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ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER
Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will

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ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

*Prize Essay on the
Freedom of the Will*

EDITED BY
GÜNTER ZÖLLER
University of Iowa

TRANSLATED BY
ERIC F. J. PAYNE



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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page vii
<i>Introduction</i>	ix
<i>Chronology</i>	xxx
<i>Further reading</i>	xxxiii
<i>Note on the text and translation</i>	xxxv
Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will	I
I Definitions	3
II The will before self-consciousness	12
III The will before the consciousness of other things	23
IV Predecessors	56
V Conclusion and higher view	81
Appendix, supplementing the first section	89
<i>Appendix: Eric F. J. Payne, translator</i>	93
BRYAN MAGEE	
<i>Index</i>	97

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[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

The plan for this edition goes back to conversations about Schopenhauer with Bryan Magee in the common room at Wolfson College, Oxford, in the latter part of Hilary term 1994. In the course of our discussions I brought up the fact that the *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will* was missing from the extensive list of Schopenhauer translations published by the late Eric Payne, the main English translator of Schopenhauer in the twentieth century. I ventured the theory that Payne had undertaken the translation of the *Prize Essay* but failed to publish it after another translation of the work appeared in 1960. Bryan Magee, who had known Eric Payne, agreed to contact Payne's grandson and heir, Christophe Egret, in an effort to search for the missing translation among Payne's literary remains. Several months after my return to the States, the typescript with Payne's complete translation of Schopenhauer's *Prize Essay* arrived in the mail. Karl Ameriks took an interest in the work, kindly agreed to publish it in the series Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, and provided valuable editorial advice. Christophe Egret graciously granted permission to use the translation. Bryan Magee gladly contributed a note on Eric Payne. I am most grateful to Bryan Magee, Christophe Egret, and Karl Ameriks for their support of this project, and to Hilary Gaskin for seeing it through to publication. Further thanks go to the fellows of Queen's College, Oxford, and especially Susanne Bobzien for making me an additional member of Common Room at Queen's in 1994. Special thanks are due to my wife and colleague, Marlena Corcoran, for introducing me to Bryan Magee, her fellow visiting fellow at Wolfson at the time.

In 1996 the University of Iowa Libraries acquired Eric Payne's

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literary remains along with the rights to their use for research and publication. Edward Shreeves, Director of Collections and Information Resources, University of Iowa Libraries, granted permission to use Payne's translation of the *Prize Essay* for the present edition.

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Introduction

In April 1837 the Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences announced the following prize question in a German literary journal:

Can the freedom of the will be proven from self-consciousness?

The entry for which the prize, a gold medal, was awarded in 1839 had been submitted by one Arthur Schopenhauer, a fifty-two-year-old German private scholar residing in Frankfurt-on-Main, for whom this was his first public recognition as a philosopher. None of Schopenhauer's earlier publications, including the first edition of his main work, *The World as Will and Representation* (1818),¹ had attracted any attention in the world of academic philosophy, and it was not until some fifteen years after the *Prize Essay* and then in the decades after his death in 1860 that Schopenhauer became recognized and admired as the leading philosophical voice of the time.

Given the conditions of anonymity under which the *Prize Essay* had to be submitted to the Society, Schopenhauer was not able to refer explicitly and specifically to his previously published views on the matter. As a result, the *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will* is a freestanding piece of philosophy, and one of the more lucid and penetrating examinations of the topic, at that. The independent and self-sufficient status of the work is further due to Schopenhauer's estrangement from the academic philosophy of his day. At a time when the idealist metaphysics of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) and his followers, with its detailed knowledge claims

¹ Trans. Eric F. J. Payne, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1974). Vol. I corresponds to the first edition of the work.

Introduction

about the absolute or God, dominated the teaching of philosophy at German universities, Schopenhauer upheld the critical standards for any possible metaphysics introduced by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781; second, revised edition 1787)² and the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783).³ It was not until the mid nineteenth century that German academic philosophy, in a movement which came to be known as neo-Kantianism,⁴ returned to its roots in Kant, to which Schopenhauer had stayed close all along.

To be sure, even Schopenhauer's allegiance to Kant was selective and revisionist. Most notably, he rejected the categorical imperative as the principle of morality, replacing the command to act on a principle of action that can be consistently willed by everyone with an ethics of compassion built on the recognition of the ultimate identity of doer and sufferer.⁵ Most important, Schopenhauer identified Kant's "thing in itself," that unknown and unknowable reality behind the spatiotemporal order of things, with the will, understood to include striving of all kinds in all kinds of beings.⁶ But Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will is virtually absent from the *Prize Essay*, as is his critique of Kant's ethics. In fact, the work can be regarded as a systematic presentation of the Kantian position on the matter and as such could have been written half a century earlier, were it not for the polemical asides on the development of philosophy since Kant.

A sketch of Schopenhauer's life

Schopenhauer's position as an outsider in academic life in general and university philosophy in particular is rooted in his life story as a gentleman scholar of independent means and an equally independent mind. Born on 22 February 1788 in the free city of Danzig (today's

² Trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). The *Critique of Pure Reason* will be cited after the pagination of the first and second editions ("A" and "B," respectively) indicated in the standard modern editions and translations of the work.

³ Trans. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). The *Prolegomena* will be cited after the pagination of the work in vol. IV of the Academy edition (*Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences and its successors [Berlin: Reimer, later de Gruyter, 1900ff.]) indicated in the standard modern editions and translations of the work.

⁴ See Klaus Christian Köhnke, *The Rise and Fall of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy Between Idealism and Positivism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁵ See Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. Eric F. J. Payne. rev. ed. with an introduction by David E. Cartwright (Providence, RI and Oxford: Berghahn, 1995).

⁶ See *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 93ff.

Introduction

Gdansk in Poland) into a wealthy Hanseatic merchant family and destined to be the future head of the family firm, Schopenhauer was free to pursue his scholarly interests only after his father's sudden death in 1805 (probably by suicide). He studied sciences and philosophy at the University of Göttingen (1809–11) and the University of Berlin (1811–13) and received his doctorate *in absentia* from the University of Jena in 1813. The main influences on his philosophical outlook were Plato and Kant, and, later, Hindu and Buddhist thought, which he was the first European philosopher to incorporate in his philosophical work. Another formative influence was Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832), whom he met in the literary salon of his mother, Johanna Schopenhauer, in Weimar. Schopenhauer was only thirty when he published his main philosophical work, which was the first completely elaborated system of philosophy to appear since Kant.⁷

Schopenhauer spent the next four decades supplementing and expanding it in monographs and essay collections. Throughout his life he kept up with the latest scientific developments, especially in physiology, as well as with political events at home and abroad. Although nominally affiliated with the University of Berlin as an unsalaried lecturer from 1819 until 1831, he conducted a lecture course only once (1820). Schopenhauer traveled extensively throughout Europe, living in France, England, and Italy for extended periods of time and finally settling in Frankfurt-on-Main in 1833, where he died on 21 September 1860. His influence reaches from Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche through Sigmund Freud and Ludwig Wittgenstein to Samuel Beckett. He remains one of the finest writers of German prose.

The organization of the Prize Essay

The *Prize Essay* is in five sections. The first section defines the key concepts referred to in the Society's question, viz., freedom and self-consciousness. The second section provides an answer in the negative to the question posed: it is impossible to prove the freedom of the will from self-consciousness. The third section widens the basis of the

⁷ The two further competitors for the title of first complete philosophical system since Kant, Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* from 1800 and Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* from 1817, are more schemas of a complete philosophical system than actual, specific, and detailed executions of such a system.

Introduction

investigation by turning to a possible alternative source of evidence for the freedom of the will, viz., the consciousness of other things. But again the answer is negative: it is impossible to prove the freedom of the will from the consciousness of other objects. Moreover, in principle there can be no instance of freedom of the will anywhere in the sphere of experience. In the fourth section Schopenhauer presents philosophical, theological, and literary predecessors who held or defended the view that there is no freedom of the will. The short fifth section provides a last-minute dramatic reversal of the situation by appealing to the phenomenon of moral responsibility as evidence for the freedom of the will and by introducing a “higher view” from which the freedom of the will can be maintained although not explained or understood. The essay concludes with an appendix supplementing the definitional considerations of freedom in section I.

One might regard Schopenhauer’s treatment of the freedom of the will as a rigorous and successful defense of determinism, the position that everything in experience is completely determined as to the time and place of its occurrence. The final rescue effort on behalf of the will’s freedom might then be dismissed as inconsistent with the main parts of the work and to be eliminated from consideration in the text. But such a selective appropriation of the *Prize Essay* as a canonical defense of determinism would not only be incomplete but would also overlook the preparation for the dramatic finale in the preceding sections of the work. Far from being a relapse into a previously overcome position, the concluding defense of freedom is the well-prepared culmination of the *Prize Essay*.

Physical, intellectual, and moral freedom

For Schopenhauer, freedom is a *negative* concept that indicates the absence of hindrances to the exercise of some force. Depending on the nature of the force that is subject to or free from hindrances, three kinds of freedom are to be distinguished. *Physical freedom* is the absence of *material* hindrances in the exercise of some *physical force*. *Intellectual freedom* is the absence of *intellectual* impairment in some *cognitive force* or in cognition. *Moral freedom* is the absence of *motivational* hindrances in some *volitional force* or in willing.

Each of the three forms of freedom bears a relation to the will. The

Introduction

physical freedom of the will consists in its ability to be exercised free of external, physical constraints. Intellectual freedom is the will's freedom from cognitive error. Moral freedom is the freedom of the will from motivational constraints, historically expressed in the Latin term *liberum arbitrium* or "free choice of the will." It is the third kind of freedom, moral freedom, that is at issue in the *Prize Essay*.

After consigning the discussion of intellectual freedom to the appendix, Schopenhauer clarifies further the conceptual difference between physical and moral freedom. It is important to realize that the terminological contrast between the two kinds of freedom does not concern the specific opposition between nature and morality but refers to the more general distinction between the physical domain and the psychical or mental domain. The wider sense of "moral" that is operative here underlies, e.g., the older designation of the humanities as the "moral sciences."

Physical freedom is defined as the ability to act in accordance with one's will in the absence of external hindrances. Freedom so defined does not concern the question whether the will itself might be constrained but involves only the relation between a given will and the action willed and carried out under conditions of physical freedom. Schopenhauer sees no problem in asserting the reality of freedom in the physical sense. In fact, in line with popular linguistic practice, he even extends the application of the concept to include not only human, rational animals but animal beings in general and applies it as well to collective entities such as nations or peoples.

In the case of moral freedom, the concept of freedom no longer concerns the freedom to do as one wills, but the freedom of willing or that of the will itself. The question is no longer whether one can *do* what one *wills*, but whether – in Schopenhauer's own intentionally paradoxical formulation – one can *will* what one wills. Formulated this way, the question suggests the possible dependence of one's overt, manifest will on some hidden prior will, and so on *ad infinitum*. Schopenhauer's point here is that the ordinary, popular thinking about freedom, as codified in the physical sense of the term, is ill suited to posing the question of the moral freedom of the will.

In order to address more adequately the sense in which the will itself and as such might be free, Schopenhauer turns to an alternative generic definition of freedom, again a negative one, viz., the absence of *necessity*,

Introduction

and proceeds to define the underlying positive conception of necessity. Necessary is what follows from a given sufficient reason or ground.⁸ Schopenhauer regards necessity and consequence from a sufficient ground or reason as reciprocal concepts that define each other. Something is the sufficient reason for something else if and only if the former and the latter are related with necessity as ground and consequent.

Schopenhauer had devoted his doctoral dissertation of 1813 to a systematic study of the principle of sufficient reason. The dissertation, first published in 1814 and later revised (1841) in light of his main work, to which it serves as an introduction of sorts, has remained the classic treatment of the principle.⁹ In the *Prize Essay* Schopenhauer recapitulates the main points of the earlier work.

Schopenhauer distinguishes three kinds of reason and, accordingly, three kinds of necessity, to which he will later add a fourth kind of ground and necessity pertinent to the human will. First, there is reason in the *logical* sense, and the associated logical necessity, which obtains, e.g., between the premise or premises of an argument and the conclusion. If the premises are given, the conclusion necessarily follows.

Second, there is the *mathematical* sense of reason and the allied mathematical necessity, exemplified by the equality of the sides in a triangle with equal angles. Given the equality of the angles, equilaterality necessarily obtains.

Third, there is the *physical* sense of reason and its peculiar physical necessity, which holds between cause and effect in the physical world. The effect occurs as soon as the cause is given. Schopenhauer regards the law of causality, according to which every event in the physical world has a cause from which it follows necessarily, as one of several manifestations of the general principle of sufficient reason that is said to govern thinking about objects of all kinds – logical and mathematical as well as physical objects.

Given the notion of necessity as consequence from a given sufficient reason, freedom understood as the absence of necessity would consist in

⁸ Schopenhauer follows the customary German translation of the Latin term “principium rationis sufficientis,” rendered in English as “principle of sufficient reason,” by employing the German term for “ground” (*Grund*) for the Latin “ratio” (*Satz vom zureichenden Grund*).

⁹ English translation of the second, revised edition as *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, trans. Eric F. J. Payne (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974). See also F. C. White, *On Schopenhauer's "Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason"* (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

Introduction

the lack of any sufficient reason and hence in utter contingency. The only realm in which there is contingency is the real or physical world. Therefore the ideal worlds of logic and mathematics remain out of consideration in Schopenhauer's further discussion of freedom, necessity, and contingency.

Now it is indeed the case that in the physical world an event is necessary only in relation to its own sufficient cause while being contingent with respect to all other circumstances. But nothing in the physical world is entirely contingent and not necessary with regard to anything. Yet to claim that something is free is to claim that it lacks necessity in each and every regard, and hence is entirely contingent. The free can be defined as that which is absolutely contingent.

Applied to the case of the human will, freedom as absolute contingency would consist in the fact that a particular act of volition is not determined by any sufficient reason in general and any cause in particular. But the very notion of an absolutely undetermined will or act of will is unintelligible. All human thinking follows the principle of sufficient reason in one of its specifically different forms. Still, there is a technical term for an absolutely undetermined will, viz., *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae* (free choice of indifference). The term implies that to a given individual under specifically determined circumstances two diametrically opposed actions are equally possible. Schopenhauer will return to this issue after defining self-consciousness and introducing the peculiar kind of necessity involved in human volition.

Defining self-consciousness

Schopenhauer distinguishes two kinds of consciousness or awareness: the consciousness of one's own self and the consciousness of other things, including other selves. He further identifies the latter with the faculty of cognition. Even the universal forms and conditions of all cognition, which – with Kant – he takes to be subjective in nature and identifies as space, time, and causality, are said to belong to the consciousness of other things rather than to self-consciousness. For Schopenhauer consciousness is primarily and for the most part directed toward the real world outside us, standing to it in the relation of apprehension and comprehension.

By contrast, self-consciousness is for Schopenhauer the immediate

Introduction

awareness of one's own *willing*. Self-consciousness is the consciousness of oneself as willing. The notion of willing employed here covers the whole range of a person's affective inner life, not just the resulting actual decisions and actions. In addition to the overtly volitional activities, it also includes the feelings of pleasure and displeasure. Schopenhauer is here effectively regrouping the faculty of desire and the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, which Kant had treated in strict separation in his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788)¹⁰ and *Critique of Judgment* (1790),¹¹ respectively, under the comprehensive heading of will, willing, or volition.

Whereas the sole object of self-consciousness as such is the ceaseless coming and going of positive or pleasurable and negative or displeasurable affections, the objects of the will's affective responses are provided by the outside world mediated through the faculty of cognition in the consciousness of objects. But any consideration of the will's dependence on the consciousness of other things already falls outside the narrow sphere of self-consciousness as such. It is that confined sphere which has to be examined for evidence of the will's freedom.

Wishing and willing

On Schopenhauer's analysis, the act of willing that forms the immediate object of self-consciousness occurs on the occasion of some instance of consciousness of other things. In fact, willing is nothing but the affective and appetitive reaction to a given external cognition. Schopenhauer terms the cognition insofar as it sets the will in motion the "motive." The question concerning the freedom of the will now takes the following form: whether the will – more precisely, the given particular act of the will or volition – is necessitated by the given motive, or whether, the given motive notwithstanding, the volitional act in question might not occur or some other volition might occur. Given the terms set by the Society, that question has to be answered on the basis of the data to be found in immediate self-consciousness.

But self-consciousness proves to be singularly ill equipped to address,

¹⁰ Trans. Mary Gregor, in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The *Critique of Practical Reason* is cited after the pagination of the work in vol. v of the Academy edition indicated in the standard modern editions and translations of the work.

¹¹ Trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995).

Introduction

much less answer, the question of the will's freedom. All that can be established on the basis of self-consciousness as such is that in any number of instances one can do what one wills, as evidenced by the immediate manifestations of one's willing in one's bodily activity. But this ability to act in accordance with the will is none other than the *physical* freedom already discussed and dismissed as beside the point to be established, viz., the (moral) freedom of willing that might, or might not, underlie the (physical) freedom of acting.

The insufficiency of the data provided by self-consciousness for determining whether the will is free is due to that faculty's structural limitations. The question of the will's freedom concerns the nature of the relation between motives, originating in the external world as perceived and comprehended by the human mind, and acts of volition, occurring in one's inner, affective world. But self-consciousness as such is limited to the latter and cannot provide any basis for judging the motivational force of some cognition on the very formation of the volition.

In the perspective of self-consciousness, desires and intentions arise and interact in various ways. But this multifarious and often contradictory *wishing* must not be confused with the eventual *willing* that replaces the previously entertained possible and possibly competing actions with the one deed actually willed and immediately carried out through bodily movement. There is no way to know the prevailing desire or intention before the decisive act of the will and its bodily manifestation have occurred. Much less is there any evidence available in self-consciousness about the circumstances of the will's decision process.

Schopenhauer attributes the widespread belief in the freedom of the will to the inability of the ordinary mind to distinguish between the statement that one is free to *think* or *consider* oneself willing any one of a number of contrary things, on the one hand, and the statement that one is free to *will* any one of a number of contrary things, on the other hand. The former statement is true; the latter statement requires further investigation, given the insufficient evidence provided by self-consciousness.

At this point the specific question of the Society about the evidential basis in self-consciousness for the freedom of the will has been answered in the negative. Schopenhauer proposes to continue the

Introduction

inquiry with the aim of complementing the previous direct and specific investigation of the actuality of freedom based on the data of self-consciousness with the indirect and more general investigation of the very possibility of a free will. If the impossibility of the will's freedom could be established independent of the inconclusive evidence of self-consciousness on the matter, then this would confirm in principle what has already been established on limited, empirical grounds. There can be no evidence of something that is not even possible in the first place.

Motivational causation

The alternative source of evidence to which Schopenhauer turns is the faculty of cognition. So far the will has been considered *subjectively* or from within one's own experience of willing. Henceforth the will is considered *objectively*, in the external perspective of an outside observer and examiner who seeks to ascertain the precise relation between motivational consciousness of objects and motivated will. The inquiry moves from the will as the immediate object of self-consciousness to the will as the mediate object of the consciousness of objects. In the new perspective the will comes into view as a faculty possessed by a being that exists in the physical world.

As part of an entity in the physical world, the will is subject to the principles and laws of nature, chief among them the law of causality. On Schopenhauer's view, the law of causality as one of the specific forms that the principle of sufficient reason takes invariably informs the experience of any being endowed with an understanding or intellect. In addition to governing the perception and conception of the physical world, the law of causality is also the basic law of the physical world so perceived and conceived. Schopenhauer here follows Kant's identification of the necessary conditions of experience on the part of a *subject* with the necessary conditions of the *objects* of that subject's experience.¹² Under the law of causality, all changes in the physical world have their sufficient reason or cause. Nothing happens without cause; and given its cause, it happens necessarily. The law holds strictly, without exception; everything in the real world that undergoes change is subject to it.

¹² See *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 111; *Prolegomena*, Academy edition, IV, 296.

Introduction

In order to ascertain what might be specific to the operation of the law of causality in the case of a being endowed with a will, Schopenhauer adopts the familiar classification of beings as lifeless or inorganic and living or organic, and further distinguishes between vegetative or plant life and animal life. In inorganic beings the specific causal relation obtains between a mechanical, physical, or chemical *cause* (or a cause in the narrow sense) and some such effect. In plants the specific causal relation holds between *stimulus*, such as water, air, and heat, and response, such as growth. In animals the specific causal relation takes the form of *motivation* understood as causality operating by means of cognition bringing about a willed action.

Schopenhauer offers an evolutionary account of the emergence and development of the cognitive and conative abilities of animal life. The increased organizational complexity of higher life forms brings with it a manifold of needs that can no longer be adequately satisfied on the basis of stimulus and response. In addition, there is now the animal's susceptibility to motives or its capacity to be moved by the representation of objects, i.e., by cognition. Schopenhauer attributes the capacity to represent relevant aspects of the world to *all* animals but notes the increase in cognitive abilities in correlation with the development of their physiological basis in the nervous system and the brain. Moreover, he identifies the animal's ability to act upon motives as *will*.

In nonrational animals the faculty of cognition is limited to the *perception* of what is immediately given. Nonrational cognition consists in the *intuitive* apprehension of the external world. For Schopenhauer the intuition of the spatiotemporal world already involves some operation of the intellect or understanding, which assigns to given sensations by means of the instinctually employed principle of causality a world of objects impinging upon the animal. In rational animals or human beings the faculty of cognition also includes reason, which is the ability to form universal concepts that transcend the specifics of a given situation. Once formed, the concepts are designated by words and used in all manners of combination, thereby adding to the perception of the external world through *intuition* its grasp through concepts introduced by the activity of *thought*.

Owing to reason or the rational faculty of cognition, the human being is susceptible to motives that are not directly given in perception but are present in the medium of thought. Moreover, the human being is

Introduction

able to exercise a measure of control over the motives that take the form of thoughts. Such motives can be compared and weighed against each other in acts of *deliberation*. Accordingly, rational animals exercise a much higher degree of choice in their volitional processes than nonrational animals. One may even speak of the *relative or comparative freedom* which human beings possess: they are free from the immediate compulsion through the intuitive, nonconceptual motives and hence free by comparison with their nonrational fellow animals.

But on closer inspection it becomes clear that the conceptually mediated motive is just as much a cause as the strictly perceptual motive. Freedom of deliberation is not freedom from motivation. In rational deliberation human consciousness becomes the battleground for conflicting motives, each of which seeks to influence the will. Finally, one motive prevails over the others and succeeds in determining the will. This is the moment of decision, which occurs by no means freely but in strict necessity, caused by the victorious motive.

In essence, the causal efficacy of motivation to be found in a being endowed with a will, or an animal, is no different from the causal necessity involved in the two lower forms of causality specific to inorganic matter and plants, respectively. In each case, some change is brought about with necessity, given a sufficient reason or cause. What is specifically different about motivational causation in general and rational motivational causation in particular is (1) the heterogeneity between the immaterial, merely mental cause and its physical effect of bodily motion, and (2) the fact that in motivation causality is no longer only externally observed, and perhaps measured, but actually experienced from within in its effect on the will. But this changes nothing in the causal necessitation of the will by the prevailing motive. Schopenhauer acknowledges the peculiarity of volitional or motivational causation by introducing it as a fourth form of the principle of sufficient reason.

Schopenhauer argues that a human being can just as little get up from a chair without a motive that compels him or her to do so than a billiard ball can move on a table before receiving a push. The human being is considered here as an object of experience subject to the same basic principle (the law of causality) as anything else to be encountered in space and time. To maintain the freedom of the human will would

Introduction

turn each and every human action into an “inexplicable miracle” by introducing effects without cause.

Motive and character

In further explaining the operation of causality in empirical objects in general and human beings in particular, Schopenhauer distinguishes two factors that jointly bring about the effect: (1) an original *force* inherent in the object on which the causal influence is being exercised and (2) a determining *cause* that makes the force manifest itself. Thus causal efficacy always requires some force, and any causal explanation needs to have recourse to some such force. Moreover, the force itself lies outside the domain of the relation between cause and effect; it underlies all causal relation but is not subject to it.

On Schopenhauer’s account of causality, the cause provides the occasion on which the force produces the effect. All causes are occasioning causes, and that out of which the effect proceeds is not the cause but the force. Forces in Schopenhauer take on the role of powers or capacities in earlier accounts of causation, such as Aristotle’s. Yet for Schopenhauer the recourse to forces is not sufficient to explain the necessity of physical change. Forces as potentialities need to be subject to specific conditions in order to actualize themselves in specific ways. Those conditions are provided by the causes.

With the introduction of forces as involved in all causality but neither caused nor causing, there emerges something nonphysical, even metaphysical, at the very core of physical reality in Schopenhauer. It is this metaphysical core of the physical that will provide the basis for Schopenhauer’s concluding reintroduction of freedom.

Schopenhauer distinguishes several classes of forces in accordance with his classification of causes. Examples of forces behind causes in the narrow sense are electricity and magnetism. The force behind the physiological causality operative in living beings is termed “life force.” Finally, the force that is specific to animals is none other than the will. In each case, Schopenhauer stresses the inexplicable, unfathomable character of the original force. The original forces cannot be reduced to each other or to something else. They mark the end points of all inquiry. All that can be ascertained about original forces are the lawful

Introduction

conditions for their specific actualizations. This is exactly the business of the natural sciences.

Schopenhauer's closer examination of the force peculiar to animals in general and rational animals or human beings in particular is concerned with the specific quality of the will due to which the same motive may result in different reactions in different animal species and in different human beings, respectively. Schopenhauer terms this peculiarity the *character* of the being or beings in question. While animal character varies from species to species, human character varies from one individual to the other. Character is the property of the motivational force (will) of a being to react specifically or individually to motives. Schopenhauer thinks of a being's character as the core or very essence of that being.

Schopenhauer lists four main features of the character of human beings. They are not individual character traits but traits of human character as such. The human character is (1) individual, (2) empirical, (3) constant, and (4) inborn.

Whereas there is an underlying character of the human species as such, each individual of the species exhibits its own character. This accounts for the fact that the effect of the same motive (cognition) on different human individuals is quite different.

The human character is, moreover, nothing that can be ascertained prior to its exercise in particular acts of volition. Each individual human being discovers its own character as well as that of its fellow human beings only through experience, hence over time. Furthermore, the empirically acquired knowledge of one's own individual character informs one's future decisions and plans, thus resulting in a secondary or *acquired character* that reflects the possibilities as well as limitations of one's basic, inborn character. The acquired character is like the role that the individual develops for itself in response to its basic character. But the acquisition of secondary character traits can never alter the basic character itself, which remains unchanged or constant over an individual's entire lifetime. Any appearance of change in someone's character should be regarded as evidence that the character was different to begin with and had been misconstrued previously. Schopenhauer claims that in effect each and every one operates on the assumption of the constancy of the human character.

Although it is not possible to change an individual's basic character,

Introduction

Schopenhauer believes it possible to either reinforce or discourage the manifestations of the character. This can be managed by appealing to the individual's intellect or understanding, providing the latter either with powerful motives or with strong countermotives for certain actions.

Finally, the individual character is already wholly formed at the moment of birth and is not the result of any subsequent natural or cultural influences. Schopenhauer asserts that virtues as well as vices are inborn and not the result of some later acquisition. The constant and inborn nature of human individual character rules out the possibility that an individual in a given situation is free to choose among two or more possible courses of action. The character together with the motive or motives present in the situation determines the individual's course of action unfailingly. For a different action to occur, the motive or the character would have had to be different.

Schopenhauer summarizes his account of necessary change in natural beings of all kinds by resorting to the scholastic formula "acting follows being" (*operari sequitur esse*). Any action, whether physical, chemical, vegetative, sensible, or rational, follows from the being of the entity in question. "Being" here includes not only *existence* – that something is – but also *essence* – *what* it is. To be sure, it is not just anything in and about an existent, such as an actual human being, that counts as its essence but only that entity's basic nature, i.e., its character.

Schopenhauer claims that the strict necessity of all events has been felt, if not properly understood, for a long time in many cultures and by numerous individuals. He mentions specifically the religious conception of fate in classical antiquity, the fatalism of the Islamic faith, and the Christian doctrine of predestination.

In the section of the *Prize Essay* devoted to identifying individual predecessors for the determinist conception of the human will, Schopenhauer cites not only religious authorities, among them Saint Augustine and Martin Luther, and philosophers, including Hobbes, Spinoza, Hume, Priestley, Voltaire, Kant, and Schelling, but also the dramatic poets and novelists Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott, Goethe, and Schiller. The point of naming these predecessors is not to mount an argument from authority that would supplement the earlier argument from reason or to document a record of widespread consensus on the matter.

Introduction

On the contrary, Schopenhauer firmly believes in the prevalence of error among his fellow human beings. True insight into the operations of the human will is the prerogative of the few. The particular assertion which the section on predecessors is designed to support is that of universal agreement on the will's unfreedom among "true thinkers."

Idealism to the rescue

For Schopenhauer the problem of the freedom of the will is one of the two problems that have most deeply occupied modern European philosophy since Descartes, the other being the problem of the relation between thought and reality. The two basic problems of modern philosophy are moreover structurally related in that each of them concerns the relation between the subject and the object. In one case, it is the epistemic relation between the subject of knowledge and the object known, addressed in modern epistemology; in the other case, it is the practical relation between the subject of willing and the object willed, as examined by modern moral philosophy.

Schopenhauer notes that the ordinary understanding is prone to opposite errors in the assessment of the two basic relations between subject and object. With respect to the epistemic relation, the untutored mind tends to attribute too much to the side of the object and too little to the side of the subject. The work of Locke¹³ and Kant on the cognitive functions of the mind can be seen as attempts at correcting this popular misconception of what is involved in knowing. Both Locke and Kant demonstrate how much of our knowledge concerning objects originates in the knowing subject. By contrast, in regard to the practical relation, the untutored mind tends to attribute too much to the subject and too little to the object. Schopenhauer seems to regard his refutation of the will's freedom of choice as an effort to combat this popular misconception.

Yet the conclusion reached earlier, that there can be no freedom in human action and that all human action is subject to strict necessity, is by no means Schopenhauer's last word on the matter. Only now that determinism has been completely established for all human action is it

¹³ See *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2 vols., ed. Peter H. Nidditch (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

Introduction

possible to seek a higher kind of freedom of the will or “true moral freedom.”

Schopenhauer’s continued search for human freedom is based on a fact of consciousness that has so far been left out of consideration. The fact now invoked is the clear and certain feeling of responsibility that we each have for our actions. Even the realization that our actions are inevitably necessary, given the particular constellation of the individual character and the motives involved, does not defeat our sense of responsibility. Moreover, we do not blame our actions on the motives, which are merely the varying external circumstances that occasion our actions. Instead our practice of praise and blame is directed toward the human being acting on the motives, even if that person is acting in a completely determined manner. The precise object of praise and blame, and more generally of responsibility, is the person’s character, owing to which the given motives result in the given action.

In taking responsibility for an action, we are not really taking responsibility for the action as an action. We assume responsibility for that which makes our action *our* action. And that is not the motive, which is the cognition of things outside us, but the character, which is our very own inner being. Responsibility involves the satisfaction or the regret, as the case may be, over the fact that one is who one is, that one has the character that one has, as revealed in the things one did, provided certain motives. Implicit in the feeling of responsibility is, so Schopenhauer argues, the recognition that one would have acted differently had one been a different individual – a being with a different character.

Moving the discussion from the level of action to that of being or character underlying the action allows Schopenhauer to introduce an alternative conception of freedom, one that does not pertain to actions, which remain necessary, but to character, which emerges as the ultimate refuge of freedom. The freedom in question is not freedom with respect to acting but freedom in regard to being. To be sure, the freedom involved in the freedom of one’s character cannot be the freedom of choice, or the ability of the will to decide one way or the other without motivational determination. The notion of the will’s freedom as some choice in a situation of indifference has already been rejected as incompatible with universal natural causation.

But what could it mean to attribute freedom to one’s character while

Introduction

maintaining the necessity of the actions following from the character? Schopenhauer argues that the freedom in question can only be understood as the freedom from the principle of sufficient reason in all of its forms, including the law of causality. Like any of the other forces of nature, the will and its basic nature or character underlies causation but is not itself a link in the causal chain. In particular, the character underlies the causal efficacy of motives but is neither motivated nor motivating. It is involved in motivational causation but not included under motivational causation.

Considered that way, the human will in general and its character in particular is no more and no less a nonphysical, a metaphysical, entity than any natural force. It could be argued that any force, not just the human will, is free as to its being while remaining completely determined in its acting. However, the wider, outright cosmological, scope of the new conception of freedom is not an issue in the topically limited *Prize Essay*. The relation of all physical reality to some metaphysical core independent of causation figures prominently, though, in Schopenhauer's writings on the philosophy of nature.¹⁴

But can anything more be said about the will's ultimate or original freedom from causality? To say that we are responsible for our character seems to suggest that we owe our character to ourselves, that each one of us is responsible for our own character. This seems to imply some causal process of self-constitution on the part of each and every one of us. But Schopenhauer has ruled out the applicability of any thinking in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason as inadequate to the will's radical freedom from that principle. Moreover, such a process would have to take place prior to our full-blown existence. And would this not be a reinstatement, at some more remote level, of the very freedom of choice previously rejected?

Schopenhauer attempts to clarify the nature of "true" freedom by resorting to Kant's earlier distinction between the empirical and the intelligible character of an action, which in turn builds on Kant's distinction of appearances from things in themselves in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹⁵ Kant argues for the dual nature of objects. In addition to

¹⁴ See *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, 93ff., and vol. II, 191ff.; *On the Will in Nature*, trans. Eric F. J. Payne, ed. David E. Cartwright (New York and Oxford: Berg, 1992); *On Vision and Colors*, trans. Eric F. J. Payne, ed. David E. Cartwright (Oxford and Providence, RI: Berg, 1994).

¹⁵ A 26ff./B 42ff. and A 490ff./B 518ff.

Introduction

the properties which objects exhibit under conditions of human experience, there are also those properties to be considered which objects possess, or might possess, independent of experience. The distinction is between the way things appear (to human beings) and the way they are in and of themselves. Resorting to scholastic terminology, Kant calls the empirical side or aspect or nature of things “sensible,” to indicate that about the object which can be grasped by the senses. By contrast, the nonempirical side or aspect or nature of things is called “intelligible,” indicating that about the object which cannot be met in experience but can only be entertained in thought by the intellect.

Kant applies the distinction throughout nature and pays special attention to its import for actions of all kinds and human actions in particular. In Kant’s usage, “character” designates quite generally the law governing the efficacy of a cause.¹⁶ The empirical character of a cause, and by extension of an agent, is the empirical law that links appearances in natural-causal terms. In addition, Kant countenances the intelligible character of a cause or agent, which pertains to the latter’s intelligible side, aspect, or nature. Hence Kant allows for a dual causality or two types of causality with respect to one and the same action or, more generally speaking, one and the same event. A given action or event can have both an empirical and a nonempirical cause, the former due to its empirical character, the latter due to its intelligible character.¹⁷

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant treats the dualism of empirical and intelligible character as a mere logical possibility, something that cannot be excluded on logical grounds alone and for which positive evidence might be discovered in later investigations, specifically in the theory of morals. Kant’s specific point in introducing the distinction is to argue that necessity and freedom need not contradict each other in the description of an action. An action may well be correctly described as naturally caused, while admitting, or perhaps requiring, a further description under which the event is brought about by something other than natural causes operating under natural causal laws. To the extent that the action is brought about by something other than natural causes, it can be described as free. Kant’s full conception of nonnatural

¹⁶ See *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 539/B 567.

¹⁷ See *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 532ff./B 560ff.

Introduction

causation includes the introduction of a nonnatural law for the naturally free action, viz., the moral law.¹⁸

Schopenhauer draws on Kant's distinction between empirical and intelligible character to show how freedom and necessity need not contradict each other when attributed to one and the same action. The freedom so reconciled with natural necessity is the freedom from natural necessity. It is important to note that in his selective appropriation Schopenhauer does not follow Kant's identification of freedom as an alternative type of causality, subject to its own, nonnatural law (moral law). For Schopenhauer, any application of the principle of sufficient reason, including its causal form, fails to capture the true nature of freedom.

The exclusion of freedom from the domain of rational inquiry under the guidance of the principle of sufficient reason seems to render impossible any further thought about such freedom and the will to which it might pertain. At this point, Schopenhauer's specific examination of freedom converges with his more general metaphysics according to which the world considered in itself is best described as *will* – on the analogy with the human will known to us through inner as well as outer experience. The will in the extended, cosmological sense is supposed to be the essence of the world as it exists outside and independent of the relations of ground and consequence that obtain within the world as experienced, or – in Schopenhauer's phrase – the world as representation.

Schopenhauer rejects the idea that the will, either in its limited psychological or in its universal cosmological function, can be described in causal or quasi-causal terms. Instead he wants us to think of the will as the hidden other side, the inner side or inside of the overt world of experience. The suggestion is that the essence of the world, including the solution to the problem of the will's freedom, lies not behind this world in some other world but within this our world. With respect to the will's freedom, Schopenhauer brings out this faithfulness to our world in the statement that "freedom is transcendental." His use of the Kantian term indicates not a leaving behind of experience but a turn

¹⁸ See *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor, in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 440. The *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* is cited after the pagination of the work in vol. IV of the Academy edition indicated in the standard modern editions and translations of the work. See also *Critique of Practical Reason*, Academy edition, v, 30.

Introduction

toward its very core, which for Schopenhauer, though, can no longer be described in the Kantian language of “conditions” and “grounds.”

It is important to keep in mind this transcendental (as opposed to transcending) character of freedom, its immanent transcendence, when considering Schopenhauer’s concluding reference to a pronouncement he attributes to the seventeenth-century French philosopher, Catholic theologian, and priest Nicholas Malebranche and which also serves as the motto of the *Prize Essay*: “La liberté est un mystère” (freedom is a mystery). The exact quotation is nowhere to be found in Malebranche’s works.¹⁹ However, the phrase “is a mystery” occurs in Malebranche’s discussion of the relation between mind and body.²⁰ In another context the compatibility of freedom and divine foreknowledge regarding human action is called “a mystery.”²¹ In the first case, the mystery concerns God’s will to have human beings be embodied rather than be pure spirits. In the second case, the mystery concerns the relation of human freedom to divine omniscience. Schopenhauer’s claim about the mysterious freedom of the human will is different from either of those cases. There is no appeal to unknown and perhaps unknowable divine reasons for human freedom. Nor is there the threat to human freedom posed by divine powers. The mystery about the will’s freedom does not lie outside the world but resides in the world itself. To be sure, freedom is not to be found in the world as representation or the world known under the forms of space, time, and causality. In that case freedom would be the miraculous suspension of the natural order. Instead freedom belongs to the world as will – to its core as revealed in our emotional life, which includes the feeling of responsibility. To Schopenhauer, freedom is a mystery but not a miracle.

¹⁹ Arthur Hübscher has traced the wording of the motto of the *Prize Essay* to a work by the eighteenth-century French philosopher Claude-Adrien Helvétius (*De l’esprit* [On the mind], 1758), with which Schopenhauer was familiar. See “*La liberté est un mystère*. Das Motto der norwegischen Preisschrift,” *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 45 (1964): 26–30.

²⁰ *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Jolley and David Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 63.

²¹ *The Search After Truth*, ed. and trans. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), vol. III, 1.

Chronology

- 1788 Born 22 February in the free city of Danzig (today's Gdansk, Poland), the first and only son of the Hanseatic merchant Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer and his wife Johanna, née Trosiener
- 1793 In response to the imminent annexation of Danzig by Prussia, Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer moves his family and the firm to the free city of Hamburg
- 1797–99 Lives with the French family of one of his father's business partners in Le Havre
- 1799–1803 Attends a private school in Hamburg
- 1803–4 Accompanies his parents on a tour of Europe (Holland, England, France, Switzerland, Austria) as reward for agreeing to pursue a career as a merchant rather than as a scholar
- 1804–7 Apprenticed to two Hanseatic merchants in Hamburg
- 1805 20 April: death of Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer, probably by suicide
- 1806 Johanna Schopenhauer along with her daughter Adele (b. 1797) moves to Weimar, where she establishes herself as a literary hostess and popular novelist
- 1807–9 Leaves his merchant apprenticeship and prepares for university studies, first at the Gymnasium in Gotha and then through private tutoring in Weimar
- 1809–11 Studies sciences and philosophy at the University of Göttingen

Chronology

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| 1811–13 | Studies sciences and philosophy at the University of Berlin, where he attends the lectures of Fichte and Schleiermacher |
| 1813 | Lives in Rudolstadt near Weimar and writes his doctoral dissertation, <i>On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason</i> , which is accepted by the University of Jena and published in 1814 |
| 1813–14 | Lives in his mother's house in Weimar. Has contacts with Goethe, with whom he discusses the theory of colors. In May 1814 the longstanding conflicts with his mother culminate in the final break |
| 1814–18 | Lives in Dresden |
| 1815 | Publishes <i>On Vision and Colors</i> |
| 1818 | March: completes his main work, <i>The World as Will and Representation</i> , which is published in January 1819 |
| 1818–19 | Travels in Italy (Florence, Rome, Naples, Venice). Returns to Dresden |
| 1819–31 | Privatdozent (unsalaried lecturer) at the University of Berlin. The only lecture course he actually gives takes place in the summer semester of 1820 |
| 1822–23 | Travels in Italy (Milan, Florence, Venice) |
| 1823–25 | Lives in Bad Gastein (Switzerland), Mannheim, and Dresden |
| 1825–31 | Lives in Berlin |
| 1831–32 | Lives in Frankfurt-on-Main |
| 1832–33 | Lives in Mannheim |
| 1833–60 | Lives in Frankfurt-on-Main |
| 1835 | Publishes <i>On the Will in Nature</i> |
| 1839 | Awarded prize for essay <i>On the Freedom of the Will</i> , which is published in 1841 together with his unsuccessful prize essay <i>On the Basis of Morality</i> , under the title <i>The Two Basic Problems of Ethics</i> |
| 1844 | Publishes second edition of <i>The World as Will and Representation</i> , which contains a second, supplementary volume |
| 1851 | Publishes <i>Parerga and Paralipomena</i> |
| 1853 | An anonymous article on Schopenhauer, entitled |