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B.A.4TH SEMESTER

G.E :4.1

PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC

The World as Will and Representation: A critical evaluation

Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* is one of the most important philosophical works of the nineteenth century, the basic statement of one important stream of post-Kantian thought. It is without question Schopenhauer's greatest work. Conceived and published before the philosopher was 30 and expanded 25 years later, it is the summation of a lifetime of thought. For 70 years, the only unabridged English translation of this work was the Haldane-Kemp collaboration. In 1958, a new translation by E. F. J. Payne appeared. *The World as Will and Representation* marked the pinnacle of Schopenhauer's philosophical thought; he spent the rest of his life refining, clarifying, and deepening the ideas presented in this work without any fundamental changes. The development of Schopenhauer's ideas took place very early in his career (1814–1818) and culminated in the publication of the first volume of *Will and Representation* in 1819. This first volume consisted of four books—covering his epistemology, ontology, aesthetics and ethics, in order. Much later in his life, in 1844, Schopenhauer published a second edition in two volumes, the first a virtual reprint of the original, and the second a new work consisting of clarifications to and additional reflections on the first. His views had not changed substantially. A third expanded edition was published in 1859, the year prior to Schopenhauer's death. In 1948, an abridged version was edited by Thomas Mann.

Schopenhauer asserted that the work is meant to convey a 'single thought' from various perspectives. He develops his philosophy over four books covering epistemology, ontology, aesthetics, and ethics. Following these books is an appendix

containing Schopenhauer's detailed *Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy*. Taking the transcendental idealism of Immanuel Kant as his starting point, Schopenhauer argues that the world we experience around us—the world of objects in space and time and related in causal ways—exists solely as ‘representation’ (*Vorstellung*) dependent on a cognizing subject, not as a world that can be considered to exist in itself (i.e. independently of how it appears to the subject's mind). Our knowledge of objects is thus knowledge of mere phenomena rather than things-in-themselves. Schopenhauer identifies the thing-in-itself—the inner essence of everything—as *will*: a blind, unconscious, aimless striving devoid of knowledge, outside of space and time, and free of all multiplicity. The world as representation is, therefore, the ‘objectification’ of the will. Aesthetic experiences release a person briefly from his endless servitude to the will, which is the root of suffering. True redemption from life, Schopenhauer asserts, can only result from the total ascetic negation of the ‘will to life.’ Schopenhauer notes fundamental agreements between his philosophy, Platonism, and the philosophy of the ancient Indian Vedas.

Kantian influences and differences

Schopenhauer states at the beginning that his book assumes the reader's prior knowledge of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Moreover, Schopenhauer asserted that his philosophy was the natural continuation of Kant's, and is regarded by some as remaining more faithful to Kant's metaphysical system of transcendental idealism, expounded in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), than any of the other later German Idealists. However, *The World as Will and Representation* contains an appendix entitled “Critique of the Kantian philosophy,” in which Schopenhauer rejects most of Kant's ethics and significant parts of his epistemology and aesthetics.

Schopenhauer saw the human will as our one window to the reality behind the world as representation, i.e. the external world as we experience it through our mental faculties. According to Schopenhauer, the will is the 'inner essence' of the entire world, i.e. the Kantian thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*), and exists independently of the forms of the principle of sufficient reason that govern the world as representation. Schopenhauer believed that while we may be precluded from direct knowledge of the Kantian noumenon, we may gain knowledge about it to a certain extent (unlike Kant, for whom the noumenon was completely unknowable). This is because, according to Schopenhauer, the relationship between the world as

representation and the world as it is 'in itself' can be understood by investigating the relationship between our bodies (material objects, i.e. representations, existing in space and time) and our will. Another important difference between the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Kant is Schopenhauer's rejection of Kant's doctrine of twelve categories of the understanding. Schopenhauer claims that eleven of Kant's categories are superfluous 'blind windows' meant for the purposes of architectonic symmetry. Schopenhauer argues that there are three *a priori* forms by which our minds render our experience of the world intelligible to ourselves: time, space, and causality.

Plato's influence

Schopenhauer also states in his introduction that the reader will be at his best prepared to understand the theories in *The World as Will and Representation* if he has lingered in the school of 'the divine Plato': Schopenhauer frequently acknowledges Plato's influence on the development of his theories and, particularly in the context of aesthetics, speaks of the Platonic forms as existing on an intermediate ontological level between the representation and the Will. The reader will be at an even further advantage if they are already familiar with the ancient Indian philosophy contained within the Upanishads.

In Plato, art is the idea of beauty. Schopenhauer's idealism differs from Plato's idealism. According to Schopenhauer, a table or chair is an object of perception, in this it is a manifestation of the will, which is the ultimate reality. According to Plato, a table or chair expresses the idea of a table or a chair, and it is the idea of the table or chair that is the ultimate reality.

Schopenhauer also explains that art is the direct and adequate objectivity of the will. Art is a way of seeing things independently of the principle of sufficient reason. On the other hand, science is a way of seeing things according to the principle of sufficient reason.

Will of Life

Schopenhauer states in the preface to the first edition that *The World as Will and Representation* aims to "convey a single thought." The resulting structure of the work is therefore, in his words, "organic rather than chainlike," with all of the book's earlier parts presupposing the later parts "almost as much as the later ones presuppose the earlier." Since, as we have said, this whole work is just the unfolding of a single thought, it follows that all its

parts are bound together most intimately; each one does not just stand in a necessary connection to the one before, presupposing only that the reader has remembered it ... although we need to dissect our one and only thought into many discussions for the purpose of communication, this is an artificial form and in no way essential to the thought itself. Presentation and comprehension are both made easier by the separation of four principal perspectives into four Books, connecting what is related and homogeneous with the utmost of care. Schopenhauer used the word *will* as a human's most familiar designation for the concept that can also be signified by other words such as *desire*, *striving*, *wanting*, *effort*, and *urging*. Schopenhauer's philosophy holds that all nature, including man, is the expression of an insatiable *will*. It is through the will, the in-itself of all existence, that humans find all their suffering. Desire for more is what causes this suffering. He argues that only aesthetic pleasure creates momentary escape from the will. Schopenhauer's concept of desire has strong parallels in Buddhist thought. Buddhism identifies the individual's pervasive sense of dissatisfaction as driving craving, roughly similar to what Schopenhauer would call the will to life.

Schopenhauer begins *WWR* by examining the world as it shows itself to us in our minds: objects ordered necessarily by space and time and by cause-and-effect relationships. In our experience, the world is ordered according to the principle of sufficient reason. We perceive a multiplicity of objects related to one another in necessary ways.

In Book II, Schopenhauer argues that *will* is the Kantian thing-in-itself: the single essence underlying all objects and phenomena. Kant believed that space and time were merely the forms of our intuition by which we must perceive the world of phenomena, and these factors were absent from the thing-in-itself. Schopenhauer pointed out that anything outside of time and space could not be differentiated, so the thing-in-itself must be one. All things that exist, including human beings, must be part of this fundamental unity. The manifestation of the single will into the multiplicity of objects we experience is the will's *objectivation*. Plurality exists and has become possible only through time and space, which is why Schopenhauer refers to them as the *principium individuationis*. The will, as thing-in-itself, lies outside of the principle of sufficient reason (in all its forms) and is thus groundless (though each of the will's phenomena is subject to that principle). The will, lying outside the *principium individuationis*, is free from all plurality (though its phenomena, existing in space and time, are innumerable).

In Book III, Schopenhauer explores the experience of aesthetic contemplation. When we contemplate something aesthetically, we have knowledge of the object not as an individual

thing but rather as a universal Platonic Idea (*die Platonische Idee*). The individual is then able to lose himself in the object of aesthetic contemplation and, for a brief moment, escape the cycle of unfulfilled desire as a "pure, will-less subject of knowledge" (*reinen, willenlosen Subjekts der Erkenntniß*). This entails the abandonment of the method of cognition bound to the principle of sufficient reason (the only mode appropriate to the service of the will and science). During the aesthetic experience, we gain momentary relief from the pain that accompanies our striving. Like many other aesthetic theories, Schopenhauer's centers on the concept of genius. Genius, according to Schopenhauer, is possessed by all people in varying degrees and consists of the capacity for aesthetic experience. Those who have a high degree of genius can be taught to communicate these aesthetic experiences to others, and objects that communicate these experiences are works of art.

We consider objects to be beautiful that best facilitate contemplation that is purely objective by a will-less consciousness and express 'elevated' Ideas (such as those of humanity). Schopenhauer compares the experience of something as beautiful to the experience of something as sublime (*das Erhabene*)—in the latter case, we struggle over our natural hostility to the object of contemplation and are elevated above it. We do not have an aesthetic experience occurs when the object *stimulates* our will; hence Schopenhauer criticized depictions of nude women and appetizing food, as these stimulate desire and thus hinder the viewer from becoming "the pure, will-less subject of knowledge."

The rest of the Third Book contains an account of a variety of art forms, including architecture, landscape gardening, landscape painting, animal painting, historical painting, sculpture, the nude, literature (poetry and tragedy), and lastly, music. Music occupies a privileged place in Schopenhauer's aesthetics, as he believed it to have a special relationship to the will. Other artworks objectify the will only indirectly by means of the Ideas (the adequate objectification of the will), and our world is nothing but the appearance of the Ideas in multiplicity resulting from those Ideas entering into the *principium individuationis*. Music, Schopenhauer asserts, passes over the Ideas and is therefore independent of the phenomenal world.

Thus according to Schopenhauer, music is as *immediate* an objectification and copy of the whole *will* as the world itself is, indeed as the Ideas are, the multiplied phenomenon of which constitutes the world of individual things. Therefore music is by no means like the other arts,

namely a copy of the Ideas, but a *copy of the will itself*, the objectivity of which are the Ideas. For this reason the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence.

In Book IV, Schopenhauer returns to considering the world as will. He claims in this book to set forth a purely descriptive account of human ethical behavior, in which he identifies two types of behavior: the affirmation and denial of the 'will to life' (*Wille zum Leben*), which constitutes the essence of every individual.

According to Schopenhauer, the will conflicts with itself through the egoism that every human and animal is endowed with. Compassion arises from a transcendence of this egoism (the penetration of the illusory perception of individuality, so that one can empathise with the suffering of another) and can serve as a clue to the possibility of going beyond desire and the will. Schopenhauer categorically denies the existence of the "freedom of the will" in the conventional sense, and only adumbrates how the will can be affirmed or negated, but is not subject to change, and serves as the root of the chain of causal determinism.

Schopenhauer's praise for asceticism led him to think highly of Buddhism and Vedanta Hinduism, as well as some monastic orders and ascetic practices found in Catholicism. He expressed contempt for Protestantism, Judaism, and Islam, which he saw as optimistic, devoid of metaphysics and cruel to non-human animals. According to Schopenhauer, the deep truth of the matter is that in cases of the over-affirmation of the will—that is, cases where one individual exerts his will not only for its own fulfilment but for the improper domination of others—he is unaware that he is really identical with the person he is harming, so that the Will in fact constantly harms itself, and justice is done in the moment in which the crime is committed, since the same metaphysical individual is both the perpetrator and the victim.

According to Schopenhauer, denial of the will to live is the way to salvation from suffering. Salvation can only result from the recognition that individuality is nothing more than an illusion—the world in itself cannot be divided into individuals—which 'tranquilizes' the will. The human who comprehends this would 'negate' his will and thus be freed from the pains of existence that result from the will's ceaseless striving. "Schopenhauer tells us that when the will is denied, the sage becomes nothing, without actually dying." When willing disappears, both the willer and the world become nothing. The one who has achieved the will-less state, it

is the world of the willer that has been disclosed as 'nothing'. Schopenhauer concludes the Fourth Book with the following statement: "...to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world of ours, with all its Suns and Milky Ways, is—nothing." In a footnote, Schopenhauer associates this 'nothing' with the Prajñāpāramitā of Buddhism: the point where subject and object no longer exist.

Aesthetic Perception as a Mode of Transcendence

Schopenhauer's violent vision of the daily world sends him on a quest for tranquillity, and he pursues this by retracing the path through which Will objectifies itself. He discovers more peaceful states of mind by directing his everyday, practically-oriented consciousness towards more extraordinary, universal and less-individuated states of mind, since he believes that the violence that a person experiences is proportional to the degree to which that person's consciousness is individuated and objectifying. His view is that with less individuation and objectification, there is less conflict, less pain and more peace.

One way to achieve a more tranquil state of consciousness is through aesthetic perception. This is a special state of perceptual consciousness where we apprehend some spatio-temporal object and discern through this object, the object's essence, archetype, or "Platonic Idea" that corresponds to the type of object in question. In this form of perception, we lose ourselves in the object, forget about our individuality, and become the clear mirror of the object. During the aesthetic perception of an individual apple tree, for example, we would perceive shining through the tree, the archetype of all apple trees (i.e., the Ur-phenomenon, as Goethe would describe it) in an appreciation of every apple tree that was, is, or will be. The kind of perception involved compares, for example, to the traditional portrait artist who discerns the shapes that nature intended to realize in a face, but that were not ideally realized. The painter consequently removes in the artistic portrait, the little hairs, warts, wrinkles and such, to present a more idealized, angelic, timeless, and perfected facial presentation, as we might see in a wedding or religious portrait.

Since Schopenhauer assumes that the quality of the subject of experience must correspond to the quality of the object of experience, he infers that in the state of aesthetic perception, where the objects are universalistic, the subject of experience must likewise assume a universalistic quality (*WWR*, Section 33). Aesthetic perception thus transforms an individually-oriented state of consciousness to a universally-oriented state of consciousness, or what Schopenhauer calls a pure will-less, painless, and timeless subject of knowledge (*WWR*, Section 34).

Schopenhauer states that the highest purpose of art is to communicate Platonic Ideas (*WWR*, Section 50). As constituting art, he has in mind the traditional five fine arts minus music, namely, architecture, sculpture, painting, and poetry. These four arts he comprehends in relation to the Platonic Ideas — those universal objects of aesthetic awareness that are located at the objective pole of the universal subject-object distinction at the root of the principle of sufficient reason. Schopenhauer's account of the visual and literary arts corresponds to the world as representation in its immediate objectification, namely, the field of Platonic Ideas as opposed to the field of spatio-temporal objects.

As a counterpart to his interpretation of the visual and literary arts, Schopenhauer develops an account of music that coordinates it with the subjective pole of the universal subject-object distinction. Separate from the other traditional arts, he maintains that music is the most metaphysical art and is on a subjective, feeling-centered level with the Platonic Ideas themselves. Just as the Platonic Ideas contain the patterns for the types of objects in the daily world, music formally duplicates the basic structure of the world: the bass notes are analogous to inorganic nature, the harmonies are analogous to the animal world, and the melodies are analogous to the human world. The sounding of the bass note produces more subtle sonic structures in its overtones; similarly, inanimate nature produces animate life.

In the structure of music, Schopenhauer discerns a series of analogies to the structure of the physical world that allow him to claim that music is a copy of Will itself. His view might seem extravagant upon first hearing, but it rests on the thought that if one is to discern the truth of the world, it might be advantageous to apprehend the world, not exclusively in scientific, mechanical and causal terms, but rather in aesthetic, analogical, expressive and metaphorical terms that require a sense of taste for their discernment. If the form of the world is best reflected in the form of music, then the most philosophical sensibility will be a musical sensibility. This partially explains the positive attraction of Schopenhauer's theory of music to creative spirits such as Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche, both of whom combined musical and philosophical interests in their work.

With respect to the theme of achieving more peaceful and transcendent states of mind, Schopenhauer believes that music achieves this by embodying the abstract forms of feelings, or feelings abstracted from their particular everyday circumstances. This allows us to perceive the essences of emotional life — “sadness itself,” “joy itself,” etc. — without the contingent contents that would typically cause suffering. By expressing emotion in this detached way,

music allows us to apprehend the nature of the world without the frustration involved in daily life, and hence, in a mode of aesthetic awareness akin to the tranquil philosophical contemplation of the world. Insofar as music provides an abstract and painless vision of the world and of inner life, however, it also fails to evoke the compassion that issues from identifying tangibly with another person's suffering. This deficiency motivates a shift from musical, or aesthetic, awareness to moral awareness.