

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SCHOPENHAUER'S TWOFOLD DYNAMISM

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*Introduction*

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) is a thinker famous for his powerful philosophical vision, the key idea of which we find, in effect, stated in the title of his masterpiece, *The World as Will and Representation*: “[T]his world is, on the one side, entirely *representation*, just as, on the other, it is entirely *will*” (W I, p. 4). This, of course, is his understanding of the Kantian distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal realms, an understanding which, in fact, represents one way of bringing metaphysics back to post-Kantian thought.

At first blush it may seem that some central passages in which Schopenhauer presents his views on the concept of power or force (*Kraft*) makes him an unlikely candidate to be included in this book. Consider, for instance, the following (W I, pp. 111–112):

[T]he word *will* [*Wille*], which, like a magic word, is to reveal to us the innermost essence of everything in nature, by no means expresses an unknown quantity, something reached by inferences and syllogisms, but something known absolutely and immediately, and that so well that we know and understand what will is better than anything else, be it what it may. Hitherto, the concept of *will* has been subsumed under the concept of *force* [*Kraft*]; I, on the other hand, do exactly the reverse, and intend every force in nature to be conceived as will. [...] For at the root of the concept of *force*, as of all other concepts, lies knowledge of the objective world through perception, in other words, the phenomenon, the representation, from which the concept is drawn.

So the concept of force is ‘drawn from the representation’, whereas we have another, privileged kind of access to the noumenon as the will;<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that despite the above quote’s strong claim concerning our acquaintance with the noumenon as the will, the treatment Schopenhauer gives to this topic in W II, pp. 196–198 makes it rather clear that we cannot have completely direct

and, according to Schopenhauer, “if we refer the concept of *force* to that of *will*, we have in fact referred something more unknown to something infinitely better known” (W I, p. 112). Given all this, it is not surprising that scholars seem to have been prone to view the Schopenhauerian concept of force as one pertaining exclusively to the natural sciences or, more generally, to the phenomenal realm, not to the noumenon.<sup>2</sup> It may surely be asked, what else could the aforesaid amount to but metaphysics in which the concept of force or power plays only an inferior role? Consider the following passage by Roland Hall:

Schopenhauer’s claim that the forces of nature [...] are manifestations of the will, leads one naturally to view the will as a kind of force, even though a superior force, in spite of his warnings to the contrary. Even some commentators seem to have fallen into this trap.<sup>3</sup>

This is a trap because thereby the will is understood, according to Hall, “as an answer to a scientific question”;<sup>4</sup> and indeed, all sciences concern, for Schopenhauer, only the phenomenal world, whereas the idea is, of course, to discern the underlying metaphysical nature of reality.

However, there is another kind of interpretive stand concerning the question of the relationship between the concept of force and the noumenal world. Bryan Magee laments Schopenhauer’s choice of naming the thing in itself will. According to Magee, this welcomes far too many misunderstandings; for instance, “the fact that the concept [of will] is wholly derived from personal experience, and from observation of persons and animals, causes any application of it to carry implied overtones of the attribution of personality”.<sup>5</sup> The terms Magee finds more apt for designating the thing in itself are all dynamic in character; after contending that due to the unhappy choice of the key term, Schopenhauer “has brought it about that all his formulations about it [the

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or immediate access to the noumenon. For an instructive account of this and related discussion, see Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy*, pp. 158–165.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Seelig, “Wille und Kraft”; Hall, “The Nature of the Will and its Place in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy”; also Voigt (“Wille und Energie”), Young (*Willing and Unwilling*), and Brandt (“Über den Willen in der Natur”) discuss this topic. That it is, according to Schopenhauer, the task of the natural sciences to study forces is beyond doubt: “It [the will] appears as such a blind urge and as a striving devoid of knowledge in the whole of inorganic nature, in all the original forces. It is the business of physics and chemistry to look for these forces and to become acquainted with their laws” (W I, p. 149).

<sup>3</sup> Hall, “The Nature of the Will and its Place in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy”, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73. Hall (p. 74) himself holds that Schopenhauer sees the world biologically, as “a vast organism”.

<sup>5</sup> Magee, *Self and World in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy*, p. 142.

noumenon] carry, hidden somewhere on board, something counter-intuitive in their cargo”, he claims that “[t]he term ‘force’, rejected by him, would have been vastly preferable. ‘Energy’ would have been better still”.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, already before this Magee writes, “all material objects, in their inner nature, are primitive, blind, unconscious force inaccessible to knowledge. [...] The whole universe is the objectification of this force”.<sup>7</sup> Daniel Brandt contends similarly, “the *will* is a metaphysical force”.<sup>8</sup> Dynamic concepts such as force and energy are thus regarded as invaluable for discerning the true nature of the Schopenhauerian conception of the noumenal world.

As I will show below, both of the above positions have their merits; but I find, on the whole, the latter preferable. Even if we grant that the concept of force has an important place in Schopenhauer’s view of natural sciences and that we definitely should avoid treating Schopenhauer’s theory of the will as a scientific hypothesis, it still does not follow that dynamic concepts would not be of utmost importance for metaphysics as Schopenhauer conceives it. A careful analysis that takes into account the context provided by early modern thinkers reveals that Schopenhauer’s system is based on an elaborate theory in which the concepts of force and striving play a key role, and that this underpins a line of thought essentially dynamistic in character *both with regard to phenomenal and noumenal realms*. Understanding Schopenhauer’s twofold dynamism and its conceptual architecture allows us not only to gain insight into the nature of his metaphysical enterprise by designating its place within the context of this book, but also to obtain a better grasp of his view of the relationship between the noumenal and phenomenal realms. I also put forward a reading of Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the phenomenal world in which it is interpreted as a dynamic field of matter.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139. For criticism, see Young, *Willing and Unwilling*, pp. 64–66; Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy*, pp. 248–249.

<sup>8</sup> Brandt, “Über den Willen in der Natur”, p. 265, translation mine. However, Brandt (p. 265) compares the will as the thing in itself to “the universe’s energy before the Big Bang”, and in this respect he seems to treat the will as a scientific hypothesis. D. W. Hamlyn (*Schopenhauer*, p. 95) contends, after deeming some other interpretations of Schopenhauer’s conception of the will unacceptable: “It is a less misleading interpretation to take the will as being for Schopenhauer a kind of force that permeates nature and which thus governs all phenomena.” Hamlyn (p. 96) also claims that the will “is the force that determines that phenomena should have a course” and that “phenomena can be seen as governed by a force which is to be identified with the will”.

*The will as striving*

As already noted, Schopenhauer adopts the Kantian idea that reality is not exhausted by our representations, there is also the thing in itself,<sup>9</sup> and gives his own twist to this doctrine by arguing that the nature of the thing in itself is not, *contra* Kant, totally unknowable to us. Shortly after having labelled the thing in itself will, Schopenhauer designates its place in his conceptual framework. The guiding idea is that “the concept of will receives a greater extension than it has hitherto had” (W I, p. 111). What is at stake here? The following passage is revealing:

But hitherto the identity of the inner essence of any striving and operating force in nature with the will has not been recognized, and therefore the many kinds of phenomena that are only different species of the same genus were not regarded as such; they were considered as being heterogeneous. Consequently, no word could exist to describe the concept of this genus. I therefore name the genus after its most important species[.]<sup>10</sup>

So the claim is that the *essence* of strivings and forces we find in nature is in some sense *identical with* the will, they occupy the same level in Schopenhauer’s conceptual hierarchy by being all species of a genus strictly speaking unknown to us.<sup>11</sup> The will, however, is especially important, according to Schopenhauer, because we have direct—or at least most immediate (W II, pp. 197–198)—access to it. Thus Schopenhauer claims,

[w]e must now clearly separate out in our thoughts the innermost essence of this phenomenon, known to us directly, and then transfer it to all the weaker, less distinct phenomena of the same essence, and by so doing achieve the desired extension of the concept of will.<sup>12</sup>

This leads him to make the already-quoted claim, namely that “[h]itherto, the concept of *will* has been subsumed under the concept of *force*; I, on the other hand, do exactly the reverse, and intend every force in nature to be conceived as will” (W I, p. 111). However, I think we should keep in mind how weak the proposed subsumption in fact is: the mere fact

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<sup>9</sup> Christopher Janaway (*Self and World in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy*, p. 170) notes, very aptly I think, that the thing in itself “must be there because, as Schopenhauer puts it, it does not make sense to talk of appearance unless there is something that appears”.

<sup>10</sup> W I, p. 111.

<sup>11</sup> On the unknowability of the will, or the unanswerability of the question concerning the thing in itself, see especially W II, p. 198.

<sup>12</sup> W I, p. 111.

that one species of a genus is allegedly more clearly understood than others grounds the decision to call the genus 'the will'; the chosen species holds no other, conceptually strict, kind of authority over the other species.

When Schopenhauer elaborates his views on metaphysical issues, dynamic terms abound. Consider the following passages:

In fact, absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of *the will in itself, which is an endless striving*.<sup>13</sup>

As soon as knowledge, the world as representation, is abolished, nothing in general is left but mere will, blind impulse.<sup>14</sup>

It [the will] always strives, because *striving is its sole nature*, to which no attained goal can put an end.<sup>15</sup>

We have long since recognized this striving, that constitutes the kernel and in-itself of everything, as the same thing that in us, where it manifests itself most distinctly in the light of the fullest consciousness, is called *will*.<sup>16</sup>

[T]he constant striving, which constitutes the inner nature of every phenomenon of the will[.]<sup>17</sup>

The will is that primary and original force itself, which forms and maintains the animal body[.]<sup>18</sup>

This, of course, is the universal force of nature, which, in itself identical with the *will*, becomes here, so to speak, the soul of a very brief quasi-life.<sup>19</sup>

Before conducting closer analysis of Schopenhauer's use of dynamic notions, we can make some general observations concerning these notions in the Western thought. The most important thing to note is that in the metaphysical tradition much of this book focuses on, the concept of power (*dunamis, potentia*) plays a key role. Already the Eleatic Stranger of Plato's *Sophist* (247d–e) suggests that the mark of real things is power (*dunamis*) to affect or to be affected. The influential idea that *to be is to be causally powerful* goes nowadays by the name of 'the Eleatic Stranger's reality test'.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> W I, p. 164, emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> W I, p. 180.

<sup>15</sup> W I, p. 308, emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> W I, p. 309.

<sup>17</sup> W I, p. 312.

<sup>18</sup> W II, p. 293.

<sup>19</sup> W II, p. 299.

<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the *Timaetus* can be interpreted as presenting a dynamistic view of the fundamental nature of reality; see chapter one of this volume.

For many early modern thinkers, the relationship between metaphysics and physics was a topic of greatest importance, and this had a profound impact on the way in which they thought about power. Leibniz is especially instructive in this connection. Force occupies a central place in his physics, but he thought that adequate grounding for physics can only be found in metaphysics in which basic constituents of reality, monads, have intrinsic power to transfer themselves from one perception to another. Drawing the line between physics and metaphysics to some extent the way Leibniz did, Schopenhauer quite often specifies rather carefully whether he is talking about forces as *phenomenal manifestations* of the underlying metaphysical basis, or about *the dynamic nature of that basis*. For example, when he discusses “the forces of impenetrability, gravitation, rigidity, fluidity, cohesion, elasticity, heat, light, elective affinities, magnetism, electricity, and so on”—all of which undoubtedly belong to the phenomenal world<sup>21</sup>—he makes it clear that we are dealing with “the thing-in-itself which, *by appearing, exhibits those phenomena*” (W I, p. 122, emphasis added); whereas when he talks about the striving “that constitutes the kernel and in-itself of everything” (W I, p. 309), it is beyond doubt that we are dealing with the noumenal world.

However, the way in which Schopenhauer sometimes uses dynamic concepts creates interpretative problems. For instance, when he says that “I must recognize the inscrutable forces that manifest themselves in all the bodies of nature as identical in kind with what in me is the will, and as differing from it only in degree” (W I, p. 126), it is somewhat difficult to discern whether the forces in question should be understood as inhabitants of the phenomenal or the noumenal world.

It seems to me that the notion of force occupies a rather complicated and interesting limiting position between the phenomenal and the noumenal realms. According to Schopenhauer, forces are something the natural sciences inevitably end up presupposing despite the fact they remain, in the end, incomprehensible to such fields as physics and chemistry. Moreover, forces are something that point toward another kind of enquiry, namely metaphysics; or as Schopenhauer puts it,

the universal, the common reality, of all phenomena of a definite kind, that which must be presupposed if explanation from the cause is to have sense and meaning, is the universal force of nature, which in physics must

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<sup>21</sup> In W II, p. 314, Schopenhauer talks about gravity as an empirical quality.

remain a *qualitas occulta*, just because *etiological explanation here ends and the metaphysical begins*.<sup>22</sup>

This is the reason, I think, why it is difficult to say about some passages in which the notion of force makes its appearance whether Schopenhauer is discussing phenomenal or noumenal matters: in the universal force of nature, physics meets metaphysics. “[M]etaphysics never interrupts the course of physics, but only takes up the thread where physics leaves it, that is, at the original forces in which all causal explanation has its limits” (W II, p. 299).<sup>23</sup>

Although Schopenhauer is not altogether clear about this, I think his view to be as follows. There are many kinds of original forces of nature which appear to our senses and can be, at least to some extent, be explicated by philosophical reflection, but do not allow proper scientific elucidation;<sup>24</sup> the “force itself”, apparently captured by the idea of the universal force of nature, is not only “entirely outside the chain of causes and effects” and “outside time” but also “generally outside the province of the principle of sufficient reason” (W I, p. 131)—indeed, it seems so stripped of everything constituting the phenomenal world that one may well wonder how it can appear to our senses at all. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer dubs it the “immediate *objectivity* of the will” (W I, p. 131, emphasis added), which leaves it unambiguously to the phenomenal side of the phenomenal-noumenal divide. So although they give an important lead to metaphysics, and although some passages might suggest otherwise, I think Schopenhauer’s considered view is, in the end, that forces pertain only to the phenomenal realm and are the basic constituents of natural phenomena. In this respect, the first of the main lines of interpretation presented in the introduction—the one treating force as a concept belonging exclusively to the phenomenal realm—is in the right. In the next section, I will provide my own account of Schopenhauer’s view of forces and their operation.

That *forces* are phenomena does not, however, mean that dynamic concepts would have no work to do in Schopenhauer’s metaphysics. To

<sup>22</sup> W I, p. 140, the latter emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> See also *Über den Willen in der Natur*, p. 323.

<sup>24</sup> Hamlyn (*Schopenhauer*, p. 77) notes that force is “an explanatory concept meant to explain why certain kinds of causality takes place”, which holds true (for more on force and causality, see below); but Schopenhauer would obviously not—and I cannot see why would he be forced to—be ready to accept the claim Hamlyn makes after this: “In that sense its invocation automatically takes us beyond phenomena” (*ibid.*).

show this, we can begin by reconsidering the aforementioned scheme of classification. There Schopenhauer made it clear that the *essence* of forces is equal with the will in his conceptual hierarchy; and given his way of drawing the line of division between physics and metaphysics, precisely clarifying the nature of forces presupposed by natural sciences is an important task of metaphysics (see especially W II, pp. 172–173). Now, it would be difficult to claim that the inner essence of forces is something non-dynamic in character; and indeed, I think it is precisely here that the notion of striving (*Streben*) steps in. That notion is in many places used to account for the manifest, phenomenal operations of the will; but, as we have seen, Schopenhauer is quite comfortable to designate also the inner nature of things as striving: he talks about “the constant striving, which constitutes the inner nature of every phenomenon of the will” (W I, p. 312), thus apparently also forming the arguably dynamic essence of the universal force of nature. Given the aforementioned classification, it seems to follow that will and striving are species of the same genus.

Although what may be called Schopenhauer’s ‘official’ stand is that as the will is the best-known member of the aforementioned genus it is in terms of the will that we must conceive all the other species of that genus, some noteworthy passages nevertheless point to quite a different direction. When confronting the task of providing an account of the will, Schopenhauer claims that *striving is the essence of the will*: “the essential nature of the will in itself” is “an endless striving” (W I, p. 164), “striving is its [the will’s] sole nature” (W I, p. 308). I noted already above that Schopenhauer’s grounds for subsuming the concept of force under the concept of will are not particularly strong, and the talk of striving as the nature of the will suggests that it is, in fact, *striving* that emerges as the dominant concept; it may perhaps be seen as the term designating the unknown genus itself. Recall:

We have long since recognized this striving, that constitutes the kernel and in-itself of everything, as the same thing that in us, where it manifests itself most distinctly in the light of the fullest consciousness, is called *will*.<sup>25</sup>

At any rate, it is uncontroversial that Schopenhauer finds ‘striving’ a particularly apt term to describe the *nature* of the will, which is already enough to show that the notion of striving has a central role in his metaphysics.

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<sup>25</sup> W I, p. 309.



To further elucidate the role of the concept of striving in Schopenhauer's system, we can examine the way in which the notion has been connected to a recent *essentialist* interpretation, put forward by Dale Snow and James Snow, of Schopenhauer's philosophy. Snow and Snow argue that Schopenhauer transforms the Kantian distinction between the phenomenon and the thing in itself "to one in which the thing in itself is the essence of all that is";<sup>26</sup> the thing in itself "is not a causal ground of phenomena but rather the essence of all that is".<sup>27</sup> Christopher Janaway elaborates this line of interpretation as follows:

The Schopenhauerian thing in itself, inasmuch as it is knowable in philosophical reflection, is the *essence* of the world of appearance, not in any way its cause. And it is the essential *aspect* of that same world of appearance, not any thing of a distinct ontological kind.<sup>28</sup>

Now, Janaway connects this line of thought to the concept of striving: "The single essential character of the world is that everything in it is alike in continually 'striving' to be, yet for no point or purpose beyond its merely being."<sup>29</sup> Slightly later he contends,

the essence of things contains no rationality, no higher purpose, no final vindication of the world or the self. The world, and humanity within it, merely strives to be, in multiple instantiations, in perpetuity. Our inner nature, and that of the world-whole, pushes each of us hither and thither, overwhelms our efforts with its own larger striving, and leads us only into suffering.<sup>30</sup>

This, I think, is well-put indeed, and I particularly appreciate the fact that from this perspective it is obvious that striving appears as the essential feature, the nature, the ontologically pre-eminent aspect, not only of every individual but the world as a whole. Thus the in-itself of everything—apparently also of our wills—is not, in fact, *a thing* but *a dynamic factor*, namely striving, that underpins all existence. Further, this is something revealed by philosophical reflection, not by physical experimentation. This insight is, to my mind, the cornerstone of Schopenhauer's essentially dynamistic metaphysics.

<sup>26</sup> Snow and Snow, "Was Schopenhauer an Idealist?", p. 644.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 648.

<sup>28</sup> Janaway, "Will and Nature", p. 166.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* Already earlier in the same paper (p. 144) Janaway writes: "But Schopenhauer wants to say that at the broadest level of generality every part of the world possesses the same essence as I do; like me it—as it were—pursues, strives, or tends somewhere."

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 166–167.

Schopenhauer nowhere, to my knowledge, properly explicates what he understands by striving, but by examining the way in which the notion was treated by some of his notable predecessors we can clarify its meaning and gather reasons for its central role in the Schopenhauerian scheme of things. First, and perhaps most importantly, it is a well chosen term given Schopenhauer's antagonist view of nature: "[E]verywhere in nature we see contest, struggle, and the fluctuation of victory[.] [...] Every grade of the will's objectification fights for the matter, the space, and the time of another. [...] [O]nly through it [this struggle] does nature exist" (W I, pp. 146–147; see also W I, p. 309). At least since the birth of modern philosophy, striving was understood as exercising one's powers against contrary powers. Descartes sees his notion of *conatus* (i.e. striving or endeavour) as including resistance and effort;<sup>31</sup> for Spinoza, *conatus* is an expression of God's power that forms our essence and amounts to exerting ourselves against opposition to get rid of harmful passions;<sup>32</sup> and Leibniz rightly emphasizes how different from a thing that merely remains in its prevailing state is a thing that is not indifferent, but is endowed with "a force and, as it were, an inclination to retain its state, and so resist changing".<sup>33</sup> In other words, the capacity forces or powers have to *resist opposition* was commonly explicated in terms of (some kind of) striving they are endowed with; and since the Schopenhauerian phenomenal world is certainly one in which things find themselves continually and resiliently opposing each other, it is understandable that precisely striving forms their innermost nature. As Schopenhauer puts it, the will as striving "can be checked only by hindrance" (W I, p. 308), and this corresponds to the fact that "[w]e see striving everywhere impeded in many ways, everywhere struggling and fighting" (W I, p. 309).

Second, although the term 'striving' can easily be fitted into a teleological framework, and although it is a close relative of such terms as 'trying', it should be kept in mind that in the Cartesian vocabulary 'conatus' has a technical meaning that does not involve any kind of conscious aiming at ends:<sup>34</sup> it refers simply to the tendency corporeal

<sup>31</sup> See *Principles of Philosophy* II.43; CSM I, 243; AT XI, 84.

<sup>32</sup> See propositions 6, 7, and 37 of the third part of the *Ethics*.

<sup>33</sup> AG, p. 172.

<sup>34</sup> For an instructive discussion of this, see Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 107.

things have to stay in their prevailing state. Spinoza generalizes this line of thought in his all-encompassing theory of finite existence, human existence included, and although his traditional status as an arch-enemy of all teleology has recently been questioned,<sup>35</sup> I think that his theory is meant to be free of all teleology.<sup>36</sup> Leibniz argues that there are two kingdoms, that of nature and that of grace, efficient causes pertaining to the former, final to the latter; and as the notion of striving belongs predominantly to his physics and hence to the kingdom of nature, it does not carry any teleological overtones.<sup>37</sup> Now, Schopenhauer emphasizes again and again that the will is endless, blind, and without any aim—"the will dispenses entirely with an ultimate aim or object. It always strives, because striving is its sole nature, to which no attained goal can put an end" (W I, p. 308)—and given the way in which it was used by his seventeenth-century predecessors, the notion of striving gives him possibility to account for the non-teleological and non-inert nature of the noumenon. Schopenhauer's stand is that purposeful action needs a motive and thus falls under the principle of sufficient reason (W I, p. 163), but as the noumenon has no ground it is untouched by that principle and can have no motive or purpose.<sup>38</sup>

It is worth noting that, in Schopenhauer's framework, 'striving' is—unlike 'force'—equally at home in both the phenomenal and the noumenal realms. We find Schopenhauer stating,

as every body must be regarded as the phenomenon of a will, which will necessarily manifest itself as a striving, the original condition or state of every heavenly body formed into a globe cannot be rest, but motion, a striving forward into endless space, without rest or aim[.]<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See especially Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza and Early Modern Rationalism"; Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza".

<sup>36</sup> For more on this, see my *Spinoza's Dynamics of Being*, chapters 11–12.

<sup>37</sup> See *New Essays on Human Understanding* 2.21.

<sup>38</sup> Schopenhauer may be seen as running into trouble by claiming, in the very same paragraph, both that the will is blind and that it always wills life (W I, p. 275). However, the fact that the will is will to life (*Wille zum Leben*) should not be taken to mean that there is a drive aiming at animate existence; rather, life "is nothing but the presentation of that willing for the representation" (W I, p. 275), i.e. one way in which the will appears to us (see also W I, p. 220), and the will can thus be called will to life. The idea is obviously simply that the noumenon as striving is the inexhaustible source of existence, also animate existence (cf. Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, p. 155).

<sup>39</sup> W I, p. 148.

so evidently striving is not only the essence of the will but—at differing levels of consciousness and purposefulness—also its important manifestation, giving the forces of nature their resistant character (see W I, p. 149). This squares well with Schopenhauer’s contention that “the task of metaphysics is not to pass over experience [...], but to understand it thoroughly” (W I, p. 428), “philosophy is nothing but the correct and universal understanding of experience itself” (W II, p. 183):<sup>40</sup> the phenomenal world that exists through strivings and contests of opposing forces (W I, p. 147) strongly points towards the corresponding nature of the noumenal reality;<sup>41</sup> it may be said, I think, that the idea of the thing in itself as striving solves “the riddle of the world” (W I, p. 428) by combining the inner experience we have of our will with what Schopenhauer evidently regards as undeniable, that the world before our eyes is one of incessant struggle.

Finally, we may observe that when he discusses the nature of the noumenon, Schopenhauer ends up, I think, with a monistic position. This is so because he argues that plurality is possible only through time and space that are forms of objects of representation; but as the will as the noumenon “lies outside time and space”, it is “outside the possibility of plurality”; hence, “[i]t is itself one” (W I, p. 113) and “indivisible” (W I, p. 128). Schopenhauer emphasizes that despite the manifold of ‘objectifications’ in which the will manifests itself in the phenomenal world, “it is everywhere one and the same” (W I, p. 118). Thus I think it is well-warranted to see Schopenhauer as a monist;<sup>42</sup> and given that

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<sup>40</sup> See also *Über den Willen in der Natur*, p. 324. Cf. Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer*, p. 80: “The thing-in-itself provides a kind of explanation of phenomena, but not one that involves the principle of sufficient reason. It does not explain each phenomenon taken separately; it explains them taken as a whole.”

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, pp. 154–155: “When reading Schopenhauer’s numerous descriptive passages about the endless restlessness of matter and the teeming activity of the animal and human worlds [...] it is important to remember that these are not descriptions of the will as it is in itself but only as it manifests itself in the world of phenomena. Nevertheless it is clear that he takes this as telling us something about the essential nature of the will.”

<sup>42</sup> Dale Snow and James Snow (“Was Schopenhauer an Idealist?”, p. 644) argue against interpreting Schopenhauer as a monist: “In view of Schopenhauer’s polemics against Schelling, it would also be a mistake to characterize him as a metaphysical monist. The terms of his rejection of Schelling’s philosophy of identity—itsself a revival of Spinozism—makes clear that he is not a thoroughgoing monist.” However, as Schopenhauer quite obviously is a monist with regard to the will, and as, in the final analysis, only the will in the strict sense exists—both the subject and its correlative, matter, are merely *manifestations* of the will (see e.g. W II, pp. 15–16)—I think a rather strong case for regarding Schopenhauer as a monist can be made.

the noumenon is will as striving, I think it is well-warranted to regard him as espousing one kind of dynamistic monism.<sup>43</sup>

*The phenomenal world as a dynamic field*

In what follows, I aim to offer an account of Schopenhauer's doctrine of the phenomenal world. In consonance with the above discussion of the noumenal essence of things, Schopenhauer's theory of the phenomenal objectifications of the will—i.e. entities such as inanimate matter, plants, animals, and human beings—has its own distinctive dynamistic flavour. That doctrine contains a wealth of elements: forces of nature, causality, form, matter, time, space, and even Platonic Ideas. I shall argue that an illuminating way to understand all this is to interpret Schopenhauer as a kind of field theorist concerning the world of representations.

In his *Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, published in 1984, Jonathan Bennett presents the famous, and controversial, 'field metaphysical' interpretation of the Spinozistic extended substance.<sup>44</sup> Its central idea is that the monistic substance under the attribute of extension, i.e. the extended substance or space, is one continuous field without really distinct parts; corporeal things are, metaphysically speaking, ways in which space is modified, or states or properties occupying certain regions of the unified spatial field. This kind of theory may sound strange, but really is not; as Mark Wilson puts it, "a physical quantity (such as mass, temperature or electrical strength) appears as a field if it is distributed continuously and variably throughout a region".<sup>45</sup>

Now what I want to argue is that a field theory of this mould can be quite helpful in understanding Schopenhauer's theory of the phenomenal world. Here the nature and status of matter (*Materie*) emerges as the crucial issue.<sup>46</sup> Schopenhauer discusses matter in a highly complex

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<sup>43</sup> In this respect he comes close to Spinoza (see chapter nine of this volume). Interestingly, in the final chapter of the second volume of his main work Schopenhauer himself contends: "[T]he world exists, with me as with Spinoza, by its own inner power and through itself" (W II, p. 644).

<sup>44</sup> Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, chapter 4; see also Bennett, "Spinoza's Metaphysics"; *Learning from Six Philosophers*, chapter 7. For an interpretation that combines Bennett's field metaphysical interpretation with a dynamic view of Spinozistic substance, see my "Field Metaphysic, Power, and Individuation in Spinoza".

<sup>45</sup> Wilson, "Field Theory, Classical", p. 668.

<sup>46</sup> The *a priori* forms of objects are, for Schopenhauer, space, time, and causality (see especially W I, §§ 2–3). As Janaway (*Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*,

way in several places of *The World as Will and Representation*, especially in § 4 of the first volume and chapters 1, 4, and 24 of the second. The starting points of his view can be summed up, I think, as follows. Although pure matter is not only non-spatial and non-dynamic but also never perceived, matter is still by no means a mere *ens rationis*: it provides the all-important common reference point, the required ‘filler’ so to speak, of the forms of our perception—it is where time, space, and causality are combined.<sup>47</sup> So although we can never perceive matter purely as such, matter still “enters into every external experience as a necessary constituent part thereof” (W II, p. 306); indeed, “sensibility presupposes matter” (W I, p. 11; see also W II, p. 15). The governing idea here is that *matter is the common substratum of the whole phenomenal world*, that “in which the world as *representation* exhibits itself” (W II, p. 306); or, to put things in Kantian terms, it is “the final subject of all the predicates of every empirically given thing, what is left after removing all its properties of every kind” (W I, p. 489). Hence to be *real* or *actual* in the phenomenal world equals being material (cf. W II, p. 47). Given all this, we should not be surprised to find Schopenhauer designating matter as nothing less than one of the two “fundamental conditions of all empirical perception” (W II, p. 15), the other being the subject, or the intellect; these two exist only for each other (*ibid.*), and “together constitute the *world as representation*” (W II, p. 16). The central position of matter is further witnessed by the fact that matter is said to be the phenomenal counterpart of the will: “[E]very object as thing-in-itself is will, and as phenomenon is matter” (W II, p. 307). Matter is “the mere *visibility of the will*” (W II, p. 45).

However, like everything phenomenal, also matter exists only as conditioned by the forms of our perception—Schopenhauer is eager to emphasize that his doctrine is a form of idealism, and that matter only exists for the transcendental subject. The relationship between

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p. 172) notes, “there may be some surprise at the category of *substance* going out of the window, since it is the one category besides *causality* that has continued to be thought of as of crucial importance in the Kantian scheme of things”. The category of substance is obsolete, Schopenhauer argues, because it has, in fact, been abstracted from the concept of matter and does thus not contain anything that the latter concept would not already contain (W I, pp. 490–491). Thus, “the concept of substance must be entirely rejected, and that of matter be everywhere put in its place” (W I, p. 491). See also *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, p. 67.

<sup>47</sup> On problems pertaining to this, see Morgenstern, *Schopenhauers Philosophie der Naturwissenschaft*, pp. 97–98.

matter and the forms of space and causality proves to be especially important: the will “exhibits itself forthwith as body, that is, as matter clothed in form and quality; but form is conditioned by space, and quality or activity by causality” (W II, p. 309). As the former linkage, that between matter and space, is the one that sets the field theoretical interpretation underway, I will discuss it first.

After having quoted with approval the view he assigns to Plotinus and Bruno, “matter itself is not extended, and consequently is incorporeal” (W II, p. 308; see also p. 45), Schopenhauer goes on to explain that “space, which is the form of our intuition or perception, endows matter with extension” and that “we can perhaps picture matter to ourselves without weight, but not without extension, force of repulsion, and persistence; for it would then be without impenetrability, and consequently without space-occupation, that is to say, without the *power of acting* [*Wirksamkeit*]” (W II, p. 308). We can, for now, disregard the reference to power of acting—or perhaps we should simply say to efficacy—and note that how ever bare may pure matter be, *for us* it can appear only as extended, because it falls under space as a form of our perception. Slightly later Schopenhauer confirms the crucial significance of space for matter: “Space is the perception-form of matter, because space is the substance [*Stoff*] of mere form, but matter can appear only in the form” (W II, p. 308).

Thus as the substratum of the phenomenal world matter is extended and exists “in all the dimensions of space and throughout the whole length of time” (W II, p. 48). This gestures towards a view according to which *matter forms a field* apart from which nothing phenomenal can exist. This line of interpretation receives ample support especially from the table of the ‘*praedicabilia a priori*’ located in the fourth chapter of the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*. Consider the following:

Both [matter and the subject] belong to the phenomenon, not to the thing-in-itself, but they are the framework of the phenomenon.<sup>48</sup>

There is only *one* matter, and all different materials are different states of it: as such it is called *substance*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> W II, p. 15.

<sup>49</sup> W II, p. 48.

The shapes and forms are innumerable: matter is one, just as the will is one in all its objectifications.<sup>50</sup>

[I]t [matter] is never immediately apprehended, but is always only added in thought as that which is identical in all things under every variety of quality and form, as *that which is precisely substantial, properly speaking, in all of them*.<sup>51</sup>

Matter is homogenous and a *continuum*, in other words, it does not consist of originally heterogeneous (homoimeries) or originally separate parts (atoms); it is therefore not composed of parts that would be separated essentially by something that was not matter.<sup>52</sup>

Matter has no origin or extinction, but all arising and passing away are in matter.<sup>53</sup>

To my mind, what Schopenhauer puts forward is, if not by name, a fine representative of a field theory: *everything phenomenal takes place in a unified, permanent, and endless spatio-temporal field of matter*. On this interpretation, all real empirical objects are, philosophically speaking, parts of this total field that is not built up from finite bodies. All objects are matter in some determinate state, or as Schopenhauer puts it: “*Things, that is to say, states of matter*” (W II, p. 42; see also p. 13). Already in the early *Fourfold Root* (p. 65) he states, “whatever the body’s form may have become, its substance, i.e., its matter, must exist and be found somewhere”. There thus exists basic stuff,<sup>54</sup> matter, which forms an infinite continuum with no non-material gaps, but not one without divergence. Matter can only be encountered in some certain state, modified in a certain manner, i.e. as things; just as Spinoza’s extended substance is always modified in some way, we can never find Schopenhauerian matter as it is, without any form or quality.

From early on, Schopenhauer was fascinated by Plato’s doctrine of ideas and wanted to incorporate it into his system. The way in which he does this, however, has been often found problematic; for instance Janaway holds that “Schopenhauer’s doctrine of ideas is remarkable and

<sup>50</sup> W II, p. 309.

<sup>51</sup> W II, pp. 311–312, emphasis added.

<sup>52</sup> W II, p. 48.

<sup>53</sup> W II, p. 49.

<sup>54</sup> As Martin Morgenstern (*Schopenhauers Philosophie der Naturwissenschaft*, pp. 101–102) points out, matter means, for Schopenhauer, both basic stuff (*Stoff*) and substance. Moreover, Morgenstern argues that as *Stoff* matter is something extended, whereas as substance it is not (and is hence something that can only be thought about, not perceived).



full of difficulties".<sup>55</sup> For our purposes the important point is that, apart from being central to Schopenhauer's aesthetic and ethical concerns, the doctrine of ideas also has considerable amount of work to do in his theory of the phenomenal world, and for the following reason. Given the above presented framework, it can and should be asked, what makes certain distributions of states of matter *individuals*? On what grounds can it be said that certain regions in the material field are occupied by individuals? Now, Plato's Ideas equal, for Schopenhauer, "*grades of the objectification of the will*" that exist "as the unattained patterns" of individuals, "or as the eternal forms of things" that "remain fixed" and are "subject to no change" (W I, p. 129). "These grades are certainly related to individual things as their eternal forms, or as their prototypes" (W I, p. 130; see also §§ 31–32). As commentators have pointed out, with 'Ideas' Schopenhauer refers, then, to "those most universal features of the natural world that are shared in by the various individuals within it".<sup>56</sup> Moreover, they have been said to "operate in the world *like dies that put a uniform stamp* on innumerable phenomena which are then, though all different, all the same";<sup>57</sup> I would only add that what is being stamped is the material field, the stamping resulting in individuals as specifically distributed states of matter. So although the ontological status of ideas is unclear,<sup>58</sup> we can see that they have here a clear and important role to play (and similar to the one essences have in Spinoza's metaphysics). We should also take heed of the fact that even though Schopenhauer so often emphasizes that the will is not rational, it nevertheless manifests itself in the Ideas that are its "adequate objectivity" (W I, pp. 179–180) that, as we have seen, shape the phenomenal realm. Given this, it may well be asked, to what extent can the will be regarded as arational, if that which objectifies it *adequately* is something akin to Platonic Ideas, the classic source of order and rationality we find in the world? It thus seems that Schopenhauer needs something to account for the fact that the world we perceive is not a chaotic flux but is endowed with structure and order—however precarious those may be—, and turns to the notion of Idea to explain this. This is, then, one

<sup>55</sup> Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, p. 10.

<sup>56</sup> Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, p. 254; see also Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer*, chapter 6. Only human beings have their unique Platonic Ideas; see W I, pp. 132, 158.

<sup>57</sup> Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, p. 150, emphasis added.

<sup>58</sup> On this, see Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, pp. 277–278; Snow and Snow, "Was Schopenhauer an Idealist?", p. 648.

route through which a basic kind of rationality may be seen to find its way into his system.<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, we have already noted that matter can only appear in some definite (spatial) form. Now, given the connection between Ideas and forms, expressed in passing in above quotes and explicitly in “by *forma substantialis* the scholastics in fact understood what I call the grade of the will’s objectification in a thing” (W I, p. 211; see also p. 143), it is evident that there is, in a sense, a hylomorphic element in Schopenhauer’s system. This is why so much of what we have discussed above can be stated in scholastic terminology of *forma* and *materia*:

[T]he *form* alone constitutes *the thing*, that is to say, it establishes the *difference* of things, whereas matter must be conceived as homogeneous in all. The scholastics therefore said: *Forma dat esse rei*. [...] The union of *form* with *matter* [...] gives the *concrete*, which is always an individual, hence *the thing*. It is the *forms*, whose union with *matter*, that is to say, whose appearance in matter, by means of a change, is subject to the law of *causality*.<sup>60</sup>

Platonic Ideas thus operate, much like substantial forms do for the scholastics, as the basis for individuation.<sup>61</sup> It is thus not difficult to find a place for the notion of form in the interpretation put forward here: forms have an important task of designating certain states (that occupy certain regions on the field of matter) as individuals.

### *Matter and causality*

We are, long at last, in a position to examine the connection between matter and causality. What this examination shall show is that it is a special feature of Schopenhauer’s field theory—I take it that at this point I am entitled to speak of such—that it is unmistakably and overtly dynamistic in character.

According to Schopenhauer, time and space are the source of plurality and thus the principle of individuation (see especially W I, § 23), by which he seems to mean simply that time and space are something

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<sup>59</sup> I am grateful to Juhani Pietarinen for pointing me out these implications of Schopenhauer’s thought.

<sup>60</sup> W II, pp. 42–43. See also W I, p. 277.

<sup>61</sup> For substantial forms and individuation in scholasticism, see Des Chene, *Physiologia*, p. 54.

with regard to which things are differentiated from each other.<sup>62</sup> The spatio-temporal plurality of states, in turn, changes as dictated by the law of causality. Schopenhauer states this repeatedly, for instance in the following manner:

*Every change in the material world can appear only in so far as another change has immediately preceded it; this is the true and entire content of the law of causality.*<sup>63</sup>

In words more explicit about what the change in questions consists of (W I, pp. 9–10):

[T]he law of causality receives its meaning and necessity only from the fact that the essence of change does not consist in the mere variation of states or conditions themselves. On the contrary, it consists in the fact that, at the *same place in space*, there is now *one* condition or state and then *another*, and at *one* and the same point of time there is *here* this state and *there* that state. [...] Thus change, i.e., variation occurring according to the causal law, always concerns a particular part of space and a particular part of time, *simultaneously* and in union. Consequently, causality unites space and time.

Moreover, and as we should by now expect, all this takes place in matter (W I, p. 10):

[M]atter must carry within itself simultaneously the properties and qualities of time and those of space [...]. It must unite within itself [...] the unstable flight of time with the rigid unchangeable persistence of space[.]

So, apparently, causality is lawfulness or rule-governedness—here I think we can hear Humean echoes—we find in the way in which states of matter succeed each other in space and time. The picture resulting from the considerations thus far is, then, this: objects, i.e. things of the phenomenal world, are spatio-temporally distributed states of the material field, and the distribution takes place in a lawful manner, according to the law of causality.

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<sup>62</sup> I think a much fuller doctrine of individuation can be unearthed from the pages of *The World as Will and Representation* (see the discussion on Ideas and forms above); given the distinction formulated by Hector-Neri Castañeda (“Individuation and Non-Identity: A New Look”, pp. 132–133), the here presented stand would, in fact, equal answering the problem of *differentiating* things from each other, not the problem of individuation (which, for Castañeda, concerns discerning what *makes* an individual the individual it is).

<sup>63</sup> W II, p. 39.

But from the beginning of the first volume of Schopenhauer's main work,<sup>64</sup> it becomes evident that there is more than this to causality. He delineates the connection between matter and *causal efficacy* as follows:

[M]atter is absolutely nothing but causality [...]. Thus its being is acting [*Wirken*]; it is not possible to conceive for it any other being. *Only as something acting does it fill space and time*; its action on the immediate object (which is itself matter) conditions the perception in which alone it exists. The consequence of the action of every material object on another is known only in so far as the latter now acts on the immediate object in a way different from that in which it acted previously [...]. Thus cause and effect are the whole essence and nature of matter, its being is its acting.<sup>65</sup>

So matter is causally efficacious throughout, and due to this efficacy it can be the content, the basic material, of the objects of perception.<sup>66</sup> Schopenhauer is happy to point out that the German word for reality, *Wirklichkeit*, is a particularly felicitous one (W I, p. 9): the basis of the phenomenal reality is formed by matter to whose nature it belongs always to act (*wirken*). He could thus hardly be more explicit about the fact that the concept of matter he operates with is not an inert one. Given that the basis of the objects of our representations is matter, it is not surprising to find him stating that "the true *being* of objects of perception is their *action*" (W I, p. 14). From this the notion of power or force is only one step away: "[E]very operative or causative thing acts by virtue of its, original, and thus eternal, i.e. timeless, power [*Kraft*]" (W II, p. 44). In short, anything that does not pass the Eleatic Stranger's test is debarred from entering the world of phenomena.<sup>67</sup>

Most often, force and power are classified, and with reason, as causal notions. We should, however, take heed of the fact that especially in

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<sup>64</sup> Schopenhauer's views on these matters are fairly thoroughly exposed already in the *Fourfold Root*; see § 20 of that work.

<sup>65</sup> W I, pp. 8–9, emphasis added. See also W II, p. 305.

<sup>66</sup> No doubt, the connection between matter and space follows directly from the fact that the former necessarily falls under the latter; but sometimes Schopenhauer argues that were matter not spatial, it could not be causally efficacious. After the already quoted passage, "we can perhaps picture matter to ourselves without weight, but not without extension, force of repulsion, and persistence; *for it would then be without impenetrability, and consequently without space-occupation*, that is to say, without the *power of acting* [*Wirksamkeit*]" (W II, p. 308, the first emphasis added). So activity presupposes spatiality, and as "the essence of matter, as such, consists precisely in *acting*" (W II, p. 308), matter must be spatial.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Morgenstern, *Schopenhauers Philosophie der Naturwissenschaft*, pp. 111–112.

the second volume of his main work, Schopenhauer is careful to distinguish causes from forces. He finds fault in what he calls “*too wide* comprehension of the concept *cause*” which has led to conflating it with that of force (W II, p. 44).<sup>68</sup> The crux of this criticism seems to lie in Schopenhauer’s way of defining causality in terms of lawful succession of changes. Given this understanding of causality, Schopenhauer correctly keeps the two notions apart; and it does make sense to point out that “force is nevertheless what imparts to every cause its causality, in other words, the possibility of acting” (W II, p. 44). In other words, the explanation for the fact that things are causally active is found in forces. Things are causally efficacious in virtue of their intrinsic force, whereas “the law of causality” regulates the manner in which that causal efficacy is exercised in particular situations (see W II, p. 14). I think we can even detect traces of Leibnizian influences in the claim that the universal forces of nature “are the prior and presupposed conditions of all causes and effects through which their own inner being is unfolded and revealed” (W I, p. 130).

The general thrust of Schopenhauer’s argumentation concerning matter, activity, causality, and so on, is toward a position in which matter and force are the fundamental ingredients in each and every phenomenon; and indeed, we find a passage that makes this as explicit as one might wish:

Two things in nature, namely matter and the forces of nature, remain untouched by the chain of causality which is endless in both directions. These two are the conditions of causality, whereas everything else is conditioned by it. For the one (matter) is that *in* which the states and their changes appear; the other (the forces of nature) that *by virtue of* which alone they are able to appear at all.<sup>69</sup>

Here it all comes together really: matter and force are the basic constituents of the phenomenal realm, and inextricably intertwined. The first is causally efficacious throughout because of the latter; the latter has a place in the phenomenal world because of the former.<sup>70</sup> It is thus wholly

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<sup>68</sup> See also *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, pp. 68–69.

<sup>69</sup> W II, p. 44.

<sup>70</sup> Julian Young argues that matter is, for Schopenhauer, “identical with force” (*Willing and Unwilling*, p. 43), and that “the ordinary world of commonsense is, Schopenhauer holds, an appearance of a reality of disembodied forces”, “the ‘seats’ of the ultimate forces in nature” being “extensionless points” (*ibid.*, p. 45). Morgenstern (*Schopenhauers Philosophie der Naturwissenschaft*, pp. 109, 122–125) claims that Schopenhauer attempts to reduce the concept of matter to that of causality. But even

appropriate to talk about “the *fundamental forces of matter*” (W II, p. 14). To be material is to be causally efficacious in virtue of one’s force.

Schopenhauer’s descriptions of the way in which the objectifications of different levels relate to each other can be, I think, quite nicely explicated within a field theoretical interpretation. The phenomenal world of forces is hierarchically structured according to Platonic Ideas, the basic level being formed by the universal forces of nature:

The most universal forces of nature exhibit themselves as the lowest grade of the will’s objectification. In part they appear in all matter without exception, as gravity and impenetrability, and in part have shared out among themselves the matter generally met with. Thus some forces rule over this piece of matter, others over that, and this constitutes their specific difference, as rigidity, fluidity, elasticity, electricity, magnetism, chemical properties, and qualities of every kind.<sup>71</sup>

The picture Schopenhauer paints before our eyes can be interpreted as a spatio-temporal field in which forces, by resisting each other, occupy varying regions of matter. Not only the original forces of nature but everything in nature behaves in a force-like manner, analogously to the ultimate forces of nature (see W I, pp. 145, 154), so that we find contest everywhere:

Thus everywhere in nature we see contest, struggle, and the fluctuation of victory[.] [...] Every grade of the will’s objectification fights for the matter, the space, and the time of another. Persistent matter must constantly change the form, since, under the guidance of causality, mechanical, physical, chemical, and organic phenomena, eagerly striving to appear, snatch the matter from one another [...]. This contest can be followed through the whole of nature; indeed, only through it does nature exist [...]. This universal conflict is to be seen most clearly in the animal kingdom.<sup>72</sup>

The idea is thus that persistent matter, with regard to which all objects of perception are of one piece, changes its form, or state, through innumerable contests. Schopenhauer suggests that out of the conflicts of the lower grades of objectification arise the phenomena of higher

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though Schopenhauer says that “Kant (after the example of Priestley) has quite rightly reduced matter to forces” (W II, p. 303), he also shows reluctance towards a reductionist position concerning matter; in many passages (see especially W II, pp. 14, 42–44) his view obviously is that there must be *something* (independent from forces or causal efficacy) in which forces inhere.

<sup>71</sup> W I, p. 130.

<sup>72</sup> W I, pp. 146–147.

ideas: plants, animals, and human beings. But not only are the objectifications of a certain grade in conflict with each other, there are also inter-level contests between objectifications of different grades. The objectifications of higher Ideas must continuously struggle to keep those of lower Ideas—ultimately the original forces of nature that have “ghostly omnipresence” (W I, p. 133) and in whom all causal explanations are ultimately anchored even though Schopenhauer is decidedly against explaining higher phenomena by reducing them to lower ones (see e.g. W I, § 27)—subdued in order for them to continue to exist, i.e. to keep a certain part of matter in a state corresponding to their higher Idea (W I, pp. 144–146). It thus seems that each Idea as the unifying principle bestows upon its objectification its own, distinctive kind of striving force to maintain the objectification (i.e. a certain way the material field is modified) in existence. This explains, I take it, at least in part why there is also harmony in the world (see W I, § 28).

To end this discussion, we can examine a couple of features of Schopenhauer's thought that appear rather understandable on the present interpretation. Janaway writes, “[i]t is not clear why Schopenhauer thinks that atoms are ‘fictions’”.<sup>73</sup> Now, Schopenhauer surely is firmly against any kind of atomism. He holds that “[t]he atom is without reality” (W II, p. 51), and at least two reasons for this can be found. First, in atomistic theories “all processes of inorganic nature are reduced to mechanism, to thrust and counter-thrust” (W II, p. 316), and this, of course, goes against his view of forces as irreducible basis of natural phenomena.<sup>74</sup> Second, and even more importantly, Schopenhauer holds that “[m]atter is infinitely divisible” and that “matter is [...] a *continuum* [...]”; it is therefore not composed of parts that would be separated essentially by something that was not matter” (W II, p. 48); the idea here is, I think, that as the material field is one unified continuum, not built up from finite regions, there are no definite end-points (such as indivisible atoms) to the way in which it can be modified. Also the claim that “if, *per impossible*, a single being, even the most insignificant, were entirely annihilated, the whole world would inevitably be destroyed with it” (W I, pp. 128–129), is what we should expect given the field

<sup>73</sup> Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, p. 178.

<sup>74</sup> Janaway (*Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, pp. 178–179) observes that reductionism is one reason for Schopenhauer to object materialism.

theoretical interpretation:<sup>75</sup> permanent going out of existence of any part of the field, which is a unity, is incomprehensible.

*Epilogue: Schopenhauer's dynamism and Nietzsche*

This discussion has shown, I hope, that not only is Schopenhauer's view of the basic nature of reality intrinsically dynamistic, amounting to *a monistic vision of will as aimless striving*, but also that his theory of the phenomenal world can be fruitfully understood as having in its heart a view of *the world as a field in which things are centres of causal efficacy, individuated by Platonic Ideas or forms, that fight over the possession of matter*. I would thus argue that it is well-taken to label Schopenhauer a twofold dynamist, so crucial a role dynamic concepts play in his theories of both the noumenal and the phenomenal.

Given these aspects of Schopenhauer's philosophy, it is interesting to recall that a thinker very much influenced by it, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), puts forward claims—most notably in his unpublished manuscripts—in which he champions a “dynamic interpretation of the world”<sup>76</sup> on which “no things remain but only dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta”.<sup>77</sup> Reconstructing the obviously extremely dynamistic theory Nietzsche is sketching out in his *Nachlass* would, of course, require a separate study of its own; but this strongly suggests that the metaphysical ideas discussed in this book do not find their end-point in Schopenhauer's elaborately expressed dynamistic theory of the world, but can be traced at least to Nietzsche. Indeed, many of the preceding chapters in this book have shown how the view of the world as having some kind of power as its basis has been traditionally allied with the idea that this power, or the reality it brings about, is fundamentally rational or intelligible in character. Now, we really should appreciate the fact that Schopenhauer's rather stark view of life as a combative affair leads to the denial of this alliance: although not much can be said about the noumenon, it does seem in many ways

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Spinoza: “[I]f one part of matter were to be annihilated, the whole of Extension would also vanish at the same time” (Letter 4, to Oldenburg; *The Letters*, p. 69). For the argument of how this backs up the field metaphysical interpretation of Spinoza's doctrine of extension, see Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, pp. 97–101.

<sup>76</sup> *The Will to Power*, § 618.

<sup>77</sup> *The Will to Power*, § 635.



apposite to hold, as Magee does, that Schopenhauer “was possessed by the idea that there is something inherently evil, monstrous, wicked about the ultimate force that constitutes the world”.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, it seems to me that it is precisely here that Schopenhauer has exerted the greatest influence on our intellectual climate:<sup>79</sup> *he alters the moral standing towards dynamistic metaphysics* by claiming that the fundamental dynamic factor underlying everything is far removed from rationality, intelligibility, design, or providence. The world in itself is purposeless striving that manifests itself as a field of constant contest with no intrinsic value; the proper thing left for us to do is the unfaltering acknowledgement of this. This moral repositioning, it seems to me, is something that forms an important background for Nietzsche’s thought.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, p. 146.

<sup>79</sup> As Magee (*ibid.*, p. 154) notes, “Schopenhauer’s world-view is unmistakably ‘modern’”, prefiguring humanist existentialism.

<sup>80</sup> I would like to thank Juhani Pietarinen and Olli Koistinen for many helpful comments on this essay. Finally, I would like to acknowledge that the work on this paper was supported by Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation.