



An
Allegory
of
Will

On the world of representations as an act of Will in the
philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer

Harri Mäcklin
Mäntän lukio

Philosophy

Table of contents

Tiivistelmä	2
Abstract	3
1. Preface	4
2. On the Kantian foundations of the Schopenhauerian philosophy	7
On time and space	7
On the distinction between phenomena and noumena	9
3. On the fourfold root of the principle of sufficient reason	11
On causality as the ground for empirical objects	12
On truth as the ground for judgements drawn from concepts	13
On time and space as the grounds for mathematical judgements	14
On motives as the grounds for actions	14
On the significance of the principle	15
4. On the world as a representation	15
On the relationship between the subject and the object	16
On matter as action	16
On the architecture of the human mind	17
5. On the world as an act of Will	19
On the objectification of Will	19
On the Platonic Ideas	23
On the metaphysical purpose of the human mind	25
6. Summary of the Schopenhauerian metaphysics	26
7. Bibliography	27

Tiivistelmä

Saksalaisfilosofi Arthur Schopenhauerin (1788-1860) metafysiikan ydin voidaan tiivistää kahteen lauseeseen: ”maailma on mielteeni” ja ”maailma on tahtoni”. Tässä esseessä kysyn, että millaisesta hatusta Schopenhauer on ne vetänyt, eli miten ja millä perusteilla moiset lauseet voivat olla edes järkeviä?

Käytännössä katson, että tyydyttävintä tapaa vastata kysymykseeni on kulkea ajatus ajatukselta Schopenhauerin metafysiikan perusopit läpi ensimmäisestä viimeiseen, eli niin sanoakseni *ab ovo usque ad mala*, munista omeniin. Tämä polku ei ole helppo eikä liioin lyhyt: jotta voisimme ymmärtää Schopenhauerin käsityksen maailmasta tahtona, on meidän ensin ymmärrettävä kantilaisen tieto-opin perusteita, schopenhauerilaista näkemystä ns. perusteenlaista sekä hänen käsitystään maailmasta mielteenä eli mielen luomana kuvana. Vasta kohdattuamme nämä saavumme polkumme päähän: miellemaailman takaa löydämme universaalista Tahton, joka sisäisessä kamppailussaan unelmoi maailman ja kaikki sen ilmiöt. Koska Schopenhauerin mukaan maailma on perimmäältään vain tämän Tahton ilmaus, voimme Schopenhauerin silmin nähdä kaikkialla ympärillämme tämän Tahton piilottelemassa ilmiöidensä takana, aivan kuin koko maailma olisi pelkkä vertaus, jossa kaikki symboloi Tahtoa; siksi näemme maailman eräänlaisena Tahton allegoriana, kuin *camera obscurana*, johon Tahton himmeät kuvat heijastuvat.

Kuten lukijalle toivottavasti käy ilmi, Schopenhauerin erikoiset lauseet eivät itse asiassa ole alkuunkaan tuulesta temmattuja. Itse asiassa ne ovat hyvinkin perusteltuja ja loppujen lopuksi varsin ilmeisiä – sikäli kun uskomme mitä Schopenhauer meille opettaa. On totta, että paikoin hän innostuu niin aiheestaan, ettei huomaa logiikan sääntöjä tiellään, kompastuu niihin ja ontuu loppumatkan; näissä tilanteissa olen pyrkinyt osoittamaan lukijalle ja itselleni, missä hän menee vikaan.

Tällä esseellä pyrin tavallaan tappamaan monta kärpää yhdellä iskulla. Toisaalta olen kirjoittanut sen kokonaan itselleni: sen avulla pyrin tyydyttämään omaa uteliaisuuttani – ja sitä lievää tyytymättömyyttä siitä, etten ole löytänyt samanmoista kirjoitelmaa yrityksistä huolimatta – sekä syventää omaa ymmärrystäni tästä kauniista rakennelmasta. Toisaalta olen kirjoittanut sen lukijaa ajatellen: haluan esittää hänelle suoraviivaisen ja toivottavasti helposti omaksuttavan tiivistelmän Schopenhauerin filosofian perusajatuksista sekä – sikäli kun olen tässä onnistunut – herättää lukijassa kiinnostuksen tätä hienoa ajattelijaa kohtaan. En odota, että lukija nielisi kaikkia ajatuksia kokonaan purematta, jos silloinkaan, mutta yhtä asiaa toivon: että tämän esseen kautta lukija kokisi edes osan siitä kauneudesta, jota itse olen arvon Schopenhauerin parissa kokenut.

Abstract

The very core of the metaphysics of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) can be summed up into two sentences: "the world is my representation" and "the world is my will". In this essay I shall ask what sort of a hat it was from which Schopenhauer drew them out of, that is, how and on what premises could such sentences make any sense?

In practise I think the most satisfying way to answer this question is to go through the basics of the Schopenhauerian metaphysics thought by thought, or so to say, *ab ovo usque ad mala*, from the eggs to the apples. By no means is this path an easy or a short one: in order to understand Schopenhauer's world as Will, we first have to understand a bit of the Kantian epistemology, the Schopenhauerian notion of the principle of sufficient reason and Schopenhauer's view of the world as a representation. Only after confronting these do we reach the end of our path: from behind the world of representations, we find the universal Will, which in its inner turmoil dreams the world and all its phenomena. Because Schopenhauer teaches that the world is by its nature an act of this Will, we can see with Schopenhauer's eyes the Will hiding behind all its phenomena, as if the world was nothing but a simile wherein everything symbolises the Will; and thus we find the world to be a sort of an allegory of Will, a *camera obscura* whereto the blurry images of the Will are projected.

As it will hopefully become clear to the reader, the strange sentences of Schopenhauer are not in fact by any means drawn from a hat. Actually, they are very well grounded and rather obvious – if we choose to believe everything Schopenhauer teaches. It is true that sometimes he gets so excited about his topic that he completely forgets the rules of logic, thus stumbling on them and limping the rest of the way; in these situations I have tried to explain to the reader and to myself where he went wrong.

With this essay I try to, in a sense, kill many birds with one stone. On the other hand, I have written it completely to myself: with it I try to satisfy my curiosity – and the slight discontent of the fact that I haven't been able to find any similar pieces of writing – as well as deepen my understanding of this beautiful system. On the other hand, I have written it while keeping in mind the readers: I want to present to them a straightforward and hopefully easily understandable summary of the foundations of the Schopenhauerian philosophy and – if I have succeeded in this – wake up an interest within them towards this great thinker. I do not expect that the readers will swallow everything said without chewing it first, if even then, but one thing I do wish: that through this essay the readers could experience even a little bit of the beauty that I have done while reading the works of our beloved Schopenhauer.

1. Preface

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) has widely been recognized as one of the brightest thinkers of the 19th century; but unfortunately, his genius has always been shadowed by the fame of his contemporaries, namely by that of Hegel and his followers.¹ In this essay I shall, in my part, pay some tribute to this eminent thinker and place him to the pedestal alongside the other geniuses where he without a doubt belongs.

I shall do this by taking the two sentences that summarize his philosophy – “the world is my representation” and “the world is my will”² – and explain the beautiful line of thought that is squeezed into these sentences.

Schopenhauer’s philosophy has been called pessimistic, what it without a doubt is. First of all, he was convinced that the world he so vividly saw around him in its entire multitude was nothing but phantasmagoria of his mind, no better than a bad dream. For him the world was a representation, a sort of a moving image, a movie perhaps, made by his intellect – as if he was living in a very life-like tragedy in which he was the reluctant protagonist.³

Worse still, he thought that at its core the world is a manifestation of a thing he called Will⁴, of an irrational and blind strife, which endlessly and aimlessly wants and desires without ever finding gratification. The whole world, including humans, is merely a daydream of this Will, through which the Will struggles to gain even a momentary satisfaction. For Schopenhauer, absolutely everything he could possibly perceive around him or within himself was nothing but an act of Will: stones fall because they want to and planets orbit the Sun because they so desire; plants and animals struggle through their lives in an endless war of survival and procreation, for they are all driven by a need to exist and multiply; but for man the Will has given the worst part of all, for man struggles in the same way as the rest of the animal kingdom, but unlike all the others, he has enough intelligence to acknowledge his suffering. According to Schopenhauer, the sole purpose of human existence is to perpetually want: from the first scream with which we rebel against birth to the last draw of breath we never cease to desire – when one desire is fulfilled, another one immediately arises, so that we

¹ If the reader is interested in Schopenhauer as a historical figure, a splendid summary of his life, philosophy and influence can be found from J.E. Salomaa’s *Filosofian historia, part 2, p.173-182*.

² *The World as Will and Representation*, vol.1, §1

³ For more details, refer to parts 2 and 4 of this essay and to *The World as Will and Representation vol.1, Book I*

⁴ When talking of the universal, all-embracing Will, a capital letter shall be used; a minor letter shall denote the individual and subjective character of a person, namely the will. Schopenhauer does not use this division, but I have chosen to employ it for the sake of clarity.

are never completely satisfied. And along with unfulfilled desires, discontent and suffering arise; and thus we're doomed to suffer.⁵

To his relief, Schopenhauer was able to find two ways how one could save oneself from the sufferings of life; for him, aesthetic experiences and an ascetic lifestyle were the only roads to salvation. According to him we suffer because we desire and if we stop desiring, suffering ceases – thus, salvation is found from the denial of one's will; and clearly, this is where Schopenhauer's philosophy starts to remind that of Hinduism and Buddhism.⁶ This is not the main topic of our discussion, and thus I shall leave this topic to the interest of the reader.⁷

What makes his view so powerful and even darker is that he had a good bunch of reasons to think this way, and hence his view is by no means unfounded; and they are exactly these reasons that we shall discuss in this essay. As I attempt to show, Schopenhauer, following Kant's example, begins with one extremely simple observation and then abstracts from it until he finds the Will on which the whole world has been built. The sole aim of this essay is this: to show why Schopenhauer thought the way he did and to explain the premises he used to build the foundations of his lifework.

Schopenhauer had his roots deep in the Kantian soil; as we shall see, the doctrines of Kant's *transcendental idealism*⁸ were the cornerstones of the Schopenhauerian metaphysics. Thus we shall begin this essay with a brief discussion these doctrines, which Kant formulated in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. In this first part of essay we shall discuss the foundations of the Kantian epistemology; and to this end a discussion of time and space and the division between *phenomena* and *noumena* will suffice.

In the second part we leave Kant behind and ask why this world is the way it is. This is answered with a discussion of Schopenhauer's *principle of sufficient reason*. The fourfold nature of this principle is introduced as it bears an immense significance to what is yet to come.

The task of the third part of the essay is to elaborate the previous topics and explain in detail why the world is a representation. In it we shall discuss Schopenhauer's definitions of *the subject* and *the object*, and ponder the bizarre-sounding statement "matter is action". A discussion of the structure of the mind finishes this section.

⁵ A delightful presentation of all this can be found from the essay *On the Vanity and Suffering of Life* from *The World as Will and Representation vol.2*.

⁶ Schopenhauer acknowledges this and frequently refers to the Vedas, especially the Upanishads of Hindu literature.

⁷ On Schopenhauer's aesthetics, see *The World as Will and Representation vol. 1, Book III* and for additional knowledge chapters XXIX-XXXIX of WWR vol.2. Detailed discussion of the denial of the will can be found from Book IV of WWR vol.1. and in the essay *On Doctrine of the Denial of the Will-to-Live* from WWR vol.2.

⁸ A notion that there exists two different, yet interconnected worlds, namely that of noumena and that of phenomena. These shall be discussed in detail in part 2.2 of this essay.

Finally in the last part of this essay we arrive to our main topic, namely the Will. From the two different aspects of the subject's bodily awareness Schopenhauer infers that the subject's body is the subject's individual will turned into a perceivable form; then the will is objectified in all actions of the subject and further generalized to include not only the subject but also the rest of the world – and accordingly, we make a shift from the phenomenal world and individual willing to a universal level, into the world of Will, where everything is nothing but eternal struggle of desires.

There's no such thing as a perfect writer, and even less a perfect thinker, and Schopenhauer is not an exception; thus a few critical words might be necessary. I have chosen not to write a separate part of criticism, but rather decided to make remarks where possible, noting the problems which spring to my mind as we progress through the system – my criticism can be found from the footnotes of text. For the sake of brevity, I cannot thoroughly seek answers to all of my questions, and thus I have chosen to mention only those problems that are of most severe nature; I have only pointed out the problems that I find therein and left it under the judgement of the good reader to decide the credibility of what has been said, either by Schopenhauer or by me.

I have chosen to use only the original texts as my sources. This I have done for two reasons: firstly to keep my own notions of things as pure as possible, i.e. to avoid the influence of others – so that the text before the reader is as original as possible; secondly to add challenge to my task – for sure, it would have been quite dull if I hadn't had to think these things through myself. I used the wonderful work on history of philosophy by J.E. Salomaa to set the discussed topic into its proper historical context and I recommend the readers to do the same – in the case they haven't already done so.

While writing this my humble wish has always been that I could present the readers even the dimmest glimpse of the clearness with which Schopenhauer saw the world around him; but unfortunately, due to practical limitations, I'm only able to offer a short and inadequate outline of the foundations of his philosophy, as it were, an amateurish sketch of the most wonderful work of art. Without a doubt many questions that burden the readers will remain unanswered, and this I apologise – and yet I hope that this insufficiency only goes to spark the readers' interest and lead them to the original works of Schopenhauer; for why should the readers be satisfied with fool's gold when true diamonds are on offer? And of one thing I'm sure: that within every reader of Schopenhauer, a sense of joy and respect will overflow that such a beauty of thought can exist – and therefore, if a slight insufficiency will only increase the readers' appetite, then by all means I'm quite ready to present this essay to them as such.

2. On the Kantian foundations of the Schopenhauerian philosophy

A great deal of Schopenhauer's philosophy relies heavily upon the thoughts of his predecessor Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), who in his *Critique of Pure Reason* set the doctrines that were to become the foundations of the whole system which Schopenhauer developed in his own philosophy. Therefore it is of utmost importance for every reader of Schopenhauer to understand the Kantian philosophy, for without the basic principles developed therein, the thoughts of Schopenhauer become rather difficult to comprehend.⁹

Because of this I find it necessary to begin this essay with a short, but hopefully sufficient summary of the very basic ideas of Kant's epistemology. For the sake of brevity I have chosen to deal with what Kant called the "*transcendental aesthetics*".¹⁰ Accordingly, we shall discuss the doctrine of the transcendental ideality of time and space and the distinction between phenomena and noumena.¹¹

2.1. On time and space

The starting point of the Kantian epistemology is fairly simple and almost obvious a notion: that absolutely every bit of information we obtain from the outer world, i.e. from the world around us, is given to us by the senses; namely, I see the world with my eyes, hear it with my ears, taste it with my mouth and so forth...but take my senses away and I'm left in silent darkness, for without them, I cannot see, hear, taste or sense anything at all. Therefore my awareness of the outer world is dependent on my senses.¹²

This observation is so obvious that we rarely even take any notice of it, but if we have a deeper look into the senses and the world given by them, we quite soon notice that the senses are rather treacherous partners, for how can we assure ourselves that the world given by them is the real thing, the true world as it exists outside us? Could it be that the senses are giving us false information,

⁹ In the preface of his main work, on p.14-15, Schopenhauer himself bids the reader to get acquainted with the Kantian epistemology as well as his own essays *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* and *On Vision* before reading the main work itself (he also mentions the *Upanishads* of the Hindu philosophy, but I have not used this book as a source).

¹⁰ *Critique of Pure Reason*, p.156-157, 173-174

¹¹ Schopenhauer wrote to his main work a substantial appendix titled *Criticism of the Kantian philosophy* where he heavily evaluates Kant's epistemology and as a result abandons a great deal of his mentor's doctrines. Therefore I have chosen only these two topics since a further discussion would require a deeper consideration of Schopenhauer's criticism and since such discussion holds little relevance to our main topic, I shall leave it to the reader's further interest.

¹² *Critique of Pure Reason*, p.155

distorting the world and making us live in an illusion? What if the whole world that we so vividly see around us is nothing but a mere daydream, a product of our own imagination?

Kant begins to look for an answer to this by making yet another quite an obvious observation, namely that all objects of perception, i.e. those given by the senses, exist in space and persist in time; for they occupy a certain part of space, have dimensions and can exist in spatial relations to one another; and moreover, they can exist simultaneously or at different points of time and indeed in themselves persist in time from one moment to another rather than cease to be in a blink of the eye. From this observation Kant concludes that all perception is possible only in the forms of time and space, and that outside these two¹³ no perception can be obtained; in other words, we cannot possibly imagine or experience anything that doesn't appear in space and doesn't persist in time. Therefore everything that is outside these two remains completely unknown to us. And because all perception is dependent on these two forms, it follows that the information given by the senses, from which our perceptions are made of, must stand in relation to these two forms. According to Kant, this relationship is the clue with which the answer to our problem can be found, and we shall now seek this answer the way Kant did in the first parts of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Let us begin by first considering the form of space. First of all, space cannot be a quality of an object, because without space we could not represent any objects outside ourselves in the first place, i.e. we would not be able to imagine objects in space if space was a quality of these objects; therefore space is something that precedes the objects. From this it follows that space must be given to us *a priori*, that is, preceding all experience. Moreover, because we cannot imagine any objects outside space, all experience of these objects is possible only through space.¹⁴

In the same way, he argues, without time objects could not exist successively or simultaneously to one another because these relations presuppose time. Also, because we cannot imagine objects outside time, time must be something grounding their possibility and therefore it must be given to us *a priori*. But there is more to it than that: all the abstract concepts and thoughts inhabiting our mind are certainly not to be found from the outer world, and yet they persist in time and require time as their ground. Therefore time is a necessary form for everything that exists in the

¹³ I wonder what Kant would have thought of modern physics and its notion of time: Einstein's special relativity explains how time can slow down or accelerate depending on the observers motion, and his general relativity holds that time and space are indeed parts of one and the same thing, namely space-time (thus making Kant's notion of space and time as separate entities and his descriptions of the qualities of these two more or less questionable); and in the bizarre world of quantum mechanics and particle physics time can, indeed, break into pieces, go backwards and, as some scientist believe, stop ticking at all – and if time (or space-time) exists only as a setting for our representations, then why have we built such complex a setting?

¹⁴ *Critique of Pure Reason*, p.157-162, 174-178,

experienced world, both in- and outside the mind, and thus it must precede everything that belongs to this world, and therefore precede all experience.¹⁵

From this Kant concludes that time and space are both given *a priori* and hence are products of the mind rather than something we obtain through experience. Both time and space precede perception and are essential to it; every perception is in the forms of these two. Therefore we shall call them the *forms of perception*. On the other hand though, space and time lose their entire meaning if we take all objects and abstract concepts out of them; we simply cannot imagine empty space without objects filling it or empty time without something that persists through it. Thus Kant concludes that time and space are *empirically real*¹⁶ since all empirical experience includes them, but they are nevertheless *transcendentally ideal*¹⁷ since they have meaning only in relation to representations and not to the things as they are in themselves.

To summarize all this, one might say that according to Kant, perceiving an object is like looking at a photo of the object rather than the object itself. We only see its appearance as it is given to us by the senses, but the object itself is more than just an appearance and thus it remains unknown. Furthermore, the concepts and thoughts that fill our mind are only of use in reference to these appearances, because these appearances serve as the foundations of these thoughts. Therefore everything we might possibly perceive or think has meaning only in reference to the empirical world; outside it they lose their meaning. And because our ability to perceive the empirical reality requires time and space, which again require the subject, the perceivable world is dependent on the subject's mind; thus, to that extent, one might argue that the world is a creation of the subject.

2.2. On the distinction between phenomena and noumena

From what has been stated earlier, one might easily draw the conclusion that there is no reason to assume the existence of anything that is not a creation of the mind. But Kant says that this is not the case and that there actually must be an objective world around us for two reasons.

1) It is quite clear to us that we ourselves exist and that we persist in time. But, Kant teaches, all determinations in time require a point of reference, i.e. something persistent in time to which we can compare the elapsing time. For example, the date of my birth is a solid point to which I can make reference when considering the length of my life; without such a point, this length would be impossible to be determined. Now surely this point of reference to which we compare the

¹⁵ *Critique of Pure Reason*, p.162-165, 178-182

¹⁶ This is from a subjective point of view: time and space are an objective part of the empirical world we see around us.

¹⁷ This from an objective point of view: if we step over the limits of the human mind, time and space lose their meaning.

persistence of ourselves cannot be something in ourselves, since the whole persistence and hence the existence of one's body is relative to this point and if it was something in ourselves, it would in turn be dependent on the persistence of us, which it was supposed to establish; therefore placing this point inside the mind will only lead us into a vicious circle. Therefore this point must be something outside ourselves and thus outside our perceptions; it must be something completely different, something absolutely independent of us and thus outside the sphere of experience. From this it is apparent that *subjective idealism*¹⁸ must be wrong, because there indeed exists something that does not belong to the mind but resides somewhere outside it, that is, in the *objective reality*. Thus in this manner Kant has proved that from the fact that we exist, it must be necessary that something else exists as well and that this something must exist in a world that is independent of the mind.¹⁹

2) But what on earth is this "something"? It cannot be something we come across in our representations because in that case it would be a product of the mind. But from the fact that representations are only images of things, it is certain to us that there must be something outside the image whose appearance we are able to see; if we compare a representation to a photo or to a reflection in a mirror, then it could be said that if a photo or a reflection is to picture something, this something must surely exist; for how could one take a photo of a sunset if this sunset didn't exist? Or how could a mirror reflect an image if nothing was placed before it? This applies to representations as well: if there is a representation, there also must be something that is represented, something that is outside the representation, i.e. in the objective reality. Kant calls this something a *noumenon* or a *thing-in-itself*; this noumenon is the very nature of the object rather than a mere appearance of it, or a *phenomenon* as Kant calls it. Now the things we perceive in the perceivable world are merely phenomena, one-sided images of the world of noumena.²⁰

Thus we have achieved the Kantian notion of reality, namely *transcendental idealism*, a notion that can be placed somewhere between *idealism*²¹ and *materialism*²². As we have already stated, according to it the world we perceive around is merely a figment of the mind, which is in keeping with idealism; but in addition we have established that an objective reality outside this world of perception must also exist for two reasons: firstly, to serve as a reference point from which we can infer the persistence of our own being, and secondly to serve as the raw material from which our representations are made of.

¹⁸ A notion that the world is nothing but a product of the subject's mind; according to it there is no objective reality.

¹⁹ *Critique of Pure Reason*, p.327-328

²⁰ *Critique of Pure Reason*, p.338-353

²¹ A notion that reality is by nature a mental thing.

²² A notion that the whole reality is material and independent of the subject, i.e. is objective.

3. On the fourfold root of the principle of sufficient reason

When we look at the empirical world, which we now understand to be a multitude of representations, we immediately notice that all sorts of things fill it, that there are myriads of different objects that can enter our perception; and moreover we see that these objects do all sorts of things. Yet we have no idea why it is so: even though this multitude of things is so apparent to us, the reason why they are the way they are remains a mystery; and even though we see quite clearly these events happening before eyes, we are left wondering why such events ever came to being. Thus we ask: “What is this world about? Is there a reason for things to be the way they are? Or is it just a happy coincidence that the world is like this rather than something else?”

In this part of the essay we shall consider the way Arthur Schopenhauer attempted to answer these questions in his doctoral thesis *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*. Indeed the answer he developed is so fundamental to the whole of his philosophy, that it is necessary to discuss it here in detail.

Schopenhauer’s answer is very simple: everything that exists has a reason for existing, and everything that happens, happens for a reason. This is what we call *the principle of sufficient reason*.²³ The principle quite simply states that the world where we live in is not a coincidence, but a thoroughly understandable place where nothing occurs without a reason for it occurring. Or as Schopenhauer puts it: “nothing is without a ground or reason why it is” (*On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, p.6).

As the title of his thesis implies, Schopenhauer saw that there is not just one principle of sufficient reason, but indeed four; this is due to the fact, Schopenhauer states, that the things we encounter in the world can be divided into four groups that are so far apart from each other that one principle cannot possibly explain them all. These groups are the empirical representations, concepts, mathematical judgements and motives.²⁴ Of these only the first and the last bear any direct relevance to our main topic, but for the sake of unity, I have decided to explain all the four forms of the principle.

²³ It is noteworthy that Schopenhauer did not invent this principle. As discussed in § 6-14 of Schopenhauer’s thesis, such philosopher as Descartes, Hume and Kant attempted to prove this principle before him.

²⁴ Introduction to *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, p.x

3.1. On causality as the ground for empirical²⁵ objects

The first class of objects is concerned with the objects of perception. In practise, this means all the things we can come across in the empirical world – like tables, chairs, bicycles, umbrellas and indeed, other people.

It is quite clear to us that these empirical objects cannot just come out of nowhere, and can't either disappear without a trace. Thus we must demand a ground or a sufficient reason why these objects are perceivable in the first place, i.e. why they have come into being. According to Schopenhauer, the sufficient reason for their being lies in their causal relationship to one another: in order for something to happen, something must first cause it. For example, if we see a shattering window, we at once infer that there must be something, e.g. a stone that breaks it; for without this sufficient reason, we would be unable to explain why the window shattered into pieces. Though to be precise, says Schopenhauer, it is not the stone itself that causes the window to break, but the motion of the stone; we can say that the *state* of the stone, its movement, causes the window to break, that is, chance its state. This is what we call causality: the state of one thing causes the state of something else to change. We call the former the *cause* and the latter the *effect*. Schopenhauer states that if the cause of the effect is known, then the reason for the being of the effect is also known; the cause serves as a sufficient reason for its being. This is the first root of the principle of sufficient reason, and is called *the sufficient reason of becoming*.²⁶

In the section 2.1., when discussing the nature of time and space, we already mentioned that these forms are necessary for any object to be perceivable; without them, the objects mean nothing to us. Yet it remained unclear to us why this is so – why can't we perceive things outside time and space? Schopenhauer argues that the basic function of the mind is to establish a sufficient reason for the things it perceives by searching the causal relationships between them. It has to do this because without such reasons, we would not be able to comprehend the world around us. Thus causality is the key why we perceive this world so sensible a place. But causality has its demands: it needs time and space in order to work. First of all the cause must surely precede the effect in time; for if it was the other way round, the effect would precede the cause, and this would be absurd. And if the cause happened at the same as the effect, then we could not distinguish which was which, and this would be as absurd as the first case. Therefore the cause must exist before the effect, and surely such precedence is only possible in time. In the same way space is necessary for causality because if we

²⁵ Richard Taylor uses the term "physical" in the introduction of *the Principle*; to my mind the term "empirical" is more descriptive and suitable here.

²⁶ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, §20

take space away, objects could not exist separately from one another since they could not be in different positions, that is, in different parts of space since there is no space in which such positions could be possible. Therefore, Schopenhauer argues, we have to perceive things in time and space if we want to establish the causal relationships between the states of the objects; and only through causality are we able to comprehend them.

3.2. On truth as the ground for judgements drawn from concepts

Humans have the peculiar ability to take out and filter from the multitude of representations given to them the general forms of these images and handle them at an abstract level; these forms are what we call *concepts*²⁷; they are simple generalizations of representations, “representations from representations” as Schopenhauer puts it (*On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, p.146). For example, when considering the concept of a badger, we don’t think of any badger in particular but the qualities and the form that an object must have in order to be a badger. The combinations of these concepts through language are what we call *judgements*; for example saying “all badgers are animals” would be a judgement. But how do we know that these judgements make any sense? For instance, it is quite clear to us that it makes no sense to say “badgers are banjos” or “badgers are jam” or “badgers are not badgers” – but on what grounds do we know this? According to Schopenhauer, a judgement must be *true* if it is to make any sense, i.e. serve as a piece of *knowledge*²⁸; and according to Schopenhauer, truth is “the reference of a judgement to something different therefrom” (*On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, p.156) – in plain, this means that the judgement can be proven by referring to something else than the judgement itself. There are four “somethings”: a logical judgement must be supported by its premises; an empirical judgement must find its ground from experience; transcendental judgements must be supported by time and space; and metalogical²⁹ judgements find their ground from basic axioms of logic. This is the second root of our principle and is called *the principle of sufficient reason of knowing*.³⁰

²⁷ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, §26

²⁸ I must point here that logical deductions are hardly the only things we can call knowledge – for example, as we shall see, we know our own will in an immediate fashion. I should also point that Schopenhauer is rather vague and inaccurate when comes to the nature of knowledge, and does not even seem to be bothered to explain how we can have knowledge of ourselves as knowing things – how do we know that we know? Due to the complexity of the matter, I shall not go any further here and instead I leave it to the reader’s own amusement to ponder this.

²⁹ A metalogical truth is by definition a judgement that underlies all other truths; for example, the judgements “a=a” and “all objects necessarily have either one of two contradictorily opposite predicates” would be such.

³⁰ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, § 29-33.

3.3. On time and space as the grounds for mathematical judgements

We know that time and space exist and furthermore that only one such time and one such space can exist. This is because all the parts of space or time that we can think of are only parts of one space and one time; there is no need for many spaces or times to exist. All our representations manifest themselves in only space and in one time.³¹ From this it follows that even though objects might be in different places, they are still in the same space, and even though they might not exist at the same moment, they still exist in the same time. Therefore through these forms the objects have a relationship to one another; the place of one object can be determined in relation to the place of another object and the time of the existence of one object in relation to the time of the other.

According to Schopenhauer this makes mathematical judgements possible.³² Numbers (and their science, arithmetic) are only possible in a temporal sequence because one number can be reached only by passing through the preceding numbers before it, and this is only possible in time.³³ Geometry, to his mind, is the science that deals with the positions of the objects, and these require space.³⁴ Therefore the existence of space serves as a ground for geometrical judgements and the existence of time as a ground for arithmetical judgements. This is the third root of our principle and is called *the principle of sufficient reason of being*.³⁵

3.4. On motives as the grounds for actions

In addition to perceiving the world around us and asserting knowledge of it, we also take an active part in it: we eat, sleep, have sex, make decisions, struggle and so forth. The things we do for a specific reason or under the guidance of our will are called actions. For example, I can throw a stone towards an unfortunate window and call it an action – but I can also ask why I did it: for what reason and on what grounds did I choose to throw that stone? According to Schopenhauer, the answer lies in my motives. If I want something and I do something in order to satisfy this desire, we say that I had a motive for this action. This motive answers the question why I did it; it gives the

³¹ *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 158-159, 162-163, 175, 179

³² To my mind the fact that mathematics exists is a powerful and yet very beautiful proof of Kant's and Schopenhauer's claim that time and space are known *a priori* (of course assuming that time and space are transcendently ideal): now if mathematics is only possible in time and space, as it seems to be, and if time and space were known *a posteriori*, then it would follow that mathematics is only possible after empirical knowledge, that is, only in experience and thus we could draw mathematical judgements only from the empirical world; but do we not know without looking into the world around us that, for example, $1+1=2$ and that a triangle has three sides?

³³ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, §38

³⁴ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, §39

³⁵ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, §36

ground, i.e. the desire that the action was meant to fulfil. This is the fourth root of our principle and is called *the principle of sufficient reason of acting*.³⁶ We shall return to the metaphysics of actions in chapter 5 of this essay.

3.5. On the significance of the principle

To my mind there are two aspects of the principle of sufficient reason above others that make it so fundamental to Schopenhauer's whole system. Firstly, it organizes the world into an orderly place where everything has its reason and place – without it, Schopenhauer thinks, we simply could not make any sense of the world live in. Secondly – and this is the fundamental thing – the principle implies that all the things we perceive, experience or think of are, if not plain representations, no more than concepts and judgements we derive from them: we see things as representations because we have to establish their causal relationships; we draw concepts out of these representations and then use these concepts to make judgements; we make use of the building blocks of the representational world, namely time and space to create mathematics; and we act and thus become active members of this world – and hence, the world we live in is desperately dependent on our representations. The significance of this implication will become clear in the following chapter.

4. On the world as a representation

This is what we have achieved so far: from the timeless and spaceless world of noumena, the mind is able to draw images that both persist in time and lie in space; these we called representations or phenomena. We must set our representations into the forms of time and space, for without them, we would live in a world of complete disarray where no causality could rule – thus dictates the principle of sufficient reason. But by representing the world in these settings, we have to make a costly sacrifice: namely, we have to distort the things we perceive in order to satisfy the demanding principle. As a result, we no longer perceive things as they are in themselves, but rather as mere appearances of them, as it were, as husks instead of kernels. Therefore, being unable to see the world as it truly is, the mind is forced to create a world of its own, a world of mere surfaces and appearances. This is why “the world is my representation”³⁷.

We shall now look at this world in a more detailed fashion and present it in all its clearness.

³⁶ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, §43

³⁷ *World as Will and Representation*, vol.1, §1

4.1. On the relationship between the subject and the object

In the preceding parts of this essay no clear distinction was made between the perceiver and the things being perceived. The former, the one who experiences, senses, thinks and feels is called the *subject* of the world; it is he of whom the whole world of representations is dependent on – it is he who constructs it. Or as Schopenhauer puts it: “that which knows all things and is known by none is the *subject*” (*World as Will and Representation, vol.1, p.5*). The latter, the perceived things, are called *objects*; these are the things we represent to be outside ourselves. They are what the mind produces when setting the noumenal data into the forms of perception.

According to Schopenhauer, the subject and the object are dependent on each other. Clearly an object cannot be represented in the forms of time and space if the subject is taken away as the subject adds these forms into the object. And on the other hand, take the objects away and the world of representation goes with them, as there remains no material from which the subject could construct this world. Thus there are two necessary sides in the world of representations; namely the subject who builds the world,³⁸ and the object that serves as material from which this world is built.³⁹

4.2. On matter as action

Yet another peculiar statement, which the reader of Schopenhauer will come across, is the claim that matter is action. By *matter* Schopenhauer understands the very core of all objects, the form that remains when all qualities, causal relationships and such are removed from an object.⁴⁰ We must keep in mind that according to him, representations of objects appear to us the way they do just because of causality. Now causality is action, namely a change of state; but the problem is, according to Schopenhauer, that the mind is incapable of perceiving pure action without something that acts – simply, we cannot perceive causality if there is nothing that could change its state. Thus, matter must be introduced, for without it there would be no medium through which causality could be comprehended. Thus matter is an inseparable part of all actions and hence can be understood as a form of these actions; in the same sense as there are two inseparable sides in a coin, so are there in

³⁸ To my mind, Schopenhauer seems to value the external reality less than Kant does. Whereas Kant especially emphasises the necessity of the external reality, Schopenhauer rather explicitly reduces it to a multitude of phenomena and thus regards it more or less dependent on the subject’s mind. The reason to this difference lies in the different metaphysical notions of these two men; this reason will become apparent in the following chapters.

³⁹ *World as Will and Representation, vol.1 §2*

⁴⁰ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, §21, p.118*

an action: an acting part and a material part through which the action occurs. Thus, matter is action.⁴¹ We shall return to this idea later on and find out just what kind of action matter really is.

4.3. On the architecture of the human mind

While talking of the ways in which the subject constructs the world of representations, no precise definition of the faculties of the mind⁴² with which this is done was given. Thus few words on this are necessary.⁴³

The most basic faculty of the mind is that of *perception*. It comprises of two minor faculties, namely the faculty of *senses* and the faculty of *understanding*; the former supplies the perception with the necessary data: the eyes see, the ears hear and so forth; and the latter translates this data into the forms of perception, that is, into a spatio-temporal object. This is necessary because only then it is possible to understand the causal relationship of the representation to something external to it – we already established this in part 3.3. of this essay. Thus the sole function of the understanding is to understand causality and hence establish a ground for the representation – and in this task it uses the principle of sufficient reason. Because of this, our awareness of the world is only possible through understanding: only it can make our representations possible.⁴⁴

According to Schopenhauer, there are two types of understanding: the normal sort that understands causal relationships between external objects and *pure understanding* that represents certain objects without inferring their grounds from causality – these objects are said to be *immediate*. For example, I can perceive other people only as objects among objects, and they will always be mere appearances to me; but of my own body I am aware of in a wholly different

⁴¹ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, §21, p.119 and *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, §4 and vol.2, parts I, IV, XXIV.

⁴² In a rather peculiar manner Schopenhauer (and Kant) assumes that the mind and the subject are one and the same thing; thus I suppose that if the faculties of the mind are removed, the whole subject disappears. The problem is that Schopenhauer never even mentions or proves this assumption. Thus, if it could be established that the subject and the mind are two different things, the transcendental idealism, in which the world is dependent on the subject, would suffer a great deal as the ability to comprehend time, space and causality would be taken away from the subject. This would happen if the pure subject does not include the mind (reason, understanding etc.) but something else, such as the self or the ego, i.e. the “I”.

⁴³ I must note here that by no means all of the faculties of the mind will be discussed here, firstly because of matters of brevity and secondly because Schopenhauer does not complete his job and only defines those faculties of the mind that he saw relevant to his discussion, thus leaving us little material with which to work. Such faculties as imagination, reflection and memory could be discussed here, as Schopenhauer is clearly aware of them, even though he never really defines them; but in order to save space, I shall leave such discussions to the interest of the reader.

⁴⁴ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, §21 and *World as Will and Representation*, vol.1, §4.

I must note here that humans are by no means the only creatures that have the faculty of understanding; according to Schopenhauer, also animals bear this faculty. This makes sense since the understanding renders the world a sensible place, enabling us to become active members of it; and certainly animals must have some sort of an understanding since they so effectively survive in the world.

manner: not only do I perceive it as an object, but also as something I inhabit and control at will; it is not an one-sided appearance as the rest of the objects. In other words, I am immediately aware of it.⁴⁵ Bearing in mind that the effect of one event will be the cause of the next, we can infer that this kind of immediate object is necessary, because it serves as a starting point for causality as it is the first effect that the understanding can comprehend; without such a starting point causality could not be understood. This is because, as we have already stated, all perceptions are based on causality and furthermore causality is based on the cause and the effect, and if no immediate effect is given, the chain of causality is broken and thus perceptions become meaningless. The idea of immediate objects will be of utmost importance in the following parts of this essay.⁴⁶

Humans, unlike any other beings, have the extraordinary ability to take a representation and remove from it everything that is secondary and only accidental in its nature and this way acquire a pure form of this representation, that is, a generalization of it. This is what we call a concept, as we have already defined in part 3.4. The faculty that is capable of doing this is that of *reason*. The faculty of reason is by definition capable of stripping the *intuitive representation*, i.e. the representation given by the senses and translated by the understanding, and turning it into an *abstract representation*, which no longer is an object that could be perceived but rather a simplification of it, a blueprint. From these concepts then, as it is clear by now, we can make judgements (by using the 2nd root of the principle of sufficient reason) concerning the world of representations and thus think – it is only due to reason that *thinking* is possible. Schopenhauer emphasizes though that the faculty of reason requires intuitive representations as its material; it cannot form new concepts by itself. Thus our reason is dependent on the world of representations and can never step over its boundaries; and therefore, everything we can ever think of must also lie in this world.⁴⁷

The last and certainly the most interesting – and, as we shall see, the most important – part of the subject is his will. Alongside our rational, perceptive parts of our mind, we also bear an irrational and striving side within us that constantly bothers us with new desires and is never quite satisfied to what we offer to it; for every time we fulfil one need, a bunch new ones arise. Whereas the rational faculties are, so to speak, the receptive sides of us, i.e. they do not generate anything but only deal with already given material, the will is an active side of us: it provides us with desires and thus

⁴⁵ Schopenhauer notes that the knowledge of this immediateness is given through sensual data, as a representation; but if so, then how do we know things immediately? How does immediate understanding exactly differ from normal understanding if both are based on representations? I say: in no way! The reason why Schopenhauer had to introduce the idea of immediate understanding will become clear in the following chapters. Refer to *World as Will and Representation, vol.1, §6* for more information on this topic.

⁴⁶ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, §22* and *World as Will and Representation, vol.1, §4*

⁴⁷ *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, §26, 34* and *The World as Will and Representation, vol.1, §3*

motives, which again serve as grounds for our actions, as we have already discussed in the part 3.6. Thus the will is what makes us act in the world, and without it we would only be passive observers of the world, if even that. The nature of will shall be discussed in detail in the next part of the essay.

5. On the world as an act of Will

As discussed in the part 2 of this essay, within the Kantian (and also within the Schopenhauerian) epistemology the world is divided into phenomena and noumena. It should be at this point very clear to the reader what is meant by the former, namely by the world of representations. We shall now move on to the latter, the world of noumena, and enter the very heart of the Schopenhauerian metaphysics.⁴⁸

5.1. On the objectification of the Will

We have now established that the world around us is nothing but a representation which is completely dependent on time and space and which is ruled by the laws of causality and the principle of sufficient reason; these again are dependent on the mind of the subject. The things that exist outside these representations are the things-in-themselves, that is, entities that are independent of our mind. According to Kant, the mind is limited to our representations, and thus the world beyond these will remain desperately unknown to us – it are simply out of our reach, since we would have to step outside the world of representations.

Schopenhauer refutes this view and points out a fact, which he claims Kant had missed: that the subject, as he also owns a body, is as well a thing-in-itself. Now this opens up new possibilities, since our awareness of our own body is very much different to our awareness of other objects; the body is something much more than a mere appearance. Now if we could make use of the human body and find out what it really is, we could perform an amazing philosophical feat and to the astonishment of Kant get hold of at least one noumenon, namely that of ourselves.⁴⁹

Thus Schopenhauer teaches that instead of seeking the things-in-themselves from the external world, we ought to turn our interest towards ourselves. Our own body is different to all other

⁴⁸ As the attentive reader surely will notice, in the following considerations Schopenhauer employs rather flimsy logic, so if the reader for some reason wants to set Schopenhauer's philosophy into a questionable light, this is were to strike; I shall in my own part aid him in this task. The objectification of Will requires such a leap of faith in logic that it, at least to my mind, endangers the credibility of the whole system, and thus offers rich pickings for the scavengers; therefore my hostile friends, let us prepare ourselves and kick where it hurts the most!

⁴⁹ *World as Will and Representation, vol.2, chapter XVIII*

objects that we perceive around us: namely, the body is the starting point of all perception, since sensory data can enter our perception only if it first affects our sensory organs. Moreover, we on the other hand perceive the body as an object among other objects, but on the other hand we are aware of the body in an immediate way unlike of any other object; we feel as if we inhabit it and rule it at will. We are, so to speak, both internally and externally aware of our body.

Let us consider this: I consciously wave my hand before my eyes and thus quite clearly see my hand shaking there – and for sure this is nothing but a mere representation. But on the other hand, the motive to shake my hand comes from within me, namely from my own will. Without it my hand would not shake in the first place.⁵⁰ Therefore it is clear that I can understand the shaking of my hand in two ways: firstly as a representation brought by my senses and secondly as an act of my will. According to Schopenhauer, the representation of an action and the will to do this action are one and the same thing, for one cannot do anything without wanting it or want anything without representing this desire as a movement – for example, in order to shake my hands, I must want to shake them, and when I indeed want to shake them, I immediately represent my hands shaking.⁵¹ Thus the shaking of my hands is a coin with two sides: it has a representational and a willing side, both entwined and inseparable from each other. This applies to all representations of one's body: all actions of the body are the objectifications of the individual's will; through the actions of the body the will manifests itself.⁵²

This paradoxical idea becomes little clearer if we recall the discussion in the part 4.2. concerning matter. There we explained that since the world is conditioned by causality, and since causality is action, which cannot be perceived in its pure form, the mind has to add a material part to the actions so that the actions themselves could become perceivable. This same idea works here as well: willing is action that cannot be represented without something that acts according to it; for example, if I had no hands, I certainly could not shake them. But it also follows from our previous discussion that matter exists solely as an extension of action, as a medium through which actions are expressed; without action there would be no matter. Therefore my hands, for example, exist solely as extensions of my will; they are the material parts of my will through which my will expresses itself in the act of shaking my hands – and if my will is taken away from me, my hands lose their functions. This is the underlying idea of the above claim that will to do something is the same thing as representing this will as an action; my hands are my materialised will and the representation of

⁵⁰ This is the reason why the 4th root of the principle of sufficient reason is so important to us: it enables us to become active members of the world and, as we shall see, also allows us to explain the world in Schopenhauerian terms.

⁵¹ Schopenhauer does not really explain why willing *eo ipso* means acting according to the will; it might be true that an action is impossible without the motive to do this action, but is will dependent on the action in the same way? Why can't we want something without immediately turning it into a representation?

⁵² *The World as Will and Representation*, vol.1, §18

them shaking is the objectified will to shake them. The representation is, in Kantian terms, the phenomenal side of the noumenal willing.⁵³

Now this conclusion has a profound effect to Schopenhauer's metaphysics: namely, if my body is the material extension of my own will, or in other words, my will turned into flesh and blood, we have indeed found the noumenon behind ourselves and now understand that the hand I so lively see shaking before my eyes is in fact nothing but the appearance of my own willing.⁵⁴

In this manner we get hold of at least one noumenon, which was supposed to be impossible according to Kant. But Schopenhauer moves on even further: because the world of noumena is outside the world of phenomena, it follows that the noumena know neither time, space nor causality since these three are nothing but the forms of the world of phenomena.⁵⁵ Schopenhauer argues that because plurality is only possible in time and space, and because the noumena do not exist in these forms, they cannot exist in plurality and hence they are one and the same; there cannot be many noumena, but only a single one.⁵⁶ And we have already identified this noumenon, and called it the will.⁵⁷

Having established the noumenal nature of ourselves we must now turn our interest towards other objects and inquire what their nature is, if the only noumenon is possessed by us. Now it should

⁵³ *The World as Will and Representation*, vol.1, §20.

⁵⁴ I wonder how exactly do we know our will to be our noumenon? Schopenhauer is pretty vague on this and doesn't explain this in detail. Is it not that the will expresses itself in the actions of the body, and thus becomes known as a representation along with the action? And if so, isn't the will just a part of the action, which we have separated from the representation and now deal it as a noumenon even though in reality it is nothing but a mere concept drawn from the representation of an action? And furthermore, we are as immediately conscious of our faculties of the mind as we are of the will, and because they certainly are not representations, they should also be noumena, but Schopenhauer says this is impossible – but why?

⁵⁵ If this is true, then how is it possible that the Will affects the subject in such a manner that the subject is able to perceive the Will's phenomena? Or in a more abstract manner, if there is no causal relationship between the thing-in-itself and the subject, then how can the subject perceive the phenomenon of this noumenon?

⁵⁶ It is strange that Schopenhauer forgets the fact that because the noumena do not follow the principle of sufficient reason, they remain unknown to us (let us consider the Will as a strange curiosity) and thus no judgements on their qualities can be made – and hence a judgement that they cannot exist in plurality is unfounded; for even if they existed outside time and space, it does not follow that plurality of them is impossible, since we cannot know if they can exist this way through other forms than time and space – because they are beyond all our experience, we simply cannot even start to imagine what kinds of properties they might have.

But if we, for the sake of the argument, suppose that the Will is indeed the only noumenon there is, and also note that this noumenon stands outside time, then surely it follows from this – if we follow Schopenhauer's logic – that the Will cannot persist in time. But since all the phenomena of Will do persist in time, it must be that in some way or the other the Will also persists in time; and the only possible way this could be is, to my mind, that the Will appears again and again when one moment ends and another one begins – that is, the Will should be, in a sense, in a constant state of death and rebirth. But if this is true, then the phenomena of Will would also be constantly appearing and disappearing as time goes on. If this was the case, then our representations of our body, and, as we shall see, of the whole world, would be nothing but a flickering image of the constantly changing Will; in the same sense as old films were series of individual images flashed so quickly before the viewer's eyes that they seemed to form only one moving image, the whole world would also be this kind of a series of representations, which appear and disappear so quickly that we cannot separate them from each other.

I suppose that the absurdity of the above consideration is so obvious that there is no need to go any further.

⁵⁷ *The World as Will and Representation*, vol.1, §25

also be apparent to us that we do not know other objects in the same way we know our own body, and thus every other object remains a mere appearance to us, that is, a phenomenon, and the noumenal side of it is beyond our reach. But from the fact that the will is the only possible noumenon, two possibilities remain for existence of other objects; firstly, they could be phenomena of the same noumenon as we are, or then they might not be phenomena at all, but rather mere illusions of the mind that don't really exist in themselves at all. The latter possibility is, Schopenhauer thinks, nothing but *theoretical egoism*, for it states that the subject is the only existing thing in the world and everything else is a creation of his mind. According to Schopenhauer there is no way we could prove this view to be either correct or incorrect, but because "as a serious conviction, on the other hand, it could be found only in a madhouse", we should here ignore it as "sceptical sophism" (*The World as Will and Representation, vol. I. p.104*). Thus only the former possibility is such that we should take it seriously, and accordingly we should understand that behind every object we perceive, the one and the same will manifests itself.⁵⁸

Therefore the will that is behind the subject's body and his actions is indeed the same will that is behind every other phenomenon; my thing-in-itself is the thing-in-itself of the whole world. This is what we from now on shall call the Will, since we no longer mean the subject's individual will but rather the universal noumenon behind every phenomenon, including that of the subject. It is the same thing that makes us act that makes planets orbit the Sun, stones fall towards the Earth, animals struggle in their war of survival and reproduction and so forth; thus every event we can ever perceive is only a manifestation of Will. Furthermore, in the same way as the subject's body is Will turned into an appearance, so are all the other objects of the world; planets, stones, plants, animals and so forth; thus, every object that can enter our perceptions is nothing but a manifestation of Will.⁵⁹ Accordingly, absolutely everything we can ever experience is a phenomenon of Will, and nothing is beyond it; and hence, "the world is my will".⁶⁰

Dressed as a simplistic simile, the world now appears to us as a theatre of the burlesque: it is a house that stages an eternal show of tragic comedy. The Will, being both the audience and the play,

⁵⁸ To my mind, this rather a leap of faith; for we really have no other ground for accepting this than the threat of egoism. I shall leave it under the judgement of the reader to decide whether such a leap is necessary.

⁵⁹ Objects are made of form and matter; the former we shall identify as a Platonic Idea, which is a grade of the Will, and the latter we have identified as action in part 4.2., and this action we must now understand as an act of will; thus both parts of the object are by nature Will, and hence the object itself is nothing but the Will turned into a phenomenon.

⁶⁰ From this it follows that the 1st root of the principle of sufficient reason can more or less be reduced to the 4th root: all objects act according to their wills, and thus all actions are grounded by motives; and because all individual wills are parts of the universal Will, all actions spring forth from the same Will and because of this all actions appear in a unified manner; and this manner is what we perceive as causality. A window breaks because the will of the window is the same as that of the stone, which seems to break it, and this will provides such motives that the stone is thrown towards the window; and in the empirical world the shattering seems to happen in causality. Hence the 1st root is only the empirical version of the 4th root.

has built this house for itself – a perverse masterpiece of a lonely artist. We are the poor marionettes that act the play; the Will is the despotic puppeteer that pulls our strings behind the scene. Yet, if a breath of life made our wooden hearts beat and opened our glassy eyes, we would look around ourselves and not see a stage of drama, but something that we think is the real world as it truly is in itself; the strings that bind everything to the Will are invisible to us, and thus we see before us a multitude of separate objects. But from our present discussion, this illusion fades: like the world of theatre is a creation of the artists, so is the world of these phenomena a creation of the Will; and thus, the world we thought was real now appears in the limelight of our discussion to be a world of plaster and papier-mâché – and the strings that pull our bodies and force us to act become visible, and we understand that what we thought were individual objects are bound to the one and the same thing, namely the Will. We, the reluctant marionettes, suffer the fate of Pinocchio, who has been deceived to believe that he has become a real man; we, as everything else in this world of phenomena, are nothing but the Will turned into a perceivable form, indeed like marionettes of the most tragic play of puppetry, who in their ignorance believe that the world of theatre is not an illusion.

5.2. On the Platonic Ideas

We have now established that every phenomenon is a manifestation of one Will. Even though this might be clear to us, we are still puzzled by the question that if every phenomenon is by nature Will, then how is it possible that so many different phenomena can exist, that the world of representations presents itself to us in such a multitude of forms?

Schopenhauer answers that the Will is by nature always struggling against something,⁶¹ and because everything there is, is a manifestation of Will, this Will must be struggling against itself. Naturally this struggle also appears in the phenomenal world within and between the phenomena that inhabit it. And if every phenomenon was, so to speak, as strong as every other, this struggle would be endless, and hence through it the Will could not thoroughly fulfil its desires. Thus there must be different grades of willing, so that in the world there are weaker and stronger phenomena so that a struggle between them might have an end. For example, if I lift up a stone, my will struggles against the will of gravity, and if I want enough, I will overcome the will of gravity and the stone will rise; should it be that my will and the will of gravity were always as strong, such a struggle

⁶¹ I suppose this is inferred from the individual will of the subject, which provides the subject with needs and motives for his actions. Though I suppose that struggle only comes into the picture when these needs cannot be fulfilled; and supposing the Will has some sort of needs it strives for but can never satisfy them, struggle arises. Clearly this kind of an inference supposes that the Will is by nature similar to the individual will.

would be in vain. Schopenhauer classifies five main categories of the grades of the manifestations of Will⁶²: natural forces are the simplest ones, then come the inanimate objects such as stones, then come plants, then animals and finally humans.

Now because the Will knows neither time nor space, it knows no plurality either, and thus it cannot by itself appear in many forms; so how is it possible that these different grades can exist? Schopenhauer's answer is as follows: in the same sense as the same light appears in the dimmest flame of a candle and in the blinding shine of the Sun, so does the same Will appear in both the weakest and the strongest of its phenomena. And in the same sense as it would be absurd to say that dim light is different light than bright light, it would be as absurd to say that different parts of the Will appear in the weaker and the stronger phenomena. According to Schopenhauer, the Will does not have to divide itself in order to appear in many forms; instead, it just has to appear in different intensities. As in the weak flame of a candle and in the brightness of the Sun, the same light appears in different intensities, so does the Will appear in different intensities in its phenomena. Now these different intensities allow the Will to appear in many forms even though the Will remains the same and appears in its entirety in every phenomenon. Therefore the facts that there is only one noumenon and many phenomena do not contradict each other; indeed, one thing-in-itself can have many different appearances.⁶³

Now every object corresponds to a certain intensity of willing. Therefore all objects that are different from one another correspond to different intensities of willing and all objects that are of the same sort share a common intensity; for example, all badgers correspond to a same intensity of willing, which is, say, different to that of zebras. From this it follows that every genus of objects corresponds to a certain intensity of willing which is common to every particular object within this genus; this intensity or grade of willing is thus a universal form from which every particular object within this genus takes its form. Now these forms, these different intensities of willing, are what Schopenhauer calls the Platonic Ideas, as his theory resembles quite a lot Plato's doctrine of Ideas⁶⁴; every particular object is a vague copy of a universal and perfect Idea, that is, of a certain intensity of the objectified Will.

⁶² I must note here that the grade of the manifestation of the Will does not single-handedly determine the strength of the object – for example, I can't always lift up a stone and overcome the will of gravity even though I am a greater grade of the Will. The point of the different grades of the Will is not to set up a definite hierarchy but to enable struggle between different objects.

⁶³ *The World as Will and Representation, vol.1. §25-28*

⁶⁴ By a Platonic Idea we understand a blueprint or a pure form of an object, of which the object is dependent on and from which the object copies its form and qualities; thus two separate worlds exist, the world of Ideas (the noumenal world) and the world that copies it (the world of phenomena). For more details on Platonic Ideas, see *Filosofian historia, osa 1, p.58-69*; for more details on the similarities of Plato's philosophy and that of Kant's, see *World as Will and Representation, vol. 1, §31*. I must note here that Schopenhauer's notion of the Ideas is not as similar to that of Plato's as he originally claims: for Plato, the Ideas are above the perceived world, whereas for Schopenhauer, the Ideas are the primary forms of the world of representations; in Kantian terms, Plato considers the Ideas as noumena, Schopenhauer as phenomena.

Thus, Schopenhauer argues that the multitude of phenomena is possible only through the multitude of Platonic Ideas, which are the different intensities of the objectified Will and from which the particular objects within the world of representations take their shape.⁶⁵ Accordingly, the Ideas are the weapons that allow the Will to struggle with itself, as if it was a lonely dog that desperately attempted to bite its own tail.

5.3. On the metaphysical purpose of the human mind

As we have seen, the world is in its entirety a manifestation of the Will and that everything exists as a definite grade of this Will. For Schopenhauer, the human mind is the highest grade of the Will's manifestations; in humans, the Will finds its most complex expression.⁶⁶ Now because everything is Will, it follows that the mind and the things it perceives are by nature one and the same thing – when looking at the outer world, the mind is in a sense looking at itself. Therefore the purpose of the mind appears in a wholly new light: it is the medium through which the Will becomes aware of itself. The faculty of understanding, which establishes the causal relationships of the things we perceive, in fact understands the Will behind this causality⁶⁷; the purpose of the faculty of reason is to form a conceptual notion of the Will and the way it appears in the empirical world.⁶⁸ Therefore the mind is a mirror disguised as a telescope: though it seems to perceive the world outside it, what it actually reflects is the one and the same Will, which appears both in the mind and the world it perceives.

⁶⁵ Despite their differences, Schopenhauer's notion of the Ideas is troubled by the same problem as that of Plato's, namely by the question how exactly do the object manage to resemble their Ideas. What kind of a relationship is there between the object and the Idea – and furthermore, where does this relationship acquire its qualities? From another Idea perhaps? If so, then there must be a relationship between this Idea and the relationship that exists between the object and its Idea. And this new relationship requires yet another Idea which requires yet another and so forth *ad infinitum*. Thus it seems that if we assume the existence of one Idea, we also have to assume an infinite amount of other Ideas to support it; thus, Platonism seems to fall into an endless regression. And so does Schopenhauer; by assuming the existence of Platonic Ideas, he does manage to save himself from a tight spot (namely the problem of one Will versus the multitude of phenomena) but by doing so he, being either unaware of it or refusing to accept it, only sets a rock rolling downhill for the great displeasure of poor Sisyphus.

⁶⁶ I must note here as a curiosity that Schopenhauer actually explains in a rather Freudian manner what kind of will we exactly are. In his ever so delightful essay *The Metaphysics of Sexual Love (World as Will and Representation, vol.2, chapter XLIV)* he states that through our sexuality the Will objectifies itself most thoroughly and that only through sexual behaviour the Will can ensure the continuation of the species. Indeed, for Schopenhauer, humans are nothing but sexual lust turned into flesh; thus, not only irrationality but also sexuality precedes our rationality. To my mind, this emphasis of the irrational sides over rationality is perhaps Schopenhauer's most significant gift to modern thought.

⁶⁷ This is the reason why understanding must know causality - in part 4.3. this reason remained open and finds its answer here.

⁶⁸ I wonder if Schopenhauer was aware of the obvious vicious circle he's stepped into: on the other hand, as we have seen, the world is dependent on the subject's mind, because only it can sustain the world of phenomena; and on the other hand, the mind is a part of this world as an expression of Will. Therefore the mind on the other hand conditions the world and on the other hand the world conditions the mind, and thus, Schopenhauer's theory of the mind seems rather contradictory.

6. Summary of the Schopenhauerian metaphysics

As we have reached the end of our path, this essay draws to a closure. We are now in the full position of explaining the two sentences that summarize Schopenhauer's philosophy.

In the timeless and spaceless reality only a thing called Will exists; devoid of all ration, its essence is to perpetually want, and without knowing what it actually wants, the Will is like a hamster in a running wheel: it runs and runs without ever reaching an end. Therefore the whole of reality is in a constant state of willing; this is its inner core and whole essence. But there has to be something through which this willing is expressed, and thus the Will has to develop a way to fulfil its essence, and it does this through the Platonic Ideas, through the different grades of willing between which a struggle can occur. These Ideas again are the bases of the particular things, which acquire their forms from the Ideas. Therefore the world of objects in a sense rises from the inner turmoil of the Will: the world of objects serves as the medium through which the Will attempts to fulfil its unknown needs. And because every object, including me, is an expression of this one and the same Will, I can indeed say: "The world is my will".

Now the Will finds its fullest expression in the human race: it is the human mind that makes us able to understand the world better than any other being; it is the eye that makes us kings in the land of the blind. But even though the mind is such a complex thing, it is by no means perfect: it cannot understand the Will as it is in itself, but instead has to turn it into an appearance. It is forced to do this since the whole world is an act of will and hence by nature action; and since the mind cannot perceive pure action without something that acts, it must add matter to the world, and hence, create the material world. Furthermore, this acting appears as causality in this world, and it thus requires the forms of time and space to become conceivable. Therefore the world of Will, when translated by the mind, appears to be a spatio-temporal place full of material objects. This appearance is what we call a representation, and due to the limitations of our mind, we have to be satisfied with this vague image since we can never transcend its boundaries – quite tautologically, we cannot perceive the imperceptible or think the unthinkable. Hence: "The world is my representation".

Therefore Schopenhauer argues that the world is twofold by nature: on the other hand, it is Will and on the other, it is a representation. Yet these both are only separates sides of a coin: the former is the world as it is in itself and latter is the world as it appears to the subject of experience. Hence the sentences "the world is my will" and "the world is my representation" explain the two different aspects of the one and the same world – in this gargantuan puppet theatre that we call the world, the former is the view of the despotic puppeteer and the latter that of the ignorant actors.

7. Bibliography

- [1] **Kant, Immanuel** (1998) *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood. Cambridge University Press, New York.

- [2] **Salomaa, Jalmari Edward** (1999) *Filosofian historia, osat 1-2*, 2nd edition. Kampus Kustannus, Jyväskylä.

- [3] **Schopenhauer, Arthur** (1969) *The World as Will and Representation, vol. I-II*, trans. E.F.J. Payne, 1st edition. Dover Publications Inc, New York.

- [4] **Schopenhauer, Arthur** (1974) *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, trans. E.F.J. Payne, 1st edition. Open Court Publishing Company.

Front cover image modified from:

<http://www.marxists.org/glossary/people/s/pics/schopenh.jpg> (read 8.8.2007 14.06)