

Arthur Schopenhauer

A cynical scoundrel

"Marrying means to halve your rights and double your duties," said Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). Also, "Getting married means grabbing blindfolded in a sack hoping to catch an eel between the snakes." His mother told him that his first book, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (1813), was unreadable and that she could not imagine that anyone would want to buy it. Infuriated, he snapped back that his book would be read long after the "rubbish" she wrote totally had been forgotten¹. From the descriptions Schopenhauer emerges as an unconventional man who was quickly irritated if



Arthur Schopenhauer, 27 years (1815)

something was not to his liking. He could get mad of chattering women at his front door or intellectual twaddle of fellow students and his professors - he qualified Georg Hegel as a clumsy charlatan. The libertarian morality attributed to him would have applied also in intimate relationships with women. Schopenhauer is often called a pessimist, but whether this is appropriate -it is a qualification in the vision of the other- will be considered. After all, when the other is an -unrealistic-optimist or idealist, a realist or pragmatist rapidly seems a pessimist. The same applies to someone who is sharp and witty - whom before long, also wrongly, is called sarcastic or a cynic.

More telling about his mentality, for it reveals more about his deeper turmoil, is that Schopenhauer, when he travelled through Europe in his younger years, was touched by the horrible poverty and suffering he saw everywhere. Was he then already aware that he made the same observation as Siddhartha Gautama, later called the Buddha? The young prince and the heir of a wealthy trading house apparently both were raised sufficiently protected to be taken unawares about the circumstances in which most of the 'normal' people had to live. Schopenhauer has never let underexposed his interest for the thinking

in the Upanishads and thinking according to Buddhism, although in his time he had to do with an imperfect translation into Latin of a Persian translation from the Sanskrit Upanishads²). Since he also had to make do with secondary sources about Buddhism, he never really noticed the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism. There are striking similarities between the liberation from Samsara -the endless cycle of incarnations expressed in Hinduism and Buddhism- and Schopenhauer's liberation from suffering, the suffering that man produces because of his will. Liberation from human suffering, says Schopenhauer, occurs when a person can ignore his will, by letting go of the selfish individuality in pity and ascetic renunciation. Incidentally, Schopenhauer was the first western philosopher who made a connection in a serious manner with Indian philosophy.

The contrast is great. On the one hand of Schopenhauer, especially by his surroundings, the image was created of a selfish irascible man, on the other hand Schopenhauer suffered to the suffering of man, his compassion. However, the two observations are not necessarily contradictory with each other. The source of all suffering, the will, can be put to rest by a meditative demeanour, through the study of philosophical writings and music, according to Schopenhauer. This attitude to life was a basic requirement for Schopenhauer that everyone should want to meet to end his suffering. In contrast, it is exasperating to see people develop a wafer-thin introspective attitude by their cackling and squabbling prolonging their suffering in that way. Like bringing on the market the true elixir-of-life for eternal youth and no one buys it, because the packaging is not attractive enough³).

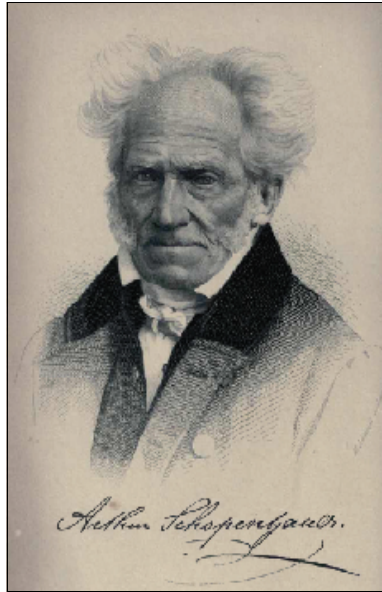
An angostura for anguish

Arthur Schopenhauer published his main work, "The World as Will and Idea -Representation-", in 1818 and an expanded second edition in 1844. Schopenhauer assumed that the reader of his work was familiar with the works of Plato and Kant. He included in his book an appendix thereon, although he also formulated his critique on Kant therein. To understand Schopenhauer distinguishing between the thing as representation and the thing in itself is necessary. The thing in itself or the thing as such, "das Ding an sich", is the being of something without human involvement or interest, without any accompanying observation or qualification of man. Kant said about das Ding an sich that man cannot know it, because in knowing already a representation by man is contained and that knowledge about the object was therefore

impossible. Schopenhauer saw it differently, because he thought that Kant had overlooked the inner experience, or as he put it, the will. For Schopenhauer the human will was the window to the world behind the representation, the world of the Kantian Ding an sich. He sees the thing as representation or the image of any object outside the mind of man, including the closest object, the human body. In short, everything outside the human mind are things of which the human mind forms an idea.

Overall the will is an important notion in philosophy, because the will of a person is one of the respective parts of the mind, together with reason and understanding, according to philosophers. The will is a property of the mind and a feature of operations performed intentionally. The will does not refer to a specific desire or preference, but to the comprehensive ability to have desires and act on that basis. When a person develops self-awareness, Schopenhauer stated in *The World as Will and Idea -Representation-*, he realizes what his essential qualities are: excitement, craving, aspiration, coveting and desire, the characteristics of what we call our will. The will is present in the deepest essence, the core of every thing and in the whole. It can be observed in any involuntary power of nature and in the conscious human behaviour. The will is a primary force and uses knowledge to select an object that can satisfy the craving. Schopenhauer argues that all of nature, including man, is an expression of an insatiable will to live. It is because of that will that humanity suffers.

It is not mind boggling complex recognizing the survival instinct in the will, under which a person may even kill to survive, placing everything in life under the sign of self-preservation. As such this does not create the suffering, the will causes the suffering having the primacy in the world, a world in which it is possible for the will to manifest. When Schopenhauer says that a person must bring to rest the will so to stop the suffering, he says basically the same as what Krishna says to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra [Bhagavad Gita⁴]. Krishna learns Arjuna that a man should act detached. Detached action is action without regard to its importance in the world and based on the dharma, the correctness of the act. Who takes the correctness of the act as a starting point and not the importance of the act breaks through the suffering embodied in Samsara, the nigh endless cycle of incarnations. Who in the interest of acting in the world, in terms of Schopenhauer, takes the will and survival as a starting point, cannot stop his suffering. What Schopenhauer says about free will, approximates what Krishna



says about Dharma. Schopenhauer states that in anticipation everyone believes he is perfectly free and thinks he may begin a different way of life at any time. However, with hindsight he realizes he is not free and subjected to necessity, and that despite all decisions and reflections he cannot change his behaviour, that from the beginning of his life up to the end of it he must perform his character . . . [Parerga and Paralipomena, Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life, page 147]. The conclusion must be that free will does not exist, because a person cannot escape himself, a person must always act according to a for him unique pattern.

It may be that all the implications of what Schopenhauer thought and wrote reveals a rather pessimistic view of life. Schopenhauer seems to have conveyed this also, although his bleakness was not devoid of humour⁵⁾. Moreover, it is not impossible that he used his cynicism as a tool to make a point without being really a full-time pessimist or cynic. His observation about rights and obligations within a marriage are not pessimistic or cynical. They are realistic. The ultimate question of course is whether reality is so very terrible. A pessimist will say yes and is depressed about it, possibly even to the extent that all other no longer matters to him. An optimist accepts the disadvantages and will highlight the advantages. One can say about him that he closes his eyes for the disadvantages, which is considered inherent stupidity, and especially wants to see the pleasant side, what in its turn is seen as naive. Likewise, the person who understands that he is a pawn of the will must determine whether that is positive or negative. So, the person who comes to the realization that he has no free will has to decide whether he has thereby cause for gloom or cheerfulness.

No person is merely a pessimist or an optimist only. In a lifetime there are trends and fluctuations, sometimes in response to what is happening outside a person, sometimes because of internal developments. Schopenhauer identifies the aspects that lead to pessimism and self-destruction. Who then concludes that Schopenhauer's elixir to understand life is a toxic Angostura has

misread the recipe, has made an assumption based on guessed data. Whoever takes the trouble actually to examine the formulation will find no toxic bark, but a balance of cooperating herbs and plant extracts. An elixir of life that, at least in reputation, soothes the crippling fear and thus enables to recover in this life. Schopenhauer shows that the will of man poisons his life and if man wants to express himself, the forces affecting him need to be calmed.

Der Wille zur was?

The will is present in everything, making it possible for man to know das Ding an sich, Schopenhauer said. Still, a differentiation must be made. Seeing the boulder is not possible as the boulder 'sees' the boulder, because man is not a boulder. Simultaneously, knowing the boulder is possible because like humans it is part of a universe where the will -to survive- is the universal law. Both the boulder as man cannot be other than they are, therein they have no free will. Why would man like to be different from who he is? He tries to satisfy the discrepancy he feels by willing it -excitement, craving, aspiration, coveting and desire- with his will. Thus he anchors himself in the world, which brings him to his suffering. What does he crave and want, why does man strive for something or why does he need something? What is wrong with man?

Krishna and Schopenhauer walk in well-nigh the same track. The Hindu god advises the human to decouple the interest in his actions -to detach- from his actions and only to act out of correctness⁶). Initially Krishna gives the impression that correctness is rooted in the unique pattern of man, or as Schopenhauer put it, that what man is when he realizes that he has no free will, that he has to answer to what and whom he is in his core. However, Krishna ultimately gives no room for man's core and gives his own vision of Arjuna's dharma, so that he may go through the various stages of Nirvana and reach the highest heaven with Krishna. In other words, Krishna replaces the will of man by the will of Krishna. And behold, the suffering does not stop⁷). Schopenhauer is in almost the same track by requiring from the human to pacify his will and so his want and thereby to stop the suffering. Still, what then? What was it man longed for to begin with? Why the suffering?

The answer to that question is even darker, bleaker and more depressing than Schopenhauer ever imagined. The world-will, says Schopenhauer, is an irrational, blind force that drives the world. That will is like the being that Spinoza called God -absolutely infinite and good-, but with the difference, according to Schopenhauer, that there is

no good in this will. Schopenhauer's atheism renders God anonymous. The watchmaker of the Enlightenment in his interpretation becomes a perpetuum mobile without qualities, God reduced to a mindless hulk that irrevocably goes on like a runaway train. Schopenhauer is no stranger to some inconsistency at this point, since it is the will, the world-will if you will, that allows man to know the things surrounding him and consequently nature or the nature of God - and hence the cause of his desire and suffering. That Schopenhauer anonymizes and denatures God is a choice, his choice. Just as the Buddha dedeified the divine. Not god, says the Buddha, nor the self nor some causeless chance created us. We are the result of our own actions that brought results for both good and evil, all according to the law of cause and effect. If God were the creator of all life, all life should adhere to his power without questions, the Buddha said.

Both Schopenhauer and the Buddha formulate near flawless reasoning -that contain several specific assumptions-, from which the conclusion must be that the Vedic God the Buddha knew and the



Christian God Schopenhauer knew, does not exist. It is striking that both subsequently not define what the driving force behind the universe is, but an impersonal denatured force. That both Schopenhauer as the Buddha are incorrect, is evidenced by the still present suffering in the world - though of human making, but not of human cause⁸⁾. That the suffering only stops when everyone is Buddhist or an adept of Schopenhauer's philosophy -both claim that their doctrine is universal- is a nonargument, because the stopping of the suffering like the promise of heaven, is set in an uncontrollable distant future. This vista therefore also infers a disqualification of contemporary man, to which can be added that the moment where everyone thinks the same⁹⁾ -Buddhist or otherwise- will never be reached. It maybe hard on Schopenhauer and Buddha, but the God they tried to cover up looks much more like Krishna -or El or Ēlāhā, a precursor of the Old Testament Yahweh- than they perhaps would wish for. In summary, in the conclusion of Schopenhauer and the Buddha God is not genuinely denied -only denatured- while the responsibility for the suffering of human beings is 'moved' to where it always was, man himself.

The Buddha likes to see man almost mindlessly in a Nirvana and Schopenhauer lets us bring our will to rest by imposing our will on the will. Schopenhauer posits the word-will that is blind while he in reality blinds all human beings and unable to know the force behind the world. The answer to the suffering is even darker, gloomier, and more depressing than Schopenhauer imagined. The dehumanization -the unrecognizability by man- of Schopenhauer's word-will and the dedeification of the Brahman and Krishna by the Buddha, makes of man a guileless vulnerable being in a deceitful intrusive existence. Man cannot lift his suffering by willing it, nor reaching a transcendental state by imagining already being here in a Nirvana. A person cannot resist a hurricane by willing -praying- it to another path - not to mention the disastrous consequences for others. Man cannot but accept what causes him to be here and subsequently not to act out of fear and hatred, the cause of all suffering. It is best to look for the means -the medium- through which a person truly can accept why he is here in order to eliminate his suffering.

Krishna's attempt to form Arjuna after his image is the ultimate effort of the will of existence in the world to point all noses to the same direction. Schopenhauer and the Buddha's attempt to let man abandon his will makes man a likely unresisting victim of the will -Krishna's will- of existence. Yet, man is also endowed with reason and that is exactly the tool that he can use to find out what he is missing, -his want, his cravings-. Contemporary man should not be disqualified with a promise for the future, but he must be awakened. Man, when he wants to raise his suffering, must have his eyes wide open and see in what a pitch black loveless existence he got himself into. Every person may not only lift his future suffering, but particularly his present by not shining his light on others and telling how it should be in the world to come, but to ignite the light within himself and to go en route on its inner path. Not the philosopher so inspirational or the spiritual as exalted that he can say how it should go with the world of man. It is each individual human being who has the light inside and uses it to discover, to rediscover inner Love. It is because of the lack of Love that man does suffer. Not the lack of human love or compassion -or even empathy-, or the lack of love for the boulder -his environment-, but the Love that is absent in existence and that can only be discovered in your inside. Who discovers that Love will change the world.

The world is Luciwhear's world and is neither good nor evil. It is this universe in which he can shine his light, but in which he lacks the Love. The Ancient Spirit drives his flock together and binds them together in

his legality, the Luciwhear paradigm - principle of suffering, the longing for love.

Concise bibliography

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Notes

- 1) Johanna Schopenhauer was the wife of the Dutch merchant Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer and the mother of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. When she was told that her son later could reach great heights, she replied: "That is not possible, there can be only one genius in the family." Of Schopenhauer's father is said that he committed suicide.
- 2) See section 2.1 in this book about Hinduism.
- 3) More biographical information about Schopenhauer:
www.egs.edu/library/arthur-schopenhauer/biography/
- 4) For an analysis of Hinduism and in particular the Bhagavad Gita see the contents of this book five.
- 5) See: www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/11682.Arthur_Schopenhauer
- 6) Non-attachment: Yet if Dharma is to be fulfilled, it must be done with total self detachment. There must be no seeking after success in life, for the fruit of action (karm-phal). Actions are to be done because they are correct, because they are required by Dharma, not for personal gain. Quest for personal gain involves a person temporal order. Eventually it draws all things down to destruction. "Be concerned with the deed alone, not on its profit; let not the consequences of the deed be your motive, nor be you attached to non action. Perform your deeds in disciplined way. To be yourself, the same in success and failure; this discipline is defined as equanimity" (II, 47-48). Through out chapters two and three there is a thorough inquiry into the reasons for man's attachment to the sense world and the manner in which release is obtained by turning mentally to the highest reality and most sublime truth. This shows a profound inner awareness that even the doings of good deeds bind man within the phenomenal order if there is any attachment what so ever, any individual self-aggrandizement within time. This is what is known in the west as purity of intention; to do things which should be done. Bron: www.gitananda.org/about-gita/topics-addressed-by-the-gita.html
- 7) The conclusion can be none other than that Krishna is not the God he says he is, when the essence of God is that it relieves or removes the suffering. See also the analysis of Hinduism and especially the Bhagavad Gita in this book five, about whom Krishna essentially is.
- 8) The causality that the Buddha perceives in the universe and human action, is less evident than he assumes. When two or more phenomena follow each other in a relationship, it cannot be taken for granted that there is a causal link between these phenomena. The link is only temporal, because it involves phenomena in time. The actual "causa" of the phenomenon or the series is situated outside the temporal, outside time.
- 9) Moreover, the pursuit of uniformity in thought and action is a feature of the Luciwhear paradigm. The satanic principle -without characteristics of good or evil- presses on the entirety of 'creation'.