**IS SCHOPENHAUER’S PESSIMISM SUSTAINABLE?**

In this essay, I will look into Arthur Schopenhauer’s pessimism, which culminates in the view that since life is not worth living, it is better for us to deny it than try to affirm it.[[1]](#footnote-1) I will argue that his pessimism is not sustainable, and that it fails on its own propositions.

In section 1, I will look at the importance of suffering as the central point in Schopenhauer’s pessimism. For Schopenhauer, the essence of the world, which he calls will, is a never-ending, blind and purposeless striving that objectifies itself in the organic and inorganic world.[[2]](#footnote-2) Will, which can also be called the will to live, is constantly driving us from one desire to another, leaving us almost without rest in the constant state of need, hence suffering. I will argue against his position that only suffering is of a positive nature, while happiness can only be negative. According to Schopenhauer, the rare moments of happiness we experience consist only in the absence of suffering. I will also look into his view that absolute happiness is impossible to achieve and question this statement as a weak argument for pessimism.

Section 2 will focus on Schopenhauer’s use of the concepts of pain and suffering. As it seems that he uses them as co-extensive terms, I will explain why they are not co-extensive.

In section 3, I will discuss Schopenhauer’s view that the world has a moral meaning. Because of inevitable suffering, according to Schopenhauer, our only moral solution to the problem of suffering will be to deny suffering, consequently, life itself. And this is, for him, the hidden moral meaning of the world that only philosophy can uncover.

In section 4, I will look at the importance of aesthetic experience, which for Schopenhauer, represents the proof that the will can be abandoned and that the short periods of liberation from the will/suffering can be reached. As for Kant, for Schopenhauer, the aesthetic experience must be purposeless and unintentional and never contemplated or purposeful. Since our contemplated activities belong to the knowledge driven by the principle of practical reason that operates on the basis of our innate categories of time, space and causality and is related only to the phenomenal world, ideas that are the essence of artistic experience cannot be grasped by such knowledge. They can only be contemplated by objective knowledge by genius, who, in the process of artistic creation, abandons his individuality and disconnects from the phenomenal world completely, grasping the idea of a perceived object purely by its rare gift and not by reason.

In the final section, I will look at compassion, which can help us overcome suffering, according to Schopenhauer. By abandoning our selfishness through compassion, we can identify with the suffering of others and understand that we are the same as others. That will help us comprehend that our individuality is the main cause of suffering and trigger our attempt to overcome suffering through compassion. I will argue that compassion cannot be devoid of self-interest and, as such, still requires a strong presence of the will. I will also show why asceticism is, as the ultimate attempt to completely redeem suffering, antipodal to compassion.

1: Pessimism

Schopenhauer’s determinism is the antecedent to his pessimism. His view that the whole world/nature, including our lives, is predetermined and, hence, there is no free will, paves the way to developing fully blown pessimism. The will, which is the inner being of the world and everything existing, dictates all our decisions. As objectified will, we cannot expect any freedom in our actions. As he puts it:

The will is first and original; knowledge is merely added to it as an instrument belonging to the phenomenon of the will. Therefore every man is what he is through his will, and his character is original, for willing is the basis of his inner being. Through the knowledge added to it, he gets to know in the course of experience what he is; in other words, he becomes acquainted with his character. Therefore he *knows* himself in consequence of, and in accordance with, the nature of his will, instead of *willing* in consequence of, and according to, his knowing, as in the old view… Therefore he cannot decide to be this or that; also he cannot become another person, but he *is* once for all, and subsequently *knows* what he is. With those other thinkers, he *wills* what he knows; with me he *knows* what he wills. (*WWR I*, pp. 292, 293)

Schopenhauer’s pessimism consists in his view that the will as the essence of the world is a blind and purposeless striving. Since the will is aimless, the permanent satisfaction of the will is impossible. For Schopenhauer, the satisfaction of a desire results in happiness, and the unfulfillment of a desire results in suffering. As existence is marked by permanent willing, and for that reason, deficiency, a satisfaction of this willing is unsustainable. It follows that absolute happiness as a permanent lack of desire is impossible. But before we look at his view that happiness is impossible, it is important to clarify his view of the negative character of happiness. For Schopenhauer, as the basis of all willing is the need or lack of something, every desire is a pain. That desire implies pain is also clear from the following quote: ‘Of its nature the wish is pain’ (*WWR* *I,* p. 313). And also: ‘The basis of all willing, however, is need, and by its very nature and origin, it is therefore destined to pain’ (ibid, p. 312). From this follows that for Schopenhauer, pleasure can only be 'negative', understood as the absence of pain. As he argues:

All satisfaction, or what is commonly called happiness, is really and essentially always *negative* only, and never positive. It is not a gratification which comes to us *sui generis* and of itself, but it must always be the satisfaction of a desire. (*WWR I*, p. 319)

And because happiness is only of a negative character, meaning that it is the absence of pain rather than positive gratification, it cannot deliver lasting satisfaction:

All happiness is only of a negative, not a positive nature, and that for this reason it cannot be lasting satisfaction and gratification, but always deliver us only from a pain or want that must be followed by a new pain... (*WWR I*, p. 320)

Therefore, the satisfaction of a desire as an absence of pain can only last as long as the memory

of the pain we have eliminated is active. But, as the memory of the pain fades away, so will the satisfaction itself. For example, food in itself is not pleasurable, but pleasure arrives with the elimination of hunger. We experience satisfaction while eliminating hunger. Once hunger is eliminated, food doesn't provide any pleasure, as we are not interested in it. As Schopenhauer explains:

We feel desire as we feel hunger and thirst; but as soon as it has been satisfied, it is like the mouthful of food which has been taken, and which ceases to exist for our feelings the moment it is swallowed… For only pain and want can be felt positively; and therefore, they proclaim themselves; well-being, on the contrary, is mainly negative. (*WWR II*, p. 575)

There are two problems with Schopenhauer’s approach to happiness. The first is his claim that happiness can be negative only and never positive.[[3]](#footnote-3) The second concerns his claim that absolute happiness is impossible. Since both claims amount to the cornerstone of his pessimism, I will argue that happiness can be positive and that Schopenhauer’s explanation of absolute happiness’s impossibility does not provide a strong argument for pessimism.

I find Schopenhauer’s claim that only fulfilled desires amount to temporary happiness is ambiguous. This statement implies that non-possession of particular objects or states that we want represents suffering, while their possession can be identified as happiness. There are many occasions in which we find pleasure and joy during the process of fulfilment of our desires, which is de facto still non-possession. As Georg Simmel observed:

It is of overriding psychological importance to recognise that we experience the happiness of the goal not only and exclusively in the touchdown, but also, through anticipation, in the approach. (1986, p. 56).[[4]](#footnote-4)

The resistance that we are experiencing during achieving a specific goal we don’t necessarily register as suffering. On the contrary, that resistance fuels our feeling of fulfilment and satisfaction during our progress towards the final goal. This state of fulfilment and satisfaction is registered as a feeling of happiness and is not negative.

In the same manner, Ivan Soll points out: ‘One could begin the rebuttal by appealing to the

pleasure commonly experienced in making progress towards an as yet unrealised goal’ (1988, p. 112).[[5]](#footnote-5)

Was it not for the resistance we often experience to fulfilling our desires, we would not even attempt to achieve them? It is positive because we are registering it, and it lasts. It is a gratification lasting for a few moments; it can also last for hours, days or years. It is far from Schopenhauer’s explanation of happiness as the absence of suffering.

I may be playing my guitar for hours and feel happy about it not because some kind of suffering is absent during my play, but simply because I experience joy while playing it and progressing in overcoming the resistance while learning to perform better. Regardless of the goal, I register my exciting hourly experience of playing the guitar as happiness, which is positive. Therefore, it is not an absence of any suffering and cannot be qualified as negative. The counterargument maybe that I experience happiness while playing the guitar because I eliminate my suffering, which manifests itself when I am not playing the guitar. But this is a weak argument since I do not experience any suffering by not playing the guitar and feel the need to play not because of the lack of playing the guitar but simply because I enjoy playing it.

Another example would be a marathon swimmer who, in the duration of his swim, which may last for twenty or more hours, finds satisfaction and joy in the process and the effort he puts into his swim. That effort during the achievement of the goal is what he values, not necessarily only reaching the final line. If someone offers him a lift in a boat to help him get to the final stage faster, he will definitely refuse, as the final goal is not winning at any price but rather the lasting process necessary for achieving it. So, the attainment of the will's progress towards the goal, such as playing the guitar for hours or reaching Dover’s shores from Calais by swimming the Channel, is what results in pleasurable feeling rather than in suffering. As Simmel has put it: 'It is simply psychologically false to claim that all volition is painful because its basis is in deprivation and because deprivation accompanies willing until it disappears in fruition' (1986, p.55). Also, even the experiences that lead to unfulfilled desires can be understood as happiness. Simmel has identified love as the perfect example of it:

Even if the initial phase is also the final one, reality and experience prove beyond discussion that in many instances love is experienced as happiness, though is destined not to succeed: the happiness of an “unhappy love” is often witnessed. (1986, p. 57)

Another problem with the negative valuation of happiness is the implicit hedonism that underlies Schopenhauer’s pessimism. For him, the positive value can only be attributed to a felt pleasure. Unless we experience pleasure, we cannot consider ourselves happy, and if we experience pain, then our feelings have a negative value. Any other state between pleasure and pain, or positive and negative value, is rendered valueless. As Christopher Janaway rightly questions: ‘Are felt pleasures and pains the sole bearers or contributors of value? Why do outcomes of our actions other than pleasures and pains count for nothing’ (2007, p. 334)? [[6]](#footnote-6) The fact is that most of our lives, we spend in-between feelings of pleasure and pain, rather in the process of achieving certain daily goals, which can be identified more as neutral than pleasurable or painful. For example, working in the office for hours, commuting, and cooking dinner is not necessarily a state of pleasure or pain, but they are important actions that we have to perform daily. They indeed have a specific existential value. Therefore, it would be wrong to eliminate these states as valueless just because they do not include feelings of pleasure or pain. According to Schopenhauer, we achieve happiness only as a negative value while eliminating pain. That means that we can instead achieve just some level zero (state of eliminated pain), but never above it and never experience positive satisfaction.

Janaway asserts:’ If the good can be solely the felt satisfaction of attaining what is willed, but if no positive satisfaction is ever felt, then the good is nothing but a satisfaction we could never feel’ (ibid). Using this inaccurate hedonistic calculus, Schopenhauer justifies the view that suffering and pain are the only positive states that we experience: hence a pessimistic conclusion that life is not worth living is our only option.

Schopenhauer has introduced the impossibility of absolute happiness as the basis of his strong argument that complete satisfaction of blind and constantly striving will is unreachable, making suffering a dominant state of all affairs and pessimism the only justified worldview. But if we look closer into his absolute happiness, we may also argue that such happiness would not be happiness at all. Contrary to his view that the impossibility of completely eradicating suffering

entails the impossibility of absolute happiness. Happiness requires suffering as its opposite, without which it would lose its potency. Hence, the state of happiness is intensified with the experience of greater suffering rather than a neutral hedonic state where one experiences neither suffering nor pleasure. For example, the happiness of a starving survivor of a concentration camp receiving his first full meal after years of deprivation is much higher than the happiness of a man who is not hungry receiving the same meal. It follows that an elevated state of suffering gives greater merit to the experience of happiness than a neutral hedonic state.

Absolute happiness that would only be achieved if we fulfilled all desires forever, which is an absurd and unrealistic proposition, would be boredom rather than happiness. Will we strive for absolute happiness that will end all future striving? Without its opposite, happiness would lose its intensity; we would not differentiate the state of happiness from other moments of our lives. What would we call happiness if our life consisted of a neutral, suffering-free existence? Like in the case of day and night, opposites support and complement each other, giving each other their identities. In permanent daylight, daytime would become an ordinary condition to which we would adapt and respond with complacency, leading to boredom. Man has always found something special in the sunrise emerging after darkness, highly anticipated and appreciated in all cultures, even in poetry over the centuries.

In the same way, happiness and suffering need each other. The differences between the two intensify the importance of each of them. Without suffering, happiness would not be a significant experience. In the case of permanent fulfilment of all desires, we would end up living in the realm of boredom, not happiness. It follows that absolute happiness, as explained by Schopenhauer, denies the idea and nature of happiness and as such, is self-contradictory. In this case, the speculation that only permanent fulfilment of all desires would lead to absolute happiness becomes irrelevant, as such a state would not be possible in any way.

2: Pain and Suffering

Schopenhauer uses concepts of pain and suffering interchangeably. For instance, he explains: 'All striving springs from deficiency, from dissatisfaction with one's own state or condition, and is therefore suffering so long as it is not satisfied’ (*WWR I*, p. 309). In the next passage, he claims: 'The basis of all willing … is need, lack, and hence pain, and by its very nature and origin (any animal) is therefore destined to pain' (ibid, p. 312). In these two passages, suffering

and pain relate to the same cause: deficiency, making it easy to assume that pain and suffering are the same things. But as Bernard Reginster observes:

He tends to call "suffering (Leiden)" the displeasure caused by the sole frustration of a desire: "all suffering is simply nothing but unfulfilled and thwarted willing" (*WWR I*, p. 363). And by "pain (Schmerz),” he tends to refer to the type of displeasure that comes unbidden, in the sense that it is not caused by the frustration of some pre-existing desire, but constitutionally involves a new desire. (2008, p. 113)[[7]](#footnote-7)

From Reginster’s observation, it follows that pain is caused by the uninvited desire, a new desire that we experience for the first time. That would mean that in comparison with suffering, pain relates to more particular obstacles that are on our way to the fulfilment of a new desire. Once a new desire is fulfilled, pain is gone, but our desire to satisfy perpetually the same desire leads to suffering. Therefore, the desire that inflicts suffering is pre-existing desire, and suffering relates more to our constant striving or desiring, which constitutes our inner nature, as Schopenhauer’s will. In Schopenhauer's words:

…every satisfied desire gives a birth to a new one. No possible satisfaction in the world could suffice to still its craving, set a final goal to its demand, and fill the bottomless pit of its heart. (*WWR II*, p. 573)

Reginster differentiates between first and second-order desires, which can help us better understand the nature of pain and suffering within Schopenhauer's context. While first-order desires relate to particular objects like food, fame, shelter etc., second-order desires relate to desires whose object is a desire. The innate blind and purposeless striving (will) represents that second-order desire, which is permanent and unsatisfying. For that reason, Reginster says: 'This structure of human willing in first- and second-order desires shows why a final and complete satisfaction of all desires (happiness) is impossible’ (2008, p. 123). Regarding this proposition, we can understand pain as the first-order desire for a particular new desire, which can be satisfied. Suffering is a second-order desire and is a permanent desire, essentially impossible to satisfy once and for all. Are pain and suffering co-extensive? Reginster’s observation shows that since pain is caused by uninvited and non-pre-existent desire, the satisfaction of that particular desire will eliminate pain. While pain can last for a short period (uninvited desire for ice cream will cause relatively short pain) or, in some cases, longer (uninvited headache can last four hours) by the same observation, suffering, as the perpetuated desire will always last longer than desire which is not pre-existent. From this follows that suffering, as an innate second-order desire for a desire which cannot be satisfied for good, in its duration, will last permanently.

In comparison with suffering, pain as a first-order desire can be satisfied but will last relatively shortly. Therefore, pain and suffering cannot be co-extensive.

We can further understand the relationship between pain and suffering if we acknowledge self-consciousness and the human ability to memorise things and events. The self-consciousness of which only humans are capable allows us to understand that we are the victims of our inner nature, which is the will to live and that we cannot stop striving, hence suffering. This understanding increases even more, our conviction that absolute happiness is not possible and strengthens our view that '…it would be better for us not to exist' (*WWR* *II*, p. 605). While man has an understanding of the past and future and our rationality makes such a difference between our consciousness and that of animals, Schopenhauer says:

He (man) far surpasses them in power and in suffering. They live in the present alone; he lives at the same time in the future and the past. They satisfy the need of the moment; he provides by the most ingenious preparations for his future, nay, even for the times he cannot live to see. They are given up entirely to the impression of the moment, to the effect of the motive of perception; he is determined by abstract concepts independent of the present moment. (*WW I*, p. 36)

Because they lack self-consciousness, other animals cannot see themselves as the victims of the will to live. Due to the lack of conceptual thinking, they do not experience suffering unique to man. Such is worry about uncertainty about the future, regrets about the past or meaninglessness of life. Also, as animals almost have no memories and live in the present alone, it would be more accurate to say that they experience pain rather than suffering in Schopenhauer’s terms. Since a lack of memories eliminates possibilities for pre-existing desires and their perpetuation, every desire is born as a new one. Hence it is a pain rather than suffering that animals experience.

3: The Moral Meaning of the World

As explained above, for Schopenhauer, every pleasure and satisfaction are the *de facto* absence of pain. As such, they are of a negative character, and ergo happiness is in general, of a negative character. Pain and suffering are positive, and this is what we feel. Since we don't feel the absence of pain, our satisfaction is the elimination of pain (satisfaction of a desire), which last as long as our memory of the eliminated pain. So, if the pain and suffering can be assumed as bad, good can only be their opposite: the negation of the pain and suffering. If the will that transcends itself into many desires and causes pain and suffering can be called bad, the negation of the will emerges as good.

Since the state of permanent fulfilment of all desires is impossible, Schopenhauer concludes that the only moral meaning of the world is to negate suffering and, ultimately life itself: ‘In fact, nothing else can be stated as the aim of our existence except the knowledge that it would be better for us not to exist’ (*WWR* *II* p. 605). And that knowledge 'that it would be better for us not to exist' directs us towards our only moral choice, which is a negation of the will or will to live. Therefore, the only option we are left with is repudiating suffering by negating life since the dominant will to live constantly seduces us into more suffering *ad infinitum*.

Schopenhauer further speculates that the world has a moral significance by saying: ‘That the world has a mere physical, but no moral significance is the greatest, most ruinous and fundamental error…’ (*PP* *II*, p. 293)[[8]](#footnote-8). Janaway thinks that the meaning of the world for Schopenhauer can only be moral. Therefore, he concludes:

Existence for Schopenhauer is therefore decidedly not meaningless: there is a way of interpreting it correctly. And it is called a “moral” meaning, I suggest, because in Schopenhauer’s view the correct interpretation of the world does not just discover naturalistic truths; rather it discovers a would-be normative truth: that the world, and our existence in it, is in itself such that we ought not to want it, indeed such that it ought not to exist. (2022, s. 179)

But since this view that the world has a moral meaning stipulates that, firstly, a naturalistic truth exists a-priori. Secondly, the view that truth has a normative value requires a more detailed analysis. If the essence of the world is the will, as Schopenhauer claims, and he defines the will as the 'blind and purposeless striving', then the world as purposeless striving cannot have any normative/moral meaning. Anything normative would have to aim towards some goal and prescribe some norm or value. It is ambiguous that something blind and purposeless can prescribe any moral norm. Suppose we anticipate a human being as the highest manifestation of the will. In that case, it is still unclear how the objectification of that blind and purposeless will become purposeful and create a moral norm. The dualism of the individual and the will in general (the rest of the world) that Schopenhauer has created due to his metaphysical concept perpetuates the problem with his moral meaning of the world. That problem further permeates the antagonism of his highest moral quality of man, that he assumes to be compassion, and the ascetic ideal of complete denial of the will. I will show why compassion, as understood by Schopenhauer, and his ascetic ideal, are incompatible with each other and why both of them still require the presence of the will. I believe that neither compassion nor asceticism are devoid of the will and are proof that will, as Schopenhauer formulated it, is undeniable. Before I examine Schopenhauer’s troubling attempt to justify compassion and asceticism as our moral virtue, I will first investigate his philosophy of art that he uses as proof that we can renounce the will and liberate ourselves from suffering, although just for a few moments.

4: Schopenhauer’s Aesthetics

We have seen that the will is the driving force for Schopenhauer and the main cause for our feeling of pleasure. Unfulfilled desires are understood as suffering, while their fulfilment results in the feeling of pleasure (although for a very short period). It seems that separating pleasures from the will is contradictory, but according to Schopenhauer, this is exactly what is required for the real experience of the beautiful. As he puts it:

My solution to this problem has been that in the beautiful we always perceive the intrinsic and primary forms of animate and inanimate nature, that is to say Plato’s ideas thereof, and that this perception stipulates the existence of its essential correlative, the *will-less subject of knowledge*, i.e. pure intelligence without aims or intentions. Through this, when an aesthetic perception occurs the will completely vanishes from consciousness. (*OSW*, p. 100)[[9]](#footnote-9)

From the above quote, it follows that the feeling of the beautiful, as the absence of the will presupposes the complete abolition of suffering. As explained earlier, for Schopenhauer, happiness can be only of a negative nature, as the absence of suffering. That absence of all desires/suffering creates the state of pleasure when the individual as a purely willing subject becomes a purely ‘will-less subject of knowledge’. The aesthetic experience of the beautiful requires that for the pure subject, the will completely manifest itself in the perceived object, which is, in fact, the Platonic idea[[10]](#footnote-10) of the object. As such, the idea of the object in question is completely dethatched from space and time, meaning it has lost its individuality. For that reason, artistic creation represents a captured idea of the object perceived. As Schopenhauer remarks: ‘This is why a painting, by fixing for ever the fleeting moment and thus extricating it from time, presents not the individual but the *Idea*, the enduring element in all change’ (*OSW*, p.102).

The knowledge we use every day for practical reasons, or that of science, relates to individual things and their relations and is driven by the will to fulfil a particular desire. This type of knowledge, driven by the will, is clearly purposeful. But, the will is completely removed when it comes to the aesthetic experience or pure knowledge of a perceived idea. The necessary condition for artistic creation is that it has to be completely unintentional and purposeless. Schopenhauer calls this ‘primal artistic knowledge’ (*OSW*, p.104), which is, in its essence, completely will-less. This rare gift of genius allows for the artistic creation to be intrinsically formed as totally free from the will. In the different mediums of art, genius depicts the idea of the object presented in the painting or sculpture so that the particular object in question stands not for itself but for the whole genus of its kind.

The difference between the knowledge of the material objects (i.e. scientific knowledge) that we grasp through the principle of sufficient reason (based on the intuitive categories of time, space and causality) and the objective knowledge of idea is that the principle of sufficient reason does not apply to the knowledge of ideas. As Schopenhauer remarks:

The method of consideration that follows the principle of sufficient reason is the rational method, and it alone is valid and useful in practical life and science. The method of consideration that looks away from the content of this principle is the method of genius, which is valid and useful in art alone. (*WWR I*, p. 185)

Direct contemplation of ideas is only possible through the rare gift of *genius*. Contrary to most people, genius is capable of complete objectivity and detaching itself from the subjectivity which connects it to the will. This unique knowledge of the ideas is the nature of Genius, and ‘its sole aim is the communication of this knowledge’ (ibid), which it communicates through sculpture, painting, poetry or music.

It is important to note that for Schopenhauer, artistic creation cannot be intentional or purposeful. Regarding disinterestedness in aesthetic contemplation of ideas, Schopenhauer asserts:

Knowledge has sprung from the will, and is rooted in the phenomenon of the will, that is in the organism, it is nevertheless vitiated by the will, just as the flame is by its combustible material and its smoke. It is due to this that we can apprehend the purely objective inner nature of things, namely the Ideas appearing in them, only when we ourselves have no interest in them, in that they stand in no relation to our will. (*WWR II*, p. 369)

While artistic comprehension of the objects is completely without interest or without subjectivity, the state of contemplation of the idea must be purely objective. In such a state of comprehension of the idea we become completely dethatched from the will and finally liberated from all desires and, therefore, from the pain and suffering. As he puts it:

We are no longer the individual; that is forgotten; we are only pure subject of knowledge. We are that one eye of the world which looks out from all knowing creatures, but which in man alone can be wholly free from serving the will. (*WWI*, p. 198)

While genius creates art and spends the most time in that contemplative state of objective knowledge, since that is his talent and nature, we have a different situation with the spectator to whom the message from the genius has been communicated through the product of art. Schopenhauer speculates that in every one of us, there is some degree of genius, notwithstanding we all can appreciate arts to a certain degree; some more, some less. Those rare moments of identifying with the ideas communicated through the products of art allow the spectators to liberate themselves from the will/suffering for a short period of time. [[11]](#footnote-11) The question we can ask is: are the relationships between the genius and the aesthetic experience and the relationship between the spectator and the aesthetic experience the same thing? The nature of the genius is that it has no choice but to contemplate ideas and communicate them through its medium of art. Its intrinsic drive to contemplate ideas is simply unavoidable. The choice of art that it uses to communicate ideas is also innate. The genius cannot choose the art for its expression randomly. There is always a dominating art in the expression of genius, although it can use other arts for communicating ideas. Therefore, Michelangelo is primarily a sculptor and then a painter and architect. Beethoven is only a composer but not a painter or a sculptor. When it comes to the spectators, we have a different situation. According to Schopenhauer, spectators do not create. They passively respond to the piece of art and, depending on the amount of genius they have in them, recognise the idea communicated by the genius. When identifying with the idea, spectators lose completely any connection with the will; they lose their individuality and become the pure subject of knowledge. While genius creates from his innate urge, spectators passively react to the art perceived while identifying with the idea. Both creators and spectators must perceive artistic pleasure without any purpose or intention since any purpose or intention will manifest desire/will. In this case, they would not be capable of perceiving ideas.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Schopenhauer explains that during the aesthetic experience, we become liberated from the knowledge ruled by the principle of sufficient reason and exalts us above the phenomenal world. Everything that has been understood as happiness and unhappiness dissipates, and as he puts it in the above paragraph.

If this is the case, then it follows that during the moments of our immersion in recognition of the idea, we become will-less, but also, in a way, will itself. That *one eye of the world* can only be the will’s eye, meaning that we must become or identify with the will in order to see the world through that one eye.

There are two issues with Schopenhauer’s aesthetics that I find problematic. First, it is our motivation to enjoy art or experience aesthetic contemplation of the beautiful. What is the drive that brings people to art galleries? I believe that the main drive is the need to enjoy the aesthetic experience of the beautiful. But what is the reason for it? According to Schopenhauer, that can only be our need for salvation from the will, and we see galleries as our sanctuaries where we find peace and disconnection from suffering/willing. Schopenhauer explains that a genius’ inner nature drives him to creative activity and communication of ideas, but he stops short of explaining what drives spectators to art. The problem may be that his own definition of purposeless art and unintentional aesthetic experience stands in the way. If we are driven to art for the purpose of our short salvation from suffering, then our aesthetic contemplation cannot be unintentional. We have a clear purpose for achieving aesthetic experience, and that is the rest from the will/suffering. Second, we become will-less by becoming the will itself by looking at the world through one eye (will’s eye). The question is, how can the will desire us to become will-less? It is as the will looks at itself during the few moments of our aesthetic contemplation, during which we become will-less. I find it contradictory for the objectified will, man, to act against itself by becoming will-less for the sake of aesthetic experience, which will liberate him from the will. If the will is at the same time the will to live, according to Schopenhauer, why would the will to live attempt suicide by repudiating desires/life?

Although I find Schopenhauer’s aesthetics exalting, I find it dubious that art must be disinterested and purposeless and also that the observer identifies with the will itself while trying to reach the will-less state. While the activity of the genius is the creative process through which he discovers and shapes/objectifies the idea in his medium of art, the aesthetic experience of the observer in Schopenhauer’s aesthetics is passive. Depending on his ability (amount of genius in him), the observer absorbs the communicated idea from the genius through the work of art. Observer does not discover and shape the idea of the object presented in the works of art; he only recognises it. The goal or the purpose of the spectator in art is to achieve peace/freedom from suffering through the will-less state, which gives art quite a reduced function of a palliative capacity. The aesthetic contemplation of the observer resembles more some kind of short-lived tranquillity than a creative process. Creativity is the process of the fulfilment of desire, which, even in the genius cannot be purposeless since the urge or need for objectifying an idea through the work of art is in itself a purpose. It follows that the creativity of the genius and the need of the spectator cannot be purposeless: the former *needs* to satisfy his urge for creation, while the latter *needs* aesthetic experience in order to liberate himself from the will/suffering.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Schopenhauer places tragedy on the highest level of poetic art. For Schopenhauer, tragedy is the best proof found in art that life is not worth living and that pessimism is our best outcome. As he asserts:

Tragedy is to be regarded, and is recognized, as the summit of poetic art, both as regards the greatness of the effect and the difficulty of the achievement. For the whole of our discussion, it is very significant and worth noting that the purpose of this highest poetical achievement is the description of the terrible side of life. The unspeakable pain, the wretchedness and misery of mankind, the triumph of wickedness, the scornful mastery of chance, and the irretrievable fall of the just and innocent are all here presented to us; and here is to be found a significant hint as to the nature of the world and of existence. (*WWI*, p. 253)

Music has a special place in Schopenhauer’s stratum of arts. For him, the difference between music and other arts is that music is a direct copy of the will, while other arts are copies of ideas. Therefore, we experience music more powerfully than other arts. As he puts it: ‘For this reason the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence’ (ibid, p. 257).

Schopenhauer’s aesthetics is a part of his philosophical system, in which ubiquity and ineluctability of suffering play a central role. His aesthetics proves that we can detach from our individuality and repudiate desires/suffering, although only for a few moments through the aesthetic experience. In the following part, I will investigate his teachings on compassion and asceticism, through which Schopenhauer offers the longest lasting way of repudiation of suffering and liberation from the will.

5: Compassion and Asceticism

As the highest moral value, the main argument for compassion arises against the fact that individuals fight for their survival and well-being in the phenomenal world. In that pursuit of survival, their wills collide, causing pain and suffering. As long as they remain in the realm of knowledge ruled by *principium individuationis* (principle of individuation), which is the main reason for suffering, they will remain selfish and only care about themselves, seeing enemies in others. Individuals are usually indifferent to the suffering of others and only care about their well-being. As the culmination of individuation, which is, for Schopenhauer, only an illusion, one can only seek to understand that selfishness has to be abandoned. This normative valuation of good constructs Schopenhauer's moral perspective:

However strange this may sound it corresponds to the nature of the case, makes us see other men in true light and reminds us of what are the most necessary of all things: tolerance, patience, forbearance and charity, which each of us needs and which of us therefore owes. (*OSW*, p. 15)

Negating flagrant egoism, which is human nature, one negates the will itself and attains the highest moral principle. Therefore, he states: ‘Egoism and the moral worth of an action absolutely exclude each other’ (*OBM*, p. 141).[[14]](#footnote-14)

The knowledge that we are all manifestations of the same will and that we only exist as individual phenomena in the spatiotemporal world should conclude that there is no essential difference between 'I' and 'them'. In that instance, when the individual identifies himself with others, he experiences their suffering as his own. Compassion is, for Schopenhauer, the supreme principle of morality. As such, it can be turned into a virtue by lamenting the suffering of others and, at the same time, alleviating their suffering. But, apart from the fact that egoism is the 'chief and fundamental incentive in man' (*OBM*, p.131), there are also those 'inborn principles' of charity and ambivalence in people which cause some to consider others as themselves and acknowledge their rights as their own. They try to alleviate the suffering in others and seek their well-being without personal advantage.[[15]](#footnote-15) For Schopenhauer, only those non-egoistic actions can have moral worth. Therefore, compassion has to oppose the egoistic forces and hence: ‘The absence of all egoistic motivation is, therefore, *the criterion of an action of moral worth*’ (*OBM*, p. 140).

The problem that I find with Schopenhauer’s praise of compassion is that although compassion makes suffering more bearable and endurable, it does not eliminate suffering. If, according to Schopenhauer, extinguishing suffering is the ultimate goal, compassion does not do that. Compassion does not tackle the cause of suffering but rather offers temporary comfort to the sufferers who still remain in the same state. And in addition to that, it can be argued that compassion also multiplies overall suffering. Although, as an atheist, Schopenhauer does not accept the existence of God, he still embraces compassion, which is the essence of Christian morality. It is the same as feeling compassionate for someone who suffers from a dangerous illness but not giving him medicine in order to eradicate that illness and help him overcome it. Despite our compassionate feeling, the person will continue to be ill and eventually die.

Another problem with compassion is that, as our highest moral virtue, compassion actually requires suffering. How would I exercise my compassion if there were no individuals who suffered? If I want to be compassionate, I need individuals who suffer. If I feel their suffering like mine, I willingly increase the total sum of suffering in the world. It follows that if I try to eliminate the suffering from the world, I will eliminate the grounds for compassion. Therefore, according to Schopenhauer’s understanding of compassion as our highest moral virtue, eliminating suffering would be immoral if I had no reason to identify with anybody in a world without suffering and focus only on myself. My actions will, in that scenario, be purely selfish, which is not in accordance with above Schopenhauer’s quote, which states that absence of all egoistic motivation is needed for the highest state of moral action. And that is what Schopenhauer identifies as the biggest obstacle to compassion. It seems Schopenhauer's take on compassion is just a continuation of his metaphysical concept of the will and its objectified world of multiplicity, which is the main cause of suffering. By overcoming the spatiotemporal world of *principium individuationis* through higher (philosophical) knowledge, the individual crosses from the limits of individuation into the oneness of existence and identifies with others. But, by doing so, the individual does not decrease or eliminate suffering in the world; he instead requires it and increases it. Although Schopenhauer glorifies compassion as the highest moral virtue, it does not take him to salvation, so why would it be glorified at all?

An increase in overall suffering and compassionate credo like 'let us all suffer equally' that should somehow alleviate suffering, which is in itself questionable, does nothing to eliminate it. Compassion can also be motivated by personal interest/benefits. If helping others or feeling their suffering as mine helps me feel like a better person or helps my well-being, helps me secure my safety regarding the state's coercive powers, or benefit from the religious promise of reward for such behaviour, I personally benefit from it. And if I want to be a better person,

and I want my eternal reward, I am still wanting. Again, what we have here is that individuated 'I' that benefits from compassion. Compassion is an important human sentiment that helps individuals bond across societal layers. Although it does not eliminate suffering, it is the primary cause of charitable actions that have helped countless suffering individuals. As such, it cannot be devoid of personal interests, such as the satisfaction of being a good man, noble individual, saviour, etc. If the goal is to help others in their suffering, then personal interest in compassion is irrelevant as long as help is delivered. But this is not what Schopenhauer wants. Although he wants the complete elimination of self-interest, he has to admit that such an experience is indeed mysterious:

This event is certainly astonishing, indeed, mysterious. In fact, it is the great mystery of ethics; it is primary and originally phenomenon of ethics, the boundary mark beyond which only metaphysical speculation can venture to step. (*OBM*, p. 144)

In an attempt to explain the mysterious selfless behaviour, Schopenhauer resorts to disputable concepts such as 'voluntary justice, pure philanthropy, and real magnanimity' (Ibid, p. 130), which are rather idealised states that he needs to justify compassion within his metaphysical system. Although welcomed as morally valuable, these states of human behaviour are not always devoid of self-interest. I believe that, as in the aesthetic experience, in the feeling of compassion, he aimed to make the individual escape from his individuality (self-interest) and in merging with the phenomenon of beauty or with other individuals, abandon all his subjectivity and, at least temporary, free himself from the will. My view is that the main reason for excluding self-interest from artistic experience and compassion is that only selflessness can fit into his metaphysics of the will and offer an escape from suffering. But, while Schopenhauer has managed to explain the achievement of selflessness and will-less state achieved through the aesthetic contemplation of ideas, I don't think this was the case with his explanation of compassion.

However, Schopenhauer is aware that compassion and the artistic experience of beauty do not eliminate suffering, which is the final goal. For that reason, Schopenhauer introduces the ascetic ideal.

Although praised as the highest moral virtue, for Schopenhauer, compassion is not the final stage in the total dismissal of the will, as shown, or the moral meaning of the world. Here again, we have a paradox: the highest moral virtue of man is not the moral meaning of the world. The virtue of recognising others as equals to oneself culminates in the knowledge that all life is suffering. For an individual who: "Wherever he looks, he sees suffering humanity and the suffering animal world" (*WWR I*, p. 379), compassion is not enough anymore, and he realises that to 'love others like himself' doesn't change his inner being, which is still the will. For him arises the aversion towards his inner nature, and he wants to repudiate it. This knowledge leads to asceticism, which starts by resisting the instinct for procreation/sexual instinct. One stops nature's concern for preserving species, dictated by the will.

On the other hand, that knowledge of the whole, of the inner nature of the thing-in-itself, which has been described, becomes the quieter of all and every willing. The will now turns away from life; it shudders at the pleasure in which it recognises the affirmation of life. Man attains to the state of voluntary renunciation, resignation, true composure, and complete will-lessness. (ibid)

In the comparison to the aesthetic experience of the beautiful, which offers us freedom from all willing only for a moment or few, about the complete freedom of the will, Schopenhauer says the following: ‘From this we can infer how blessed must be the life of a man whose will is silenced not for a few moments, as in the enjoyment of the beautiful, but for ever, indeed completely extinguished’ (*WWR I*, p. 390).

But Schopenhauer has failed to explain the magnitude of the effort one must consider in achieving salvation by fulfilling the ascetic ideal. The closest he comes to the explanation of the negation of the will is in the following passage:

His will turns about; it no longer affirms its own inner nature, mirrored in the phenomenon, but denies it. The phenomenon by which this becomes manifest is the transition from the virtue to *asceticism*. In other words, it is no longer enough for him to love others like himself, and so do as much for them as for himself, but there arises in him a strong aversion to the inner nature whose expression in his own phenomenon, to the will-to-live, the kernel and essence of the world recognised as full of misery… Essentially nothing but phenomenon of the will, he ceases to will anything, guards against attaching his will to anything, tries to establish firmly in himself the greatest indifference to all things… he desires no sexual satisfaction on any condition. Voluntary and complete chastity is the first step in asceticism or the denial of the will-to-live. (*WWR I*, p. 380)

The phrases that he uses for the will that remains are *'arises* in him strong aversion', 'he *ceases* to will anything', *'guards* against attaching his will', 'tries to *establish firmly*', *'desires* no sexual satisfaction’, are ignited by the words such as arises, ceases, guards, tries and desires. These words are just different names for the still, very much alive will that the individual tries to deny. As the negation of the will is far from easy eradication of all comforts of life and abdication from the sexual instinct, there must be extreme determination and willingness to pursue such goals. The ascetic is clearly focused on his goals, which cannot be achieved without the willingness to achieve them. Higher goals will require a stronger will. As abdication of sexual and all other desires de facto represents one of the most difficult achievements, the ascetic must be armed with an extraordinarily strong will. In this case, the problem is that to extinguish all willing, the ascetic has to will extremely, which resembles the one trying to fight the fire by adding more oil to it. How can something that should be abandoned be considered necessary until its abolition happens? As the ascetic gets closer to achieving his final goal of liberation from the will, he must exercise the strongest will possible as the final stages of the process are supposed to be the hardest. As Simmel puts it: 'The will of the ascete, however, possess the highest concentration and the most acute efficacy, because is not directed at exterior objects, subjugating only itself and not the world’ (1986, p. 134). But the ascetic is trying to abolish precisely the same will, which is helping him make the final few steps. Schopenhauer’s best, but the still unclear explanation about that mystical cut-off point when the will finally disappears, is that the will finally turns against itself. In the case of the ascetic, the suicidal intention of the will contradicts its original essence as the blind and purposeless striving, as suicide is indeed a very purposeful goal-oriented act.

As a complete denial of all willing and all desires, asceticism stands clearly against compassion. While compassion, as the highest moral feeling for Schopenhauer, requires feeling others as oneself, that feeling is nothing but the desire to feel others as oneself. But if an ascetic extinguishes all the willing, that will mean that willing to feel others as himself will have to be eliminated as well. And if that is so, then asceticism is immoral, as the care for others ceases to exist. We cannot deny that Buddha's action to abandon his newly born son, as well as his view that home is a prison, are blatantly immoral and selfish, according to Schopenhauer's understanding of moral worth. One can find the reason for the existence of self-interest in compassion and asceticism in the fact that both states still require the strong presence of the will, which Schopenhauer vehemently tried to deny. There is very little evidence that self-interest and the strong presence of the will can be eliminated from compassion and asceticism. His view of the will-free lives of saints is rather speculative and not objective. My view is that the only time an individual can be will-less, although only momentarily, as Schopenhauer explained, is during the aesthetic experience. In that captivating moment of aesthetic experience, when the individual experiences the feeling of the beautiful, we can accept that he stops willing and enjoys freedom from the will. Art’s powerful ability acts as an irresistible attraction that offers momentary sanctuary from the ever-exhausting and tiring will.

Another problematic issue with Schopenhauer’s sainthood is in the lack of explanation of salvation or complete liberation from suffering. In this regard, John E. Atwell correctly remarks:

We have seen that tragedy, like philosophy and life itself, can bring one to the threshold of salvation, but we have not “seen” what that “state” consists of. Perhaps quite naturally, we seek further information: we want to know the exact nature of this “state”; we want to know whether it exceeds every conceivable vestige of will; we enjoin Schopenhauer to tell us whether salvation involves a totally new kind of knowledge and a totally new mode of existence, and if so what they could be. (2007, pp. 102,103)[[16]](#footnote-16)

As from Atwell’s observation, we can conclude that, yet again, Schopenhauer stops short of explaining some of his own conclusions, which he arrives at due to the consistency of his philosophical system. His explanation of the liberation from the will is sound, but the destination lacks explanation. Schopenhauer’s answer to this question is impossible because the state of sainthood is outside this world in which our knowledge, ruled by the principle of sufficient reason and, therefore, language, has no access. Since, for him, knowledge, in general, belongs only to the phenomenal world, the will or ‘the inner being-in-itself of things is not something that knows, is not an intellect, but something without knowledge’ (*WWR II*, p. 642). Since knowledge is convenient only for the phenomenal world, and appropriate for individual will, it cannot reach the noumenal world. Schopenhauer adds: ‘This is why a perfect understanding of the existence, inner nature, and origin of the world, extending to the ultimate ground and meeting every requirement, is impossible’ (ibid). What I find problematic is that he has so much to say about sainthood as the final destination of his moral philosophy, but he fails to explain what it is. As Atwell concludes: ‘Aesthetic contemplation, and particularly a sensitive reaction to tragedy, can serve as a means to this Buddha-like awakening – but thereof we must be silent’ (2007, p.103).

From the above explanations, it follows that the will is undeniable and almost ever-present in the case of compassion. If I am right, asceticism is unimaginable without the highest concentration of the will. My view is that Schopenhauer, in his remarkable explanation of the artistic experience of the beautiful, has come closest to the complete denial of the will, where at least momentarily, one can free himself from all willing.

Concluding Remarks

Schopenhauer’s grandiose philosophical system was supposed to explain the essence of the world and our place in it. His main concerns were our relationship to suffering and death, our ability to achieve happiness, the possibility of individual freedom and making life bearable. His main contribution to philosophy was in diverting the existential focus from the omnibenevolent Christian God and the promised optimistic exit from this life into the heavenly afterlife. Instead of the Christian God who is all-loving with unlimited goodness, Schopenhauer brings the focus on the will, as the essence of the world, which he sees as the blind and purposeless striving. The will is neither good nor rational, and there is no prospect of any award in the afterlife. Although I see Schopenhauer as one of the most influential philosophers of the so-called continental philosophy, I also find his philosophical views ambiguous in many areas.

I see the problem with Schopenhauer’s purposelessness of the will in relation to Schopenhauer’s view that the world has a moral significance. As Janaway suggested, Schopenhauer’s meaning of the world can only be moral meaning. Since the moral meaning of the world is that life is not worth living and should be extinguished through the repudiation of all desires, it suggests that there is still a purpose that culminates in Schopenhauer’s culmination of that moral meaning, objectified in the ascetic. Ascetic’s struggle and effort to reach the end of the complete will-lessness is proof of tremendous will to achieve that goal/purpose. But, if that is so, then how can the will be purposeless when its highest form of objectification, the human being, achieves the meaning of the world by exercising his will for a clear purpose? Another problem with Schopenhauer’s moral meaning of the world is that moral means normative. If the will is purposeless, it cannot propose any normative meaning, as each norm must have a purpose/goal to be achieved.

Schopenhauer’s pessimism is based on the view that absolute/lasting happiness is impossible. Since desire, for Schopenhauer, is the lack of something we desire represents suffering in itself; temporary happiness is possible only when desire is fulfilled. I have argued against the view that the fulfilment of desire is the only happiness we can achieve. As I have explained, we can also experience happiness in our pursuit of the fulfilment of desire. As for his conclusion that absolute happiness can never be achieved, taken as the ultimate proof of his pessimism, I have argued that such happiness is not possible anyway, in which case his proposition is not a strong argument for pessimism. In the total and permanent absence of suffering, we will live in a state of boredom, as nothing would be called happiness. For happiness to exist, which is antipodal to suffering, suffering is necessary.

Schopenhauer’s philosophy of art is mainly focused on the spectators, not as much on the creators of art. Although the role of the genius as the creator of the art is indispensable, the focal point of Schopenhauer’s aesthetics is in the proof that the will can be silenced, although very briefly, through art. As part of his philosophical system, which is essentially pessimistic, aesthetics confirms the ‘wretchedness and misery of mankind’ while at the same time playing a palliative role against suffering. I have argued against Schopenhauer’s view that aesthetic contemplation has to be unintentional while we seek its palliative effect in it. I have also pointed out the problematic state of passivity during which spectators become the ‘pure subject of knowledge’ while recognising the ideas that the artist has communicated through the specific medium of art. It seems like the observer cannot take anything else from the aesthetic experience of the beautiful but the will-less state during which he loses his individuality completely and identifies with the perceived idea. I find that the whole concept of will-lessness during aesthetic contemplation simplifies art to the single service of the renunciation of desires/suffering, while denying, e.g., any creative activity during the aesthetic experience.

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ABBREVIATIONS

*WWR I* Schopenhauer, A. 1966, *The world as Will and Representation I*, Payne, E.F.J. (trans.) (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.).

*WWR II* Schopenhauer, A. 1966, *The world as Will and Representation II*, Payne, E.F.J. (trans.) (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.).

*OBM* Schopenhauer, A. 1955, *On The Basis of Morality*, Payne, E.F.J (trans.) (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company).

*OSW*  Schopenhauer, A. 2004. *On the Suffering of the World*, Hollingdale, R.J. (trans.) (London: Pinguin Books).

*PP* *II* Schopenhauer, A. 2017. *Parerga and Paralipomena II*, Del Caro, A. and Janaway, C. (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

1. See Schopenhauer *WWR II*, Payne, E.F.J. (trans) (New York: Dover Publications, Inc): pp. 576, 605. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Schopenhauer *WWR I*, Payne, E.F.J. (trans) (New York: Dover Publications, Inc): pp. 275, 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I the following paragraph, Schopenhauer states: ‘All satisfaction, or what is commonly called happiness, is really and essentially negative only, and never positive. It is not a gratification which comes to us originally and of itself, but it must always be the satisfaction of a wish. From desire, that is to say, want, is the precedent condition of every pleasure; but with the satisfaction, the desire and therefore the pleasure cease: and so the satisfaction or gratification can never be more than deliverance from a pain, from a want’ (*WWR I*, p. 319). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Simmel, G. 1986. *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, Loiskandl, H., Weinstein, D., Weinstein, M. (trans) (Oxford: Marston Book Services Limited). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Soll, I. 1990. ‘Pessimism and The Tragic View of Life: Reconsideration of Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy’ in *Reading Nietzsche*, Solomon, R and M. Higgins, K. (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 104-132. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Janaway, C. 2007. *Beyond Selflessness*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Reginster, B. 2008. *The Affirmation of Life*, (London: Harvard University Press). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Schopenhauer, A. 2017. *Parerga and Paralipomena II*, Del Caro, A. and Janaway, C. (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Schopenhauer, A. 2004. *On the Suffering of the World*, Hollingdale, R.J. (trans.) (London: Penguin Books). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Schopenhauer introduces Platonic ideas as the first stage of objectification of the will. Ideas are unchangeable and represent the forms of all organic and inorganic bodies. They represent themselves in innumerable individuals of the same genus, which are copies of the same ideas, i.e. a countless number of individual horses have the same idea of the horse. While individual representatives of particular species become and pass away in time, ideas are eternal and never changing. Another important attribute of ideas is that they cannot be grasped by reason alone, or in Schopenhauer’s terms, via the principle of sufficient reason. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The absence of the will during the moments of aesthetic experience does not last long. Any distraction that brings us back to our consciousness immediately ends our will-less state and returns us to our everyday experience of the phenomenal world. As Schopenhauer puts it: ‘As soon as any relation to our will, to our person, even of those objects of pure contemplation, again enters consciousness, the magic is at end. We fall back into the knowledge governed by the principle of sufficient reason; we now no longer know the Idea, but the individual thing, the link to a chain to which we also belong, and we are again abandoned to all our woe. Most men are almost always at this standpoint, because they entirely lack objectivity, i.e., genius (*WWI*, p. 198). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Perception of ideas requires complete disconnection from the will. By abandoning the will during the creation and enjoyment of an artistic product, one loses individuality entirely and becomes the pure subject of knowledge. As long as individuality is present, the individual’s knowledge is governed by the principle of sufficient reason based on the categories of time, space and causality. Such knowledge does not allow for perceiving ideas. Also, paintings that arouse our desires, which are, for Schopenhauer, *charming or attractive* (*WWR I*, p.207), do not fulfil the necessary condition for aesthetic pleasure: contemplation of ideas. For that reason, such an attempt to represent desirable objects, i.e., in paintings, is not art. As he puts it: ‘Charming or attractive draws the beholder down from pure contemplation, demanded by every apprehension of the beautiful, since it necessarily stirs his will by objects that directly appeal to it. Thus the beholder no longer remains the pure subject of knowing but becomes the needy and dependent subject of willing’ (ibid). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For a fuller discussion on this theme, see Foster (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Schopenhauer, A. 1955. *On the Basis of Morality*, Payne, E.F.J (trans.), (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For a further discussion on this theme, see Cartwright (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Atwell, J.E. 2007. ‘Art as Liberation’ in Dale Jacquette (ed.), *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and The Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 81-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)