

The World as Will and Representation

Arthur SCHOPENHAUER | Summary | Philosophy of Reality

Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I/II, offer a detailed exploration of his philosophical framework. He argues that the world is fundamentally driven by a blind, insatiable will, which manifests itself in both the physical world and individual consciousness. Schopenhauer further discusses the nature of knowledge, distinguishing between perception and abstract reasoning, and examines the relationship between will, reason, and morality. He criticizes the philosophies of his predecessors, including Kant and Fichte, and offers alternative perspectives on concepts like freedom, ethics, and religion.

The vol I, divided in four books, First Book: The World as Representation, First Aspect; Second Book: The World as Will, First Aspect; Third Book: The World as Representation, Second Aspect; Fourth Book: The World as Will: Second Aspect; delve into the complexities of human suffering, the pursuit of happiness, and the potential for self-denial and liberation through an understanding of the will's true nature.

Central Themes

1. **The Primacy of Will:** Schopenhauer fundamentally diverges from traditional philosophy by asserting that the driving force behind all phenomena, including human behaviour, is not reason but **will**. This "will" is a blind, insatiable striving for existence and self-preservation, operating independently of knowledge and reason.
 "If, therefore, the material world is to be something more than our mere representation, we must say that, besides being the representation, and hence in itself and of its inmost nature, it is what we find immediately in ourselves as will."
 "The will reveals itself just as completely and just as much in one oak as in millions. Their number, their multiplication in space and time, has no meaning with regard to the will."
2. **The World as Representation:** Schopenhauer adopts Kant's distinction between the phenomenal world (the world as it appears to us) and the noumenal world (the

world in itself). He argues that we can only access the world through our representations, shaped by our senses and intellect.

"On the other hand, the man who has not mastered the Kantian philosophy, whatever else he may have studied, is, so to speak, in a state of innocence; in other words, he has remained in the grasp [of the phenomenal world]."

3. **The Limitations of Reason:** Schopenhauer acknowledges the power of reason for understanding the phenomenal world, particularly in science and mathematics. However, he emphasizes that reason is ultimately a tool of the will, unable to penetrate the true nature of reality (the will itself).

"But through purely logical chains of reasoning, however true the premisses may be, we shall never obtain more than an elucidation and exposition of what already lies complete in the premisses"

"If we stick to the ground peculiar to mathematics, we gain the great advantage that in it the rational knowledge that something is so is one with the rational knowledge why it is so."

4. **Suffering and the Human Condition:** Schopenhauer's philosophy is deeply pessimistic, recognizing the pervasiveness of suffering in human existence. He attributes this suffering to the insatiable nature of the will, constantly driving us towards desires that can never be fully satisfied.

"This fate is want, wretchedness, misery, lamentation, and death. Eternal justice prevails; if they were not as a whole contemptible, their fate as a whole would not be so melancholy."

Key Ideas and Facts

Critique of Traditional Philosophy: Schopenhauer criticizes historical and emanationist philosophies for failing to grasp the timeless and groundless nature of the will. He rejects the search for a beginning or end to the world, emphasizing that "an endless time, in other words an endless time, has already elapsed up to the present moment."

Concept-Spheres and Persuasion: Schopenhauer utilizes a visual representation of concept-spheres to illustrate the nature of logic and persuasion. He argues that persuasion often relies on manipulating the overlapping nature of concept-spheres, leading individuals towards desired conclusions.

Mathematics and Intuition: He distinguishes between purely logical reasoning and mathematical knowledge, arguing that the latter's certainty stems from its grounding in a priori intuitions of space. He praises Euclid's geometrical approach but criticizes its separation of "what" and "why."

Platonic Ideas and Objectification of Will: Schopenhauer borrows from Plato's theory of Ideas, defining them as fixed grades of the will's

objectification, representing archetypes of phenomena. However, he departs from Plato by positing the will as the underlying force behind these Ideas.

Ethics and the Denial of Will: Schopenhauer identifies justice as the negation of wrong, arising from a limited understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings. True virtue, however, lies in the complete denial of the will, achievable through ascetic practices and a radical shift in knowledge.

"Therefore, it is not a question of a change, but of an entire suppression of the character; and so it happens that, however different the characters that arrived at that suppression were before it, they nevertheless show after it a great similarity in their mode of conduct."

The Arts and Aesthetic Contemplation: Schopenhauer views art, particularly music, as offering temporary liberation from the suffering of the will. He argues that art allows us to experience the world through pure, will-less contemplation, providing glimpses of beauty and the sublime.

Critique of Kant: Schopenhauer builds upon Kant's philosophy but also offers significant critiques. He criticizes Kant's language as convoluted and his system as overly complex. He specifically targets Kant's categories of understanding and his theory of the "thing-in-itself" as problematic.

Rejection of Reason as Moral Foundation: Schopenhauer disagrees with philosophers who equate morality with rationality. He contends that virtue stems not from reason, but from a deep intuitive understanding of the shared nature of all beings, encapsulated in the Vedic phrase "Tat tvam asi" ("This art thou!").

Book 1: The World as Representation

- **The Object of Experience and its Forms.** This section establishes the foundation of Schopenhauer's philosophy, building upon Kant's transcendental idealism. It explores how our understanding of the world is shaped by the inherent forms of our perception, namely space, time, and causality.
- **The Theory of Knowledge.** This section delves into the nature of knowledge, differentiating between intuitive and abstract representation. Schopenhauer emphasizes the crucial role of the understanding in perception, arguing that it is through understanding that we interpret and make sense of sensory input.
- **The Doctrine of the Abstract Representation or of Thinking.** This section focuses on the faculty of reason and its function in forming abstract concepts. Schopenhauer utilizes a schematic representation of concept spheres to illustrate the logical relationships between concepts, explaining how this system underpins the formation of judgments and syllogisms.

- **On the Basis of the Theory of Knowledge.** Building upon the preceding sections, Schopenhauer applies his theory of knowledge to analyse the foundations of mathematics and the natural sciences. He emphasizes the role of intuition in mathematics and the limitations of purely logical reasoning in comprehending the world.
- **On the Doctrine of the Ideas.** This section introduces Schopenhauer's concept of the Idea, defined as a fixed grade of the will's objectification. It explores the Platonic influence on his understanding of Ideas as eternal forms or prototypes.
- **On the Aesthetics of Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting.** This section delves into the realm of aesthetics, examining the arts of architecture, sculpture, and painting as expressions of the Ideas. Schopenhauer argues that art allows us to momentarily transcend the individual will and contemplate the eternal forms of the world.

Book 2: The World as Will

- **The Concept of Will in General.** This section marks a shift from the world as representation to the world as will. Schopenhauer posits the will as the ultimate reality underlying all phenomena, arguing that it is a blind, striving force that seeks its own satisfaction.
- **The Objectification of the Will.** Schopenhauer explores the various ways in which the will manifests itself in the world, from inorganic forces like gravity to the complex phenomena of life and consciousness. He argues that all these manifestations are different grades of the will's objectification, each expressing its essence in a unique way.
- **The Will in Nature.** This section examines the will as it operates in the natural world, focusing on its manifestations in the plant and animal kingdoms. Schopenhauer argues that the will's ceaseless striving drives the struggle for existence and the constant change and evolution of life.
- **The Metaphysics of the Love of the Sexes.** Schopenhauer dedicates this section to analysing the sexual impulse as a powerful manifestation of the will to live. He argues that the sexual drive serves the will's aim of self-preservation through procreation, driving individuals to seek partners and perpetuate the species.

Book 3: The World as Representation Again

- **Idea of the Object as Such.** This section returns to the world as representation, exploring the relationship between the will and its objectification. Schopenhauer discusses how the Idea, as a distinct grade of the will's objectification, stands in relation to individual things as their eternal form or archetype.
- **Multiplicity of Individuals.** This section delves into the individuality of organisms, arguing that the degree of individual character diminishes as we

move down the chain of being. Schopenhauer suggests that only humans possess a strong sense of individuality, while it fades in animals and disappears entirely in inorganic matter.

- **On the Knowing and Feeling of the Individual.** This section explores human consciousness and the experience of being an individual. Schopenhauer examines the limitations of human knowledge and the role of the intellect in serving the will's desires.
- **Assertion and Denial of the Will-to-Live.** This section tackles the ethical implications of Schopenhauer's philosophy. He introduces the concept of the denial of the will-to-live, arguing that it is through knowledge and self-awareness that individuals can potentially overcome the blind striving of the will and achieve a state of liberation.
- **The Ethics of Compassion.** Schopenhauer emphasizes compassion as the foundation of ethical conduct. He argues that compassion arises from a recognition of the shared suffering of all beings, motivating individuals to act with kindness and minimize the pain inflicted upon others.
- **The Metaphysics of Music.** Schopenhauer dedicates this section to exploring the power of music as a unique art form. He argues that music transcends the limitations of other arts by directly expressing the will itself, offering a profound insight into the inner nature of reality.

Book 4: The World as Will: Second Consideration

- **On the Affirmation of the Will-to-Live.** This section revisits and expands upon the concept of the will-to-live. Schopenhauer examines the various ways in which the will asserts itself in the world, driving individuals to seek pleasure and avoid pain.
- **On the Denial of the Will-to-Live.** This section provides a more in-depth exploration of the denial of the will-to-live. Schopenhauer argues that this denial is a challenging process that requires a profound shift in consciousness, leading to a renunciation of worldly desires and a detachment from egoistic striving.

Conclusion

Schopenhauer's philosophy, as revealed in these excerpts, is a challenging and profound exploration of the human condition. He offers a unique perspective on the nature of reality, the limitations of reason, and the possibility of transcending the suffering inherent in existence. His work serves as a powerful critique of traditional philosophical approaches and continues to provoke thought and debate among scholars and individuals alike.

Glossary of Key Terms

Will:

The fundamental, underlying reality of the world. It is a blind, striving force that manifests itself in all phenomena.

Representation:

The phenomenal world, experienced through our senses and intellect. It is the appearance of the will.

Principium Individuationis:

The principle of individuation, which creates the illusion of separate individual things in space and time.

Idea:

A definite and fixed grade of the will's objectification, existing outside of plurality and serving as a prototype for individual things.

Concept-sphere:

A metaphorical representation of a concept as a sphere, used to illustrate the logical relationships between concepts.

Groundless:

Not subject to the principle of sufficient reason; existing beyond the realm of causality.

Wrong:

Extending the affirmation of one's own will to the point of denying the will appearing in other individuals.

Justice:

Recognizing and accepting the moral boundary between right and wrong, refraining from harming others to benefit oneself.

Goodness:

Active benevolence and well-doing motivated by a deeper understanding of the shared nature of the will in all beings.

Saintliness:

The highest ethical achievement, involving complete denial of the will-to-live through asceticism and self-renunciation.