would be our willing that determines our actions. What Schopenhauer effectively does with these explanations is to deny the term “willing” the dimension of “wishing” which it has in the German language.¹³

¹¹ Ibid. 41.

¹² Schubbe and Koßler, “Schopenhauer Handbuch: Leben – Wirkung – Werk”, 27.

¹³ In German, if you were to, for example, wish for an ice-cream you could say in German „Ich *will* ein Eis“. This is not of great consequence for English speaking readers but I found it to be of enough consequence to want to include this point.

Self-consciousness, i.e. the subject's will then has no ability to cause any bodily actions. Instead, due to the principle of sufficient reason being the *a priori* condition for experience it only appears to us that our will has this ability. Instead our actions are caused by "external circumstances" that are out of our control.

Where do bodily actions arise from then? Everything that happens in nature happens in accordance to the principle of sufficient reason. Physical bodies, plants and animals act and react to one another in accordance to their inert properties which make them what they are. Schopenhauer claims then that humans also simply act in a matter that is dictated by their inert properties. Everything a subject does happened necessarily as a response to some outside circumstance. The action was not pre-meditated but instead happens on account of *qualitates occultaes* and right as the action occurs it is given to our will as knowledge happening due to a, by the intellect understandable, motive. Schopenhauer summarizes the contradiction in thought of free will with the actual determined non-freedom we experience like this: "For his 'I can will this' is in truth hypothetical and carries with it the sub-clause 'if I did not prefer to will that other thing'; but this removes the being-able-to-will."¹⁴

"I can go to the theatre, I can go to the club, I can go home, I can do whatever I wish!" would be like water saying "I can be crashing waves (yes, in the sea!), I can be a jet flying up (yes, in a fountain!), I can be steam and disappear (yes, when boiled!), but the water will only do these things when the outside conditions lead it to do so and then *require* it to do so. The same counts for the person wondering how to spend their evening."¹⁵ The person wondering how to spend their evening will end up doing what they always were going to end up doing at the time the decision occurs. For Schopenhauer then, the subject takes an entirely passive role

¹⁴ Schopenhauer, "The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics," 63.

¹⁵ Ibid. 62.

in their life; the will does things in response to outside circumstances and our cognition is merely picking up these matters of fact.

However, knowing that a human's actions are mere responses to outside circumstances beyond our control does not explain at the rich variety of human behaviours. This thesis will discuss the topic of character in much greater detail in the next chapter but it has to be introduced already now as a missing connective concept between the subject and the external circumstances that drive its actions. The subject's character determines *why* a certain person reacts to external circumstances in a certain way. It is the link between reactions according to pure physical laws and the complex human psyche capable of thinking abstract concepts. But what is crucial in the discussion regarding a free will is the fact that Schopenhauer claims this character to be inborn and therefore not capable of change.¹⁶ The character also explains another trifle regarding the experienced side of motives, which is that motives can lie in thought. It is, of course, possible to think about an action without actually doing it. The previous discussions would have it seem that only an action occurring *has* a motive but motives can also lie in the mind and can be thought about. What is important to remember though is that thinking about different motives still has no bearing on what action will actually be taken as this, in Schopenhauer's worldview, is predetermined by the nature of your character and the external circumstances confronting it.

We can see then that it comes as no surprise that Schopenhauer denies the possibility of a *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*. Schopenhauer defines freedom as "lack of necessity" but as shown already in his dissertation, according to Schopenhauer, everything that happens in the phenomenal world happens due to a sufficient reason and therefore happens necessarily. Human actions occur as responses of a character to external circumstances it is confronted with. Our own will, which is the "shape" of our self-consciousness, has no causal

¹⁶ Ibid. 73.

connection whatsoever towards any of our actions. The motives that stand in the subject's mind are mere abstractions of possible causal chains but also stands completely aside the actual forces and concepts that cause human acts. A *liberum arbitrium* proper is not even conceivable according to Schopenhauer as much as it a non-possibility. The possibility of free will would equal a possibility for "something to come out of nothing" or an "*esistenza* without an *essencia*"¹⁷ – a human existence without inborn character. This is the deterministic background before which Schopenhauer writes his systems of explaining human behaviour and his denial of freedom of human will.

¹⁷ Ibid. 77.

Decisions caused by noumenal Will

Already early through the development of his philosophy Schopenhauer had the idea of a metaphysical will but he would not fully develop this concept until the publication of *The World as Will and Representation*. He identifies the Kantian thing-in-itself with this metaphysical will of the world where everything in the phenomenal world is just a specified presentation thereof. Schopenhauer describes this will as a blind striving to life, being without cause nor telos and therefore beyond any means of perception.¹⁸ This is why Schopenhauer places all knowledge regarding this metaphysical will of the world into a special category which he calls “philosophical truths”.¹⁹ The will of the world objectivates itself in presentations through various levels of complexity, the lowest being simple forces of nature such as gravity and electricity and the most complex being the human animal with its capabilities of abstraction and reflection. Between the noumenal will and phenomenal presentations, as an intermediate step if you will, the will of the world “splits” into platonic ideas; these themselves then being manifested as presentations as a more distinct subsection. The ontological status of these ideas in Schopenhauer’s work is highly debated as it is unclear whether they are part of the noumenal, phenomenal world or make up a third ontological “in-between state”.²⁰ Due to this blind and eternally striving will being the inner essence of everything, the human condition is, according to Schopenhauer also a mere endless cavalcade of wanting something and then, if it is attained, boredom until something new to want is found by the subject. Suffering is not caused by not having something but by the metaphysically conditioned urge of constant wanting.²¹

¹⁸ As all perception is based upon causality understood through the roots of the principle of sufficient reason

¹⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, “The World as Will and Representation,” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Transl.: Janaway), 125.

²⁰ D.W. Hamlyn, “Schopenhauer: The Arguments of the Philosopher,” (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc.), 103-108.

²¹ Schopenhauer, “The World as Will and Representation”, 116.

We can see that Schopenhauer views human actions as wholly pre-determined without a capacity for free will but why specific people act in specific ways has not been made clear yet. With the introduction of Schopenhauer's main work, explanations for *specific* actions of specific humans can be provided which will complete Schopenhauer's account of volition.

Firstly, Schopenhauer differentiates between actions cognized intuitively and those governed by reason *as means of understanding the action*. This does not differentiate *motives understood* by one or the other but pertains to actions that should be managed by the faculty of reason and those where such reasoning would be a hindrance, i.e. actions better done 'instinctively'. For example, singing, dancing, fencing... should be left to be done without much active thinking lest reflecting on it will "make the activity uncertain" whereas an engineer designing a machine or building must make use of knowledge pertaining to the matter *in abstracto* as governed by reason to be able to manipulate the facts to achieve their goal.²²

When reason guides human actions it is referred to as "practical reason". It is in these instances where motives are abstract concepts rather than intuitive sensations.²³ Kant sees in practical reason as origin of all virtue but Schopenhauer does not agree as he does not see the causation of our actions within the faculty of reason which is the important point to take away here. When saying that practical reason "guides" human actions Schopenhauer only refers to the modus in which the actions and their motive are cognized and not that the practical reasoning caused any action. Continued from the discussion about the prize essay, this is the final proof to show that mental content about motives are not actual causes of actions; they may "guide" actions but they have no bearing on those actions being done or not. However, it

²² Ibid. 81

²³ Ibid. 110

is through “praktisches vernünfteln” that non-typical behaviour can be explained such as dangerous stunts or suicides as the faculty of reason has a crucial role in the creation of *in abstracto* knowledge but this shall be discussed later.

To finally unravel the mystery of the reasons behind specific human actions one must examine Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the character. The character is the background behind the individual expression of the individual person, i.e. the reason why not all humans act the same. Animals, for example, have a character that is common to the entire species with only the most intelligent animals such as cats or dogs showing slight character variations but with the character of their species still being the much more prevalent force. Humans also have a species-character but their individual characters are much more nuanced and prevalent and therefore take the foreground as active background determining specific human actions.

As previously stated, the will of the world objectifies itself in increasingly complex presentations, the highest of which being the human animal with its completely individual character. Schopenhauer identifies three dimensions to character, those being the intelligible character, the empirical character and acquired character. The intelligible character is the metaphysical aspect of the character, it is the *idea* of the specific individual human and therefore a *direct* manifestation of the will of the world sharing an ontological status with the other Platonic Ideas within Schopenhauer’s system. Since the intelligible character lies beyond any causal reception through the principle of sufficient reason it is identified as eternal idea without any capacity for change. This is the metaphysical reason behind Schopenhauer’s claim that humans cannot change because their character cannot change.

The way this intelligible character presents itself through human actions is by virtue of the empirical character. The empirical character is the summation of all human actions that the individual actually does. Schopenhauer writes:

“Since the character of any particular person is thoroughly individual and not entirely subsumed under that of the species, it can be seen as a specific Idea corresponding to a distinctive act of the will’s objectivation. This act itself would then be the person’s intelligible character, and the empirical character would be its appearance. The empirical character is utterly and completely determined by the intelligible character, which is groundless will, i.e. will as thing in itself, not subject to the principle of sufficient reason (the form of appearance). Over the course of a lifetime, the empirical character must provide a copy of the intelligible character, and cannot turn out differently from what is required by the essence of the intelligible character. But this determination extends only to what is essential, not to what is inessential in the way the life appears.”²⁴

However, this does not tell the full story as it does not take any subjective (personal) circumstances into account. It is an extreme example but surely the life of a person of specific character would develop differently should they live a rich and full life without many obstacles as opposed to if that same person were to spend the entirety of their life imprisoned. Here variables affecting the objectification of intelligible character come into play, those being knowledge and experience of the subject and “external circumstances”; here specifically meaning everything that happens with any bearing to the subject’s life outside their control.

It is these variables that determine whether somebody with a wicked character lives a life of petty crime or as gruesome dictator.²⁵ Schopenhauer’s concept of acquired character summarises the nuances and showcases the different parts of this causal equation well. Firstly, the acquired character itself does not at all provide a cause for any human acts but is merely a connective concept between human character and the subject’s knowledge as gained through the experience of their life.²⁶ Alex Neill and Sandra Shapshay summarise it excellently:

“imagine a heavy drinker, Bill, who has ruined his personal life by mistreating his family when drunk. In Schopenhauer’s terms, one of Bill’s empirical character traits is that he is “alcoholic”. After hitting rock bottom, Bill joins Alcoholics Anonymous to work its twelve step program. In doing so, he may come to recognise a fact about his empirical character, namely that he is essentially alcoholic. In Schopenhauer’s terms, if he acquires such knowledge, he now has

²⁴ Ibid. 183

²⁵ Ibid. 163

²⁶ Schubbe and Koßler, “Schopenhauer Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung”, 81.

“acquired character”. What this really amounts to, however, is the possibility of a difference in his behavior, on the basis of his acquired “empirical self-knowledge”, despite the fact that his empirical character remains unchanged. Bill no longer believes that he can go to the bar and have “just one little drink”. He realizes that this former belief of his is false and was perhaps all along, self-deceptive, and knows that, as soon as he puts himself in that situation, motives will act on his empirical character with the force of necessity, and he will arrive home drunk. Once he has “acquired empirical self-knowledge”, however, he can refrain from putting himself in situations where he will be tempted to drink. He can consciously avoid bars and parties where alcohol is being served. He still wills the drink, and he wills to be a good father and husband too.”²⁷

Using the example of Bill, we can say that his intelligible character, the specific idea of the specific human that he is, contains within it the potential for his empirical character to manifest itself through Bill being an alcoholic. Him drinking is one of the motives which will act upon him, i.e. act causally, for this reason. At the same time, Bill’s intelligible character contains the want to be a good husband and father. Schopenhauer writes that when faced with multiple motives, each of them weighs upon my own will and the strongest one manifests itself in action.²⁸ It is his experience of misery when the pain he feels from moving against his character by drinking excessively outweighs the pleasure he feels from affirming the potential for alcoholism within his intelligible character that “allows him” to join the twelve step program. There he learns to better categorize his alcoholism as something which stands in the way of his relationship with his family – something which brings him more pleasure – which is the knowledge he needed to result in his empirical character manifesting itself to something more akin to the nuances of his intelligible character. This example shows that knowledge and life-experience can have just as strong an influence on the empirical character as the intelligible character. In the same way that Bill changes his behaviour due to gained knowledge, a misery cheapskate might donate great wealth to the poor should he believe that he will be repaid in multitudes of what he donated. Lastly it should be noted that Schopenhauer differentiates between intuitive and theoretical knowledge regarding its

²⁷ Alex Neill and Sandra Shapshay, “Moral and Aesthetic Freedom in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy,” in *International Yearbook of German Idealism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 249.

²⁸ Schopenhauer, “The World as Will and Representation”, 59-60

influence on character manifestation. When asking why somebody reading Schopenhauer's works does not adapt to the teachings and starts to live a life of asceticism Schopenhauer will claim that knowledge "acquired through reading philosophy books cannot motivate", as opposed to having gained the ability to see past the *principium individuationis* intuitively, as is the case with saints or geniuses.²⁹

Let me summarise Schopenhauer's conception of how human actions can be explained:

Schopenhauer's dissertation establishes the four roots of the principle of sufficient reason as *a priori* condition for all human perception. As dictated by the principle of sufficient reason, everything that happens in the phenomenal world happens necessarily, which includes everything from the changes within the physical realm to the actions of human beings. Due to our separate subjectivities, our abilities of reflection and the objectivation of the subject only being possible as perceiving a subject of volition we believe there to be a causal relationship between a subject's will and its actions. However, due to the phenomenal realm being nothing but an endless chain of events caused by necessity our actions are wholly pre-determined. They happen as *reactions* to external circumstances and specific circumstances must cause a specific response by a specific person at any time which could never have been a different response. A free will – a *liberum arbitrium* is impossible according to Schopenhauer as it would result in the possibility of a human acting in two opposite way as response to whatever circumstances they are confronted with. This would mean that these responses, i.e. these motives, would be spawned *ex nihilo* as they would not follow from the causal chain of the principle of sufficient reason – this being impossible according to Schopenhauer.

Human actions vary from person to person and this is due to each person having their own intelligible character. This intelligible character is the idea of a specific human being and

²⁹ Julian Young, "Schopenhauer," (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 165-166.

therefore lies outside of time and is unchangeable. It is the background because of which all human actions occur. The noumenal intelligible character manifests itself as empirical character in the phenomenal world, the sum of all actions of a human being by necessity resulting in an empirical character by the end of their life which is congruent with the intelligible character. Also crucial are the variables posed to the human life by external circumstances outside of the subject's control, it's knowledge and experience gained throughout the subject's life which results in an understanding of how the empirical character manifests itself closer to the intelligible character. Combining these two aspects, it can be concluded that a subject's actions are caused by necessity in response to external circumstances, this response being a combination of a tendency towards certain acts from the intelligible character combined with the subject's knowledge as to what brings them more happiness. There exists no causality between human will(ing) and human actions, instead the causality is one from things-in-themselves, i.e. the intelligible character as idea manifested from the will of the world to phenomena.

Notions of Freedom as told by Schopenhauer

Despite his staunch deterministic worldview Schopenhauer asserts the possibility for ethical research. The question stands – if everything, including my actions, is just a result of a wholly predetermined endless chain of causes and reactions then how could I possibly be held responsible for any of my actions? *I* had nothing to do with causing them; they are, in a manner of speaking, out of my hands. Schopenhauer claims that the key to a possible ethics lies in a feeling of responsibility for one's own actions. Without doubt this feeling of responsibility stems from the already discussed modes of subjective reflection which also cause the wrong assertion of a subject's will -> subject's actions causality. Extending this thought process through applied "philosophical truths", it results in the subject feeling responsible for its character and then, according to Schopenhauer freedom must also be found where the cognitive condition for freedom arises, meaning the understanding of character.³⁰

Schopenhauer then draws a link between the noumenal nature of the intelligible character and the perceived freedom of it:³¹

*"we have to seek the work of our freedom no longer in our individual actions, as the common view does, but in the whole being and essence (existentia et essentia) of the human being himself, which must be thought of as a free deed that merely presents itself for the faculty of cognition, linked to time, space and causality, in a plurality and diversity of actions – actions which nonetheless, precisely because of the original unity of what presents itself in them, must all bear exactly the same character and so appear as strictly necessitated by the motives by which they are called forth and individually determined on each occasion."*³²

The will of the world exists outside of the *principium individuationis*, outside time and space and outside any causal relationships. In this way, it exists as truly free. The intelligible

³⁰ Schopenhauer, "The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics", 106.

³¹ Schopenhauer uses the specific terms „intelligible“ and „empirical character“ as little as possible in the prize essay to attempt to explain as much of his viewpoints as possible without referring to the metaphysical will of the world.

³² Ibid.108.

character being an idea is not of the phenomenal realm and therefore the freedom of the will of the world also applies to the idea. This combined with the fact that we as subjects are ignorant to our own will but only “become acquainted with it” over time, Schopenhauer asserts a transcendental freedom as a basis for his ethics. “By way of this freedom all deeds of the human being are his own work, however necessarily they issue from the empirical character upon its coincidence with motives... Consequently the will is indeed free, but only in itself and outside of appearance...”³³

In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer identifies two more ways of experiencing freedom for the human being, those being the aesthetic experience and the renunciation of will. It is impossible to ever fully escape from the shackles of the Will of the world but it is possible to enjoy fleeting glimpses of complete inner peace or finding the discipline to effectively renounce the metaphysical Will.

The first escape from endless willing, the aesthetic contemplation is found with the rest of Schopenhauer’s Aesthetic theory in the bulk of the third book of WWRI. Schopenhauer here discusses various art forms in respect to the will of the world, how they relate to the Platonic Ideas. The “quieting” aesthetic experience occurs when the subject perceives something beautiful. According to Schopenhauer then, the subject’s manner of perception becomes *elevated*. He writes:

“[During the aesthetic experience] ...we devote the entire power of our mind to intuition and immerse ourselves in this entirely, letting the whole of consciousness be filled with peaceful contemplation of the natural object that is directly present, a landscape, a tree, a cliff, a building, or whatever it might be, and, according to a suggestive figure of speech, we lose ourselves in this object completely, i.e. we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, the clear mirror of the object, so that it is as if the object existed on its own, without anyone to perceive it, and we can no longer separate the intuited from the intuition as the two have become one, and the whole of consciousness is completely filled and engrossed by a single intuitive image...”³⁴

³³ Ibid. 108.

³⁴ Schopenhauer, “The World as Will and Representation,” 201.

This loss of individuality is the cornerstone behind the aesthetic experience. In a usual state of being the subject experiences objects “in terms of their relation to one another – spatial, temporal, causal. The function of the intellect in experience is to connect representations according to the principle of sufficient reason...”³⁵

Per usual cognition through the principle of sufficient reason, pain and suffering are a given in Schopenhauer’s conception of the human condition due to this endless cycle of willing without possibility for real and lasting satisfaction that humans are trapped in. But the loss of individuation from the aesthetic experience leads to a destruction of the world and the subject *within* it. This state of being allows for the subject to experience a moment of peace from the usual constant barrage of willing and despair. There is no world left to tempt a response of desire towards it and no individual subject to want anything.³⁶ In aesthetic experience, the subject loses itself in the object.

The second possibility for experiencing freedom is the renunciation of the will of the world. Schopenhauer posits that people with the “most beautiful souls” are able to truly see past the *principium individuationis* of the phenomenal world and see it for what it truly is: a manifestation of an all-connecting will of the world.³⁷ In the same breath, realizing this also means seeing through the senselessness of the world and understanding the human condition to be one of constant suffering due to the constant willing. Schopenhauer claims that the people who have truly internalized this knowledge are drawn to live a life of asceticism as means of renouncing the will of the world. This life of denying of will means actively going against all early pleasures and drives, doing only the bare minimum to keep the body alive for the ascetic knows that only through this strict denial can they live in freedom from constant barraging of desiring from the will of the world. Whether such a life of strict rules can be

³⁵ Christopher Janaway, “Self and World in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy,” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 265.

³⁶ Young, “Schopenhauer,” 111-112.

³⁷ Schopenhauer, “The World as Will and Representation,” 408.

really considered free is a different discussion; what counts is that Schopenhauer claims freedom from the influence of the metaphysical will is the goal.

The Means of Escaping the Will of the World

In line with his deterministic worldview, Schopenhauer will argue that these states of freedom cannot be brought about wilfully. However, two papers by Schopenhauer and aesthetics expert Sandra Shapshay demonstrate that certain aspects of Schopenhauer's conceptions of freeing oneself from the will of the world appear to require certain degrees of agency.

*"...the subject of aesthetic experience becomes such by virtue of a deliberate act that breaks the normal, conditioned course of experience: we "do not let abstract thought take possession" of our minds, Schopenhauer says; we "relinquish the ordinary way of considering things". A few lines later, he suggests that "a knowing individual raises himself [...] to the pure subject of knowing" (ibid.); elsewhere, he suggests that in aesthetic contemplation "I disregard" and "set aside" the contemplated object's position in time and space (PP II, p. 417). These remarks suggest that in making the transition from ordinary to aesthetic experience the subject deliberately chooses to break free of the demands of his will and the grip of the principle of sufficient reason; to break free, that is, of what Schopenhauer elsewhere refers to as "the law of causation"."*³⁸

This, of course, goes completely against Schopenhauer's determinism. Hamlyn recognizes a same paradox writing: "That [aesthetic experience], he says (WR II 30, p. 369; WI III, p. 129), is something that involves, as it were, the accident (intellect) mastering and abolishing the substance (will). That very metaphor, however, brings out the paradox that is really there. It is impossible to see why the will should make it possible for anything of the kind to happen. Indeed, why is there intellect and phenomena at all? It is of course true that for Schopenhauer the will is blind, so that no rationale for its activities is to be expected, but that consideration hardly helps us with the paradox."³⁹

³⁸ Neill and Shapshay, "Moral and Aesthetic Freedom in Schopenhauer's Philosophy," 246.

³⁹ Hamlyn, "Schopenhauer: The Arguments of the Philosopher", 110.

The matter gets more entangled considering Schopenhauer's description of perception of the sublime. Shapshay writes that the experience of beauty and the experience of the sublime differ phenomenologically due to the distinct pleasure of exaltation.⁴⁰ During aesthetic experience of beauty, the subject experiences a "loss of self", whereas experiencing the sublime changes the horizon of awareness drastically inviting a "a second-order consciousness of having been liberated from the will and its cares; this second-order consciousness is accompanied by the feeling of "exaltation" [Erhebung] above the will [über den Willen]...".⁴¹ This is possible because experience of the sublime can only occur when perceiving a phenomena that beyond being beautiful also poses a real threat to the human's physical well-being. An example of this would be viewing a violent storm brewing above the sea. It appears to be this "painful" aspect to the experience which changes the perception of beauty as opposed to the sublime.⁴² Shapshay writes that any awareness of a loss of consciousness does not occur in the perception of beauty. However the "second order consciousness" possible when experiencing the sublime alludes to a quasi-awareness of this loss of 'connection' of mind to the will of the world leading to the aforementioned exhalatory state of being. This allows for the necessary condition of the experience of the sublime: a *continuous* and *active* defiance of the mental consciousness of danger towards the viewed object which, from Schopenhauer's explanation, requires a *free* consciousness capable of agency to make such decisions.⁴³ "His characterization of the difference between experience of the beautiful and experience of the sublime does indeed suggest that while the former is something that happens to us, the latter is something that we bring about..."⁴⁴

Regarding renunciation of the will-to-life the authors quote:

⁴⁰ Sandra Shapshay, "Schopenhauer's Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art," in *Philosophy Compass* (January 2012), 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 18.

⁴² *Ibid.* 13.

⁴³ Bryan Magee, "The Philosophy of Schopenhauer," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 164.

⁴⁴ Neill and Shapshay, "Moral and Aesthetic Freedom in Schopenhauer's Metaphysics," 257,

“we must not imagine that, after the denial of the will-to-live has once appeared through knowledge that has become a quieter of the will, such denial no longer wavers or falters. [...] On the contrary, it must always be achieved afresh by constant struggle. For as the body is the will itself [...] as phenomenon in the world as representation, that whole will-to-live exists potentially so long as the body lives, and is always striving to reach actuality and to burn afresh with all its intensity. We therefore find in the lives of saintly persons that peace and bliss we have described, only as the blossom resulting from the constant overcoming of the will; and we see the constant struggle with the will-to-live as the soil from which it shoots up. [...] Therefore we see also those who have once attained to denial of the will, strive with all their might to keep to this path by self-imposed renunciations of every kind, by a penitent and hard way of life, and by looking for what is disagreeable to them; all this in order to suppress the will that is constantly springing up afresh”⁴⁵

Here, claims can be identified by Schopenhauer saying that the constant denying of will to live is a procedural process that necessitates constant “re-denying” and therefore is implied to need “constant willing” which is at odds with Schopenhauer’s determinism. The contradictions that were just outlined all show a “disconnect” between actions done and their origin of their causes. The experience of the sublime or a constant renunciation of the will of the world all appear to require a continuous mental effort, as the mind must view the sublime object in a specific light ignoring the danger it poses for it, or the subject must actively move against motives by renouncing the will of the world. This results in a problem where the two ways through which Schopenhauer asserts a possibility of freedom, a degree of freedom and agency appears necessary to attain those in the first place.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 255

Redemption for the paradoxes of will?

Schopenhauer's determinism is, as was just discussed, at odds with his conceptions of freedom. However, due to the metaphysical grounds behind both his determinism and his conditions for freedom, different interpretations of the metaphysics can result in readings of Schopenhauer that would find this level of agency necessary to solve the aforementioned contradictions. In this next chapter I shall present an interpretation of Schopenhauer's thinking which allows for this agency to be found.

Matthias Koßler wrote the paper *Life is but a Mirror: On the Connection between Ethics, Metaphysics and Character in Schopenhauer* which was written in response to the question "If human actions are no different than natural processes how can they be evaluated morally?". As this question naturally also pertains to matters of freedom, Koßler deals with the same issues of attempting to find cause for allowing degrees of human freedom and agency within Schopenhauer's thought. He does so by showing that metaphysics and ethics are, by necessity, connected as one through the concept of character. This interpretation of character will prove that the intelligible character quasi-immanently contains all possible experiences of the world which allows for finding freedom in the phenomenal manifestation of the empirical character.

Koßler draws a genealogical thread through Schopenhauer's earliest works such as posthumously published notebooks which Schopenhauer wrote during and right after his studies and the first edition of his dissertation to analyse the shift away from a human will -> human action causality to a causality between thing-in-itself -> presentations. He points out that conceptually speaking the law of motivation and the law of becoming ultimately pertain to an exact same kind of causality since reactions happening between physical bodies are causally no different than actions done by a human being. They are both just manifestations of the same metaphysical will. The difference is only that causality understood through the law

of motivation is experienced immediately as proven by Schopenhauer's statement that motivation is causality seen from within.⁴⁶ This opens an interesting interpretation arguing that all causality could be understood just as well through a lens of motivation as through physical causes (*Ursachen*), i.e. the applied principle of becoming. This is not overly far fetched as Schopenhauer himself writes that everything can be seen as characters manifesting themselves.⁴⁷

Quoting from entries of Schopenhauer's early notebooks, Dr. Koßler makes the point that Schopenhauer focused on the doctrine of character as premise when developing his metaphysics, therefore arguing that they are necessarily intertwined.⁴⁸ Summarised his argument is that due to the fact that motives and causes (*Ursachen*) are just two different cognitions of the exact same causality one can also assert that motivation is "no longer dependent upon the self-consciousness of the human being..."⁴⁹. Motivation is the cognitive path for the human understanding of character, the character also being the place where Schopenhauer localizes the "transcendental freedom" and therefore the possibility for an ethics.

And as was just stated; it goes as far as that all phenomena could be viewed as characters manifesting themselves in the world. Because of this Koßler summarizes: "Quite simply, that metaphysics is fundamentally ethical and that the physical order of things is proven to be dependent on the moral one, in that the first is nothing more than the mirror or

⁴⁶ Matthias Koßler, "Life is but a Mirror: On the Connection between Ethics, Metaphysics and Character in Schopenhauer" in *European Journal of Philosophy*: July 2008, 234.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 236

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 236

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 234

the visibility of the latter.”⁵⁰. Since the Schopenhauerian thing-in-itself -> phenomena causality is based on a phenomenon “mirroring” its noumenal essence; and the essences of all phenomena can just as well be viewed as characters manifesting themselves, metaphysics and ethics are by necessity grouped together.

The consequences of this interpretation of character is crucial for the human character. To further develop this interpretation Dr. Koßler quotes a crucial passage from WWR I:

“In order to appear in its proper significance, the Idea of the human being cannot be displayed by itself and torn out of context, but must be accompanied by the sequence of levels downward through all animal structures, through the realm of plants, to the inorganic: only in their complementarity do they lead to complete objectification of the will’, which then finds itself individually ‘in the human being, as a (Platonic) Idea’ and as ‘most distinct and most complete’.”⁵¹

This shows that the human essence, i.e. the human intelligible character, must in itself contain all “less complex” ideas. Furthermore, Dr. Koßler draws attention to Schopenhauer pointing out that when “[he] is precise he does not identify the thing in itself with will but actually with ‘what in ourselves we call will’.”⁵² Due to this ambiguity of essence, coupled with the thought that motivational causality and *Ursachen* causality is one and the same, it could be argued that the human intelligible character contains within it the possibility of perception of all other causal relationships and ideas.

What “in ourselves we call will” has just been established as an amalgamation of *all* levels of manifestations of the will of the world; metaphysically as containing all ideas and epistemologically as containing the possibility of perception of all causal chains possible in the phenomenal world. It therefore cannot be limited to phenomena of the body but instead

⁵⁰ Ibid. 236

⁵¹ Ibid. 237

⁵² Ibid. 237-238

must be “the thing in itself for all phenomena which are unified in the world as presentations.”⁵³ This shows that the experience of character entails the experience of the world.

The character is metaphysically the possibility of all relations between all phenomena as the human essence is the same essence as of all other phenomena. According to Dr. Koßler desire is the sphere in which the world is viewed in necessary relation to the character, that metaphysical crux of the world qua human experience. “the whole of the world is presented to the individual will as desire (Wunsch), from which, however, the singular act of will detaches itself.”⁵⁴ Koßler writes further: “Desire signifies the midpoint between objective cognizance of the essence in itself in the idea and subjective knowledge in immediate self-consciousness.”⁵⁵ Desire is therefore the necessary limit between a possibly endless character and the actual living subject limited now only by its own knowledge and experiences. This establishes the human subject as something still endlessly desiring, as is the unfaultable interpretation of Schopenhauer, but the scope of this desiring is now unmediated. In the more common interpretations of Schopenhauer the character itself would act as the mediator of desire, as each character is individual and every decision made by a subject can simply be ascribed to be a fitting response to it. But since Dr. Koßler establishes the character as an open-ended collection between all possible relations between objects “The sum of all relations is the world as being ‘entirely relative’ in terms of its structure in space and time, yet realized as an unfolding of the essence of the perceived object it has real content.”⁵⁶ desire must be mediated another way.

According to Dr. Koßler this mediation occurs through thoughtful awareness (*Besonnenheit*), a process closely related to the aesthetic experience. As was already

⁵³ Ibid. 238

⁵⁴ Ibid. 239

⁵⁵ Ibid. 240

⁵⁶ Ibid. 239

explained, aesthetic contemplation free's the perceiving intellect from direct servitude to the will of the world and Dr. Koßler identifies thoughtful awareness as the process necessary for this freedom to occur. "Without thoughtful awareness the intellect only perceives singular presentations, which the intellect refers directly to the will, whereas the will itself does not come into view."⁵⁷

He writes that "Owing to thoughtful awareness, several possible motives of the mind are weighed up, therefore considered, [and] the following may occur: that not only the relation of the prevailing motive on the will, but also the relations of the thoughts and presentations to each other are made objects of the mind. With increasing awareness the connection to one's own will diminishes."⁵⁸ This means that through thoughtful awareness a conscious 'middle ground' between 'subconscious'⁵⁹ immediate motive-effect and conscious reflection upon various objects and their relations to one another including the subject itself is created which is possible due to the aesthetic contemplation allowing for the intellect to separate from its servitude to the will of the world. The motives then don't immediately act as causes anymore but are reduced to 'suggestive influences' rather than active animators. As Dr. Koßler writes: "In this sense awareness is very much the cause for the 'Velleitas' not becoming an act of will..."⁶⁰

Decisions then, can also be based upon reflection rather than being pure 'knee-jerk' reactions in accordance to a blind willing. As was explained in chapter five, the subject only becomes acquainted with their own character through living their life. Therefore the subject is ignorant of their intelligible character which allows for a level of freedom *from* character but not at level of freedom *despite* character. In this original interpretation, the character still has 'final say' about the impact of motives. But this ignorance regarding will also explains why

⁵⁷ Ibid. 238

⁵⁸ Ibid. 238

⁵⁹ I am not using this word lightly

⁶⁰ Ibid. 240

no motive cannot possibly ever be the ‘strongest’ possible motive in accordance to a specific intelligible character. Dr. Koßler draws this further saying that the arising of a mental and abstract motive is already dependent upon this active process of thoughtful awareness.

The idea of a human being is still an *individual* idea; even though it contains the sum of possibility of all less complex ideas and all epistemological relations, Dr. Koßler does not deny it the individuality of a person as a final causal ground. He does however say that due to the level of agency provided through thoughtful awareness, the concept of character as final causal ground becomes more of a blank canvas than in the usual interpretation. “Consequently because humans possess the faculty of reason empirical actions can only express the individual definition of character incompletely.”⁶¹

Dr. Koßler’s interpretation of character provides a solution for a missing agency that some of Schopenhauer’s concepts require. The intelligible character is usually interpreted as an idea which has a predetermined content to it; that being predispositions of a human’s actions manifesting themselves in the empirical character. Arguing that the intelligible character instead is an amalgamation of all “less complex” ideas and potential causal connections within the phenomenal world ‘opens up’ the character to all possible experiences and connections of the phenomenal world. Thoughtful awareness is the mental aptitude able to navigate this glimpse of freedom by ‘sorting through’ various motives without and therefore having the possibility to ‘choose’, in a limited way, which motives to let become causes. One could argue then, that the direct role Schopenhauer appears to presuppose in the perception of the sublime or the pursuit of a life of asceticism renouncing the will of the world can be found within this interpretation of character and thoughtful awareness. Motives can be reflected upon until the motive to ignore the danger to the subject when viewing something sublime occurs to the mind. Ultimately, this results in a conception of freedom which is still

⁶¹ Ibid. 241

passive, i.e. decisions are not made *ex nihilo* but the subject has a degree of control about the motives it reflects upon.

Freedom in Nothing

The famous last line from *The World as Will and Representation* reads: “Instead we confess quite freely: for everyone who is still filled with the will, what remains after it is completely abolished is certainly nothing. But conversely, for those in whom the will has turned and negated itself, this world of ours which is so very real with all its suns and galaxies is – nothing.”⁶² There is a long tradition in western philosophy of finding freedom in nothing but Schopenhauer’s work can only with difficulty be counted within this group. Eugene Thacker’s essay “Darklife” discusses Schopenhauer’s “will to life” and establishes Schopenhauer’s thinking as an *affirmative meontology* immanently including both life and the living.

Thacker wrote this essay in opposition to what he calls an “ontology of generosity” visible within the thinking of post-Kantian German idealists. He argues that the philosophies of the absolute of Hegel, Fichte and Schelling as responses to the Kantian noumenon-phenomenon split can all be characterized by firstly, an “overpresence” of life and secondly a split between “life” and “the living” where life is ontologically prior to the living but is also only ever explained through the living.⁶³ The “overpresence” of life being characterised by affirming itself not just in creation and genesis but also in decay and destruction to make space for new and different manifestations of life.⁶⁴

The question for Schopenhauer is: “...how to think “life” such that it is not always determined by overpresence (that is, by generosity, genesis, and givenness)...”⁶⁵ According to

⁶² Schopenhauer: “The World as Will and Representation”, 439

⁶³ Eugene Thacker, “Darklife: Negation, Nothingness and the Will-to-Life in Schopenhauer,” in *Parrhesia* 12, 2011, 16-17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 17-18

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 20

Thacker, the answer Schopenhauer comes up with is thinking life through negation which he does through his conception of the will-to-life. The will-to-life is the answer to a life-in-itself that can also be satisfyingly conceived of without needing to draw from the already-living.

The will-to-life affirms itself through negation which is visible in the cannibalistic nature of, well, nature. Animals eating plants or other animals is manifested will-to-life destroying itself in one instance to generate more life in another instance. Bacteria decomposing a carcass generates new life in decay. It would not be correct to speak of the will-to-life asserting itself through life anymore as, due to its nature, it asserts itself also in destruction. Furthermore, As the will-to-life in-itself lies within the noumenal realm, it has no sufficient reason applying to it. Thacker goes as far as saying “We might even say that Schopenhauer’s concept of the Will-to-Life ultimately points to a principle of insufficient reason at its core.”⁶⁶

Through this line of thought Eugene Thacker reads a beautiful post-humanism into Schopenhauer. “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.”⁶⁷ Applying this thought has grand consequences for the justifications of behaviours that at a first glance stand in opposition to the will of the world. Considering, for example, suicide – Schopenhauer writes that through intense manipulations and *misunderstandings* of knowledge only can suicide be explained.⁶⁸ However, accepting the reading as the essence behind the intelligible character to be cannibalistic, self-destructive and indiscriminate, a *true* possibility for suicide (or any other

⁶⁶ Ibid. 22

⁶⁷ Ibid. 22

⁶⁸ Schopenhauer, “The World as Will and Representation” 112; „*Praktisches Vernünfteln*“ in German – i.e. applications of the faculty of reason to such extremes that happenstances become knowledge to the mind which usually they could not; such as those that lead to the motives of suicide

behaviour seemingly contra the will of the world) can be argued towards the intelligible character. In fact, there would be no more behaviour against the will of the world proper anymore at all. Expanding this to the pleasure and pain humans feel I posit that they are only responses to a subjective will but their presence has no bearing on the grand and overarching will of the world, will-to-life... that each subjective will is just another manifestation of. This denial of generating substance can go even further as the next paragraph will show.

The negative ontology can only result in that already quoted statement which ends Schopenhauer's *Hauptwerk*; namely that the world is nothing. Schopenhauer differentiates between Kant's *nihil privativum* and *nihil negativum*. Only the *nihil privativum* is even conceivable to the human subject and it 'shows' itself in the duality between the noumenal and phenomenal world. All phenomena are ultimately nothing *true*; they are just smoke-and-mirrors standing as substitute for an *actually existing* essence which will remain forever inaccessible. "the world, with all its subject-object relations, as well as its ongoing suffering and boredom, is transitory and ephemeral."⁶⁹ Finally, due to the negating nature of the metaphysical will, Schopenhauer posits the conclusive *nihil negativum*. To this, Eugene Thacker writes: "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."⁷⁰

Returning to the problem of freedom of will, this reading of Schopenhauer does not 'open' the character or finds any more concepts of consciousness through which any agency

⁶⁹ Thacker, "Darklife," 23

⁷⁰ Ibid. 12.

could be interpreted into but instead allows an extrapolation from a truly meaningless will to a truly meaningless human life. Ultimately all human actions become justifiable through the claim that all human characters are, in essence, manifested from a will which simply has no interest in keeping this human alive. It is an uncaring immanence of blind striving impulses, all connected yet also separate, thought to the bitter end.

Conclusion

Schopenhauer's work was without doubt hugely influential for the development of philosophy, psychoanalysis, the works of many artists and many others. The shifting of causality from the subject to its actions to the thing-in-itself mirroring itself in manifestations was a Copernican revolution for the field of moral philosophy and can be interpreted as a very first cautious step towards a development of the unconscious mind. However, purely within the grandeur of Schopenhauer's corpus are a few contradictions that stem from Schopenhauer's purely deterministic worldview. Establishing the principle of sufficient reason as *a priori* condition for all experience and establishing the human intelligible character as *raison d'être* for human actions as responsive background on which external circumstances act upon paints a sound deterministic system.

However as seen in the discussion about the possibility of the aesthetic experience and the renunciation of will, Schopenhauer's language clearly necessitates a level of freedom and agency for the human subject as both these processes require conscious, deliberate and continuous acts. Schopenhauer's own conceptions of freedom do not allow for such subjective agency; moreover, ironically, it is exactly the existential moments which grant experiences of freedom that are those which appear to require freedom and agency beforehand to be brought about.

There are interpretations and readings of Schopenhauer that solve these quandaries by allowing for conceits of freedom within Schopenhauer's system. Aggrandizing the character as conceptual basis for the experience of the world, therefore including *all* possible causal connections and ideas 'less complex' into the human intelligible character allows for a much wider conception of character that in its lessened rigidity leaves room for subjective agency

and freedom. Schopenhauer's concept of thoughtful awareness then acts as mediating force between different motives and thusly has the crucial ability to let "Velleitas not become acts of will." Through this the subject has a certain control over which motives act on it which can explain the active component necessary in the pursuits of Schopenhauerian freedom. The second reading focusing on Schopenhauer's claim that ultimately the world is nothing focuses on the negation inherent to the metaphysical will of the world – a thought which brought to its end results in a metaphysical will completely devoid of *true* meaning, as that which it supposedly affirms; i.e. life, is gladly ruptured and cannibalized by this very same life force only to, somewhere else, spawn more life. Applying this reading on the notion of character and human life, suddenly *all* human actions become justifiable due to the, admittedly not most impressive argument, that they all ultimately are nothing of any substance at all.

Freedom of will in Schopenhauer is an extremely multi-faceted issue as it pertains to everything from moral philosophy and ethics over epistemology to metaphysics. Exactly here is where the problem focused on this thesis upon – the contradiction between staunchly affirming determinism while on the other hand relying on freedom and agency in order to make certain concepts viable – arose from. Drawing connections between the noumenal and phenomenal world always comes down to metaphysical speculation. Exploring those possibilities, sketching them out and applying them to the phenomenal realm can be highly rewarding and not at all without cause was Schopenhauer's work extremely influential. But one cannot substantiate from speculation.

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