



The Spirit of Pessimism in Arthur Schopenhauer's Moral Philosophy

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Abstract: This article is dedicated to the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, particularly focusing on his concepts of will, morality, and piety. From Schopenhauer's point of view, the will is the primary creative principle of the world, functioning as an unconscious and blind force. He bases moral consciousness on compassion, which he considers the foundation for human solidarity and overcoming selfishness. The article analyzes the contradictory relationship between goodness and the will to live: the moral individual seeks piety through an understanding of suffering, which ultimately leads to the denial of the will and results in either deep philosophical pessimism or supreme serenity. Schopenhauer's views on suicide, palingenesis, and nirvana are also explored. This analysis reveals the profound meanings behind the philosopher's pessimistic worldview and moral philosophy.

Keywords: Will, consciousness, representation, aesthetic contemplation, moral consciousness, compassion, justice, philanthropy, denial of the will, piety, palingenesis, ecstasy, philosophical pessimism.

Introduction: Arthur Schopenhauer is one of the most complex and influential philosophers of the 19th century, distinguished by his unique views on the fundamental forces of the world and human existence. This article examines Schopenhauer's concept of "will," its unconscious nature, and its relationship to morality. According to him, the will is the main driving force of the world, characterized by blind and uncontrollable traits. Moral consciousness, in his view, is based on compassion, which appears as the source of goodness and philanthropy. However, in Schopenhauer's pessimistic worldview, the moral individual is compelled to struggle against the suffering brought by the will to live and seeks higher goals through piety and denial of the will. This analysis aims to reveal key aspects of

Schopenhauer's philosophy concerning morality, goodness, and human destiny, providing a deeper look into his paradoxical ideas.

METHODOLOGY

The article employs various methods such as historical-analytical, comparative, logical-analytical, philosophical-ontological, gnoseological, axiological (value-based) analysis, and ethical-moral analysis.

Literature Review

This article uses various sources to analyze Schopenhauer's philosophy, which serve as a scientific foundation for explaining his worldview, doctrine of will, moral views, and philosophical methodology. Fundamental works on the history of philosophy and studies on Schopenhauer take a central place, particularly ideas from his major work *The World as Will and Representation*. These sources are the primary materials for analyzing the concept of "will," as well as his epistemology and ethics. Literature on Immanuel Kant's philosophy and his influence—especially Kant's doctrine of transcendental idealism—is highlighted as a key foundation of Schopenhauer's thought. Eastern philosophical sources, especially those related to Buddhism and Hinduism, are significant for understanding Schopenhauer's ideas about struggle against the will. These works uncover the roots of concepts like "nirvana" and "overcoming desire." Modern philosophical analyses and studies in the form of scholarly articles, monographs, and authorial works explore Schopenhauer's place in contemporary philosophy, his influence, and critical interpretations. Such sources help understand his irrationalism, pessimism, and existential direction. Philosophical literature on morality and ethics is also employed to analyze his moral concepts, including the philosophical basis for compassion and the denial of the will. These texts are crucial for scientifically presenting the ideas in the article, deeply understanding the essence of Schopenhauer's philosophy, and identifying his place in the history of philosophy. They serve not only as historical sources but also play a vital role in modern philosophical analysis.

RESULTS

Is morality possible within the framework of Schopenhauer's philosophy? According to Schopenhauer, "will is unconscious." It is the absolute primary principle of the world and, in particular, of human existence. It possesses a spontaneous source of development. Indeed, according to Schopenhauer, the will is inherently and initially unconscious and blind. In his philosophy, it is this blind, uncontrollable, and unrestrained force that drives the creation of life

realities—the unconscious will brings things into existence. The entire course of world history—from the emergence of natural, inanimate phenomena to the creation of intelligent beings with awareness and self-consciousness—occurs due to the unconscious will. It progresses through various stages of development to manifest in reality. The process of humans learning about the surrounding world, according to Schopenhauer, is made known to human consciousness through representation. In particular, the starting point of knowledge lies neither in the object nor in human consciousness, but in representation. Representation, always and everywhere influenced by the will, ensures the development of human cognitive ability.

According to Schopenhauer, the phenomenon that expresses detachment even more firmly than aesthetic contemplation is moral consciousness. The sole foundational source of morality is compassion. Compassion is a phenomenon in which a person accepts another's suffering as their own. Metaphysically, compassion in the world of will signifies human solidarity. Truly accepting another's pain as one's own indicates that I am also a person like them. Understanding such a state destroys selfishness. According to Schopenhauer, compassion, through justice and philanthropy, forms the two main foundations of goodness. Philanthropy urges us to ease the suffering of others, while justice demands that we do no harm to them. All other forms of goodness stem from these two.

At first glance, Schopenhauer's high regard for goodness seems incompatible with his notion of the Will to life. After all, a moral person alleviates the suffering of others and strives to make them happy, which in turn strengthens the Will to life. However, according to the philosopher, the moral person is fully aware that the lives of rational beings are filled with suffering. The selfish person, on the other hand, tries to improve their own life, forgets the suffering of others, and emphasizes a spirit of cheerfulness. For the moral person, this path is entirely closed. Sooner or later, they adopt a position of philosophical pessimism and begin to search for ways to escape it.

This radical path leads the individual toward the practice of piety—that is, to struggle against their own personal will. According to Schopenhauer, partial manifestation of the will occurs in "moments of union" [1; 152]. Therefore, the first step toward denying the will is choosing solitude (not starting a family). The next stage of piety, as he writes, consists of "deliberately condemning oneself to poverty" [1; 325]. Ideally, the pious person must condemn themselves to starvation. Hunger becomes the only path to self-annihilation. From such statements, one might conclude that

Schopenhauer advocates suicide. However, the thinker does not hold this position. He views “classical” suicide as a trick of the cosmic Will. The issue is that the person committing suicide does not reject the Will to life—they reject life itself. They love life, but something in that life stands in their way, so they attempt to settle accounts with it. This is a paradoxical situation. The inevitability of death softens the reality of existence.

The theme of death as a necessity greatly interested Schopenhauer. He completely disagrees with the idea that the individual might retain “a unified self with its memories” after bodily death. Schopenhauer ties personal qualities to brain activity, and the death of the brain leads to the disappearance of the individual. On the other hand, “the intellectual activity of each person” is not bodily in nature. Therefore, this activity may continue after bodily decomposition. Outwardly, the Will remains without intellect—there is a will to know, but it is not realized. Over time, it takes on another form.

From a practical point of view, the new person does not fully repeat the former one—this occurs only partially and over time. Time serves as a principle of individuation. Nevertheless, there is inevitably a connection between individuals. Of course, Schopenhauer rejects the idea of metempsychosis (the transmigration of the soul), meaning that he denies the complete transfer of the soul into another body. Instead, he refers to his theory as “palingenesis.” Palingenesis is “the disintegration and reshaping of the individual, wherein the will remains and enters a new form of existence with a new intellect” [2; 214].

Thus, suicide becomes clearer: the ordinary suicide rejects life, but not the will. Therefore, its contemplative nature reemerges. The pious person, however, gradually extinguishes the Will to life and exits the cycle of rebirth.

But what awaits the person who has renounced the Will? This is indeed a difficult question. One thing is clear: the life of the pious person is initially filled with suffering. They consciously move toward it, but this is not limited to suffering alone: “For whoever has been born with the capacity to extinguish the Will to life... possesses inner joy and heavenly serenity” [2; 331]. It can be imagined that the complete extinction of the Will to life illuminates a new radiance within the contemplative nature of the individual. This state can be likened to “ecstasy, bliss, and union with God” [2; 348]. However, this crosses into the realm of the non-philosophical: “Remaining within the bounds of philosophy, we must be content with negative knowledge” [2; 348].

Schopenhauer’s reference to this is no accident: “At

the end of my philosophy,” he writes, “I have crossed into the realm of illuminism; this is a clear fact. However, I have restrained myself from taking a full step into it... I have remained, as far as possible, within the bounds of objective rationalism” [3; 10]. The philosophical answer to the state of the Will lies in conceiving of it as a kind of Nothingness. Philosophy does not interpret this Nothingness as absolute, but rather in a relative sense—this requires the application of illuminative experience. The world as a thing-in-itself does not correspond directly to the Will to life. If it did, its denial would result in pure Nothingness. The concept of the Will to life is based on how it manifests; it may have other characteristics as well. The extinction of the Will to life may reveal new qualities. Philosophy shows that these qualities cannot be conceptualized through the categories of subject and object. If illuminative experience is employed, then the distinctions between subject and object disappear.

And finally, philosophy explains that the manifestation of the thing-in-itself as the denial of the individual will does not mean the extinction of the Universal Will. The individual will, as the thing-in-itself, is merely a partial fragment of the Will. In other words, only the sage attains nirvana—not the entire world. Yet it is not only sages who reach nirvana; heroes, too, are honored with it. They struggle for the common good and serve the cause of goodness. Schopenhauer considered himself a hero. A philosopher need not be a sage. His duty is to reveal the truth, even if he no longer has the strength to follow it.

CONCLUSION

Within the framework of Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophy, the concept of morality is closely intertwined with human consciousness, will, and suffering. According to his teaching, the fundamental source of the world and human existence is the unconscious and blind Will. A person’s capacity for knowledge is formed through representation, which serves as the starting point of consciousness. For Schopenhauer, moral consciousness is even stronger than aesthetic contemplation because it urges a person to empathize with the suffering of others. Compassion is the primary source of morality; it gives rise to justice and humaneness.

However, this moral state leads a person toward philosophical pessimism, as the rational individual comes to understand the suffering inherent in life. Schopenhauer views the extinguishing of the Will as the moral solution. He sees piety—that is, the struggle against one’s own will—as the highest point of human perfection. Such a person renounces their desires and even seeks to free themselves from the will through

hunger. According to him, ordinary suicide is merely a rejection of life, not of the Will. Therefore, a truly moral person chooses the path of extinguishing the Will and escapes the wheel of rebirth (palingenesis).

As a result, in Schopenhauer's philosophy, morality is expressed through the extinguishing of the Will, striving for goodness through compassion, and the idea that only in this way can a person attain "inner peace and divine ecstasy."

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