

# Psychotherapists: Should we meet Arthur Schopenhauer?.

*Trino Baptista*

Departamento de Fisiología, Facultad de Medicina, Universidad de Los Andes, Mérida, Venezuela.

**Key words:** Schopenhauer; asceticism; compassion; cognitive neurosciences; evolution theory; psychoanalysis.

**Abstract.** Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) is known as the pessimist philosopher and the psychologist of the will. He anticipated some features of cognitive neuroscience, psychoanalysis and evolutionary psychology, but he is relatively unfamiliar to most contemporary mental health professionals. Schopenhauer conceived the will as the universe's essence; purposeful human actions are a small part of it. We do not directly perceive the will, but only its phenomena through the 'Veil of Maya', which, in contemporary terms, refers to the cognitive and perceptual limits imposed by our own biological species. This is why Schopenhauer posits that we have a representation (idea) of the world. We have a direct access to the will by perceiving our body's desires. The will is insatiable and selfish. Because of these will's features, there is no possibility of collective or global salvation. However, individual or existential salvation may occur by denying the will through a path that includes: 1) an aesthetic experience particularly with the aid of art, that allows contemplation of the 'Platonic Ideas', lessening desire and promoting knowledge through contemplation,; 2) the ethical experience refers to the insight about the unity of the universe, particularly by realizing the ubiquity of suffering and neediness, and 3) the metaphysical step which promotes compassion and asceticism. These philosophical principles may add to specific psychotherapeutic techniques in expanding the individual's awareness beyond herself/himself, and thus arise and improve the psychological outcome.

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Corresponding author: Trino Baptista. Departamento de Fisiología, Facultad de Medicina, Universidad de Los Andes, Mérida, Venezuela. Email: trinbap@yahoo.com.

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## Psicoterapeutas. ¿Deberíamos conocer a Arthur Schopenhauer?

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**Palabras Clave:** Schopenhauer; asceticismo; compasión; neurociencias cognitivas; teoría de la evolución; psicoanálisis.

**Resumen.** Arturo Schopenhauer (1788-1860) es conocido como el filósofo pesimista y como el psicólogo de la voluntad. Schopenhauer anticipó algunos elementos de las neurociencias cognitivas, del psicoanálisis y de la psicología evolutiva, pero es poco conocido por la mayoría de los profesionales de la salud mental contemporáneos. Schopenhauer concibió la voluntad como la esencia del universo; la acción humana voluntaria es una pequeña parte de la voluntad. No percibimos a la voluntad directamente sino a sus fenómenos a través del 'Velo de Maya', el cual se refiere en términos presentes a los límites cognitivos y perceptuales impuestos por nuestra propia especie biológica. Es por esta razón que Schopenhauer afirmó que nos hacemos una representación (idea) del mundo. Tenemos un acceso directo a la voluntad al percibir los deseos de nuestro cuerpo. La voluntad es insaciable y egoísta. Dadas estas características de la voluntad, no existe la salvación colectiva o global. Sin embargo, es posible la salvación individual, mediante la negación de la voluntad, la cual ocurre a través de un camino que incluye: 1) la experiencia estética, en particular con la ayuda del arte, que permite contemplar las 'Ideas Platónicas', aplacar el deseo y promover el conocimiento mediante la contemplación; 2) la experiencia ética, la cual se refiere a la toma de conciencia sobre la unidad del universo, en especial al darse cuenta de la ubicuidad del sufrimiento y de la naturaleza menesterosa del ser humano, y; 3) la experiencia metafísica, la cual promueve la compasión y el ascetismo. Estos principios filosóficos pueden agregarse a las técnicas psicoterapéuticas específicas para expandir la conciencia individual más allá de sí mismo (misma), y de esa manera estimular y mejorar la evolución psicológica.

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### INTRODUCTION

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was a German philosopher well known for his pessimistic view of life, for the criticisms he voiced to the academic philosophers of his time, for having pioneered the introduction of Buddhism and the respect for animal life in Europe, for his misogyny, and for his clear and precise writing style often depicted by original metaphors and

irony. His main philosophical proposal was that the world is our representation and that the will is the closest knowledge to the thing-in-itself that we, humans, can have. Schopenhauer's philosophy has influenced fields as diverse as biology, psychology, art, literature and music.

In spite of its contributions to psychology, Schopenhauer's thought is not mentioned either in psychiatric education programs or in emblematic psychology books, even though he

anticipated relevant features of psychoanalysis, evolution theory and modern cognitive neurosciences.

I posit that the field of psychotherapy could very well be enriched -- both in its theoretical foundations and its practical skills-- by explicitly incorporating some of Schopenhauer's contributions. For that purpose, in this article I will firstly describe his biography, his theoretical philosophical foundations and then their relevance for mental health professionals. I will particularly emphasize the practical applications of his work to psychotherapy and psycho-education.

Throughout this article, Schopenhauer's original texts are transcribed in italics within double quotation marks. Other authors' original writings are also transcribed within double quotation marks but in standard format.

### Biography (chronology)

Schopenhauer's biography is very popular, particularly those events related to his turbulent relationship with his parents (Johanna Henriette Trosiener and Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer), his experiences at an early age with human suffering, his father's suicide, his career selection, his lifetime criticism and aversion towards academic philosophers and Hegel's philosophy, his difficult relationship with women, his ambivalent relationship with Goethe, his love for and defense of animal rights, and his lonely, but comfortable, life. The interested reader is referred to well-known scholar biographies (1,2), correspondence (3), and a popular novel (4). Here below is a selection of dates and events in Schopenhauer's life, along with other dates that are important to contextualize his biography (adapted from 1-4).

**1724** Kant is born. His Critique of Pure Reason is published in 1781.

**1770** Hegel is born.

**1788** Arthur Schopenhauer is born.

**1803-4** Grand tour of Holland, England, France, Switzerland, Austria. Later in life, Schopenhauer considered that this tour led him to have a profound insight about human suffering.

**1805** Apparent suicide of his father.

**1813** Doctorate in philosophy (Ph.D), Jena University, with a dissertation entitled: On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

**1814** Schopenhauer's final break with his mother.

**1815** Publication of On Seeing and Colors.

**1818** World as Will and Representation is published.

**1820** First and last attempt to become a university professor. Dispute with Hegel.

**1833** Settles in Frankfurt where he will remain until the end of his life.

**1851** Parerga and Paralipomena is published.

**1860** Schopenhauer dies.

Here is a brief summary of Schopenhauer's personality written by one of his modern biographers and critic. "Schopenhauer was undoubtedly an often difficult person: rude, satirical, quarrelsome, and sometimes depressed. On the other hand he is observant, funny, original, writes like an angel... He is, moreover, sharp-sighted and honest, honest with the reader, honest in particular about himself. Beneath the grim exterior of man and philosophy is someone for whom a surprising number of people (including this writer) experience considerable affection" (1).

### Publications

Schopenhauer's capital work is The World as Will and Representation, also translated as The World as Will and Idea (5,6). The first edition was published in 1818 when he was 30 years old; the second edition, published in 1844, was amplified by a second volume. The fundamental ideas of Schopenhauer are entirely contained in the original edition (5). Schopenhauer praised

himself for the unity of his work:

*“When once the time comes for me to be read, it will be found that my philosophy is like Thebes with one hundred gates: one can enter from all sides and through each gate arrive at the direct path to the centre”* (7).

Later on, Schopenhauer published three essays where he extended his reflections about issues related to freedom and ethics (7,8).

In 1851 he published *Parerga and Paralipomena* (9), which means ‘complementary works and matters omitted’. It is a collection of essays on topics as diverse as women, noise, ghosts, aging, suicide, and fame. Several chapters of *Parerga and Paralipomena* are now edited as short essays for the general public. A popular section of this book is entitled *Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life* (10).

In his will dated 26 June 1852, Schopenhauer left his handwritten notes, reflections and diaries to Julius Frauenstädt, his disciple and later editor, but some manuscripts were not recovered. The preserved writings are published as four volumes entitled *Manuscript Remains* (11). An exhaustive list of Schopenhauer’s writings is presented elsewhere (2,7,12).

## Schopenhauer’s philosophy

### Background

In his doctoral dissertation *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (13), Schopenhauer intended to simplify Kant’s entire complicated machinery of the faculty of cognition (1). This represents a foundational part for his philosophical principles. Moreover, Schopenhauer substituted the complex system of Kantian judgments, categories, schemes and principles by a simplified model of the mind (intellect), thus comprising the Perceptual Faculty (Understanding) and the Conceptual Faculty of Reason. The perception faculty provides crude apprehension of objects and the innate notions

of space (objects’ placement), time (objects’ succession) and causality (change in object’s matter). The conceptual faculty allows the development of concepts, that is, representations of representations (1). Schopenhauer considered the perceptual branch as more important than the conceptual one, but this is not supported by current research in neurosciences (1).

Schopenhauer furthermore organized the functioning of the intellect according to the principle of sufficient reason. Rudiger Safranski, one prominent Schopenhauer’s biographer, summarizes this issue as follows: “the principle of sufficient reason expresses the fact that with regard to anything that can enter into our idea we must always ask for reasons, for a connection; we must ask for it not because the external world compels us to do so, but because our perceptual and cognitive faculty compels us to so” (2). According to the different objects one may be dealing with, Schopenhauer distinguished four kinds of asking for reasons, four kinds of establishing a connection. These are:

1)With regard to everything that happens in the corporeal world, we ask for the reason why it is happening. We therefore ask about a ‘reason for becoming’. This is the question for causality in the narrow sense and is the kind of knowledge typically obtained through physics, mathematics and chemistry.

2)In the case of judgments (cognitions, concepts), we ask for whatever underlies that judgment (its logic). We ask why we maintain that it is so. We therefore ask for the ‘reason of cognition’.

3)The third kind of principle relates to the realm of pure geometry and arithmetic. These are issues that can be demonstrated by the being-so in visual space (geometry) and by directly experienced time (counting, arithmetic). This is the principle of ‘reason of being’.

4)The fourth kind relates to human action, including moral and ethical issues. With regard to

everything that is done, we ask for the motive why it is done, i.e. the ‘reason of acting’.

In short, the principle of sufficient reason gives the subject the intellectual tools to interact with the object in the process of knowing. Collectively, the four reasons underlie any search for causes and effects in the world, that is, the material cause in physical/chemical/statistical terms; the logical cause in reasoning terms; the placement of the observed phenomena in space and time and its ethical/moral implications. The relevance of these four reasons for Schopenhauer’s philosophy will be extended below.

### Schopenhauer’s philosophical principles

Schopenhauer’s philosophy is often contrasted with that of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). Julian Young describes this contrast as follows (slightly modified by the author in order to shorten the text): ‘Schopenhauer rejected Hegel’s telling history of the West as an inexorable dialectical process of self education whereby the Absolute Spirit proceeds from the primitive to the perfect. In general, therefore, Hegel’s philosophy was well calculated to appeal to an age of authoritarian complacency. Schopenhauer, rather asserted that, in Hegel’s sense, history does not exist, that life is –essentially, always and equally- suffering and replaced the Hegel’s intelligent spirit by a blind and irrational will’ (1).

Schopenhauer’s philosophy has often been considered as a “single thought” ‘The world is will and representation (idea) (14):

(a)The will is “*the inmost nature, the kernel, of every particular thing, and also of the whole. It appears in every blind force of nature and also in the pre-considered action of man*” (5).

(b)The world is my representation (idea): “*What is knowledge? It is primarily and essentially idea. What is idea? A very complicated physiological process in the brain of an animal,*

*the result of which is the consciousness of a picture there. Clearly the relation between such a picture and something entirely different from the animal in whose brain it exists can only be a very indirect one. This is perhaps the simplest and most comprehensible way of disclosing the deep gulf between the ideal and the real”* (6).

In summary, in philosophical terms, the universe is the will. It expresses itself in all the basic forces of nature (such as gravitation, electricity, etc), in the unanimated objects and in all the living beings, including humans. In his youth, Schopenhauer argued that the will was the thing-in-itself, this being a concept that had eluded philosophers for centuries. Later on, he acknowledged that the thing-in-itself was unknowable, but that the will was its closest dimension.

The representation is how we, subjects, know objects, including ourselves. One cannot know directly the objects in themselves, but we have a representation of them. This indirect knowledge of objects is mediated by the specific intellect of each species of living beings.

Schopenhauer acknowledged that his proposals were based on Kant’s, Plato’s and Hindu’s philosophy:

a)“*Kant’s greatest merit is the distinction of the phenomenon from the thing in itself, based upon the proof that between things and us there still always stands the intellect, so that they cannot be known as they may be in themselves*” (15).

b)He (Kant) “*found the same truth which Plato never wearies of repeating: this world which appears to the senses has no true being, but only a ceaseless becoming; it is, and it is not, and its comprehension is not so much knowledge as illusion. This is also what he expresses mythically; he says: Men, firmly chained in a dark cave, see neither the true original light nor real things, but only the meagre light of the fire in the cave and the shadows of real things which pass by the fire behind their backs; yet they think the*

shadows are the reality, and the determining of the succession of these shadows is true wisdom" (15).

c) "The same truth, again quite differently presented, is also a leading doctrine of the Vedas and Puranas, the doctrine of Maya, by which really nothing else is understood than what Kant calls the phenomenon in opposition to the thing in itself; for the work of Maya is said to be just this visible world in which we are, a summoned enchantment, an inconstant appearance without true being, like an optical illusion or a dream, a veil which surrounds human consciousness, something of which it is equally false and true to say that it is and that it is not" (15).

### Philosophical and psychological implications of Schopenhauer single thought

#### Philosophical implications

1) Schopenhauer used a strong statement to refer to the limits of his thought:

"My philosophy, at least, does not by any means seek to know whence or wherefore the world exists, but merely what the world is" (5).

2) The entire universe is an expression of the will.

3) The will is not either God or the soul.

4) At its basic level, the will is amorphous and is not under the principle of sufficient reason. That is, at this foundational level, the will does not follow causal pathways (reason of becoming); it is not placed either in space or in time (reason of being); it does not follow the rules of logic (reason of cognition), and it is amoral (reason of acting).

5) At a higher level, the will becomes 'ideas' (in the Platonic sense) that present themselves as the basic forces of matter, such as electricity, magnetism, chemical interaction, etc. The ideas or prototypes are the first level of objectification of the will, but, still, they are out of time, space

and causality.

6) The world as representation suddenly appears when the will originates the phenomena (inanimate objects and living beings) which are inherently in space and in time and under the rules of causality. Schopenhauer names the appearance of objects as "the principle of individuation" (principium individuationis) of the will. Stating it differently, we can say: the shapeless will become individual objects, that is, phenomena.

7) With the phenomena, particularly the living beings, appears 'knowledge'. This knowledge shows itself as 'causes' at the inanimate level, as 'stimuli' at the vegetal level, and as 'motives' in animals, notably in us, humans.

8) Each phenomenon is selfish: "Everywhere in nature we see strife, conflict, and alternation of victory. Every grade of the objectification of will fights for the matter, the space, and the time of the others. The permanent matter must constantly change its form; for under the guidance of causality, mechanical, physical, chemical, and organic phenomena, eagerly striving to appear, wrest the matter from each other, for each desires to reveal its own Idea. This universal conflict becomes most distinctly visible in the animal kingdom. For animals have the whole of the vegetable kingdom for their food, and even within the animal kingdom every beast is the prey and the food of another; that is, the matter in which its Idea expresses itself must yield itself to the expression of another Idea, for each animal can only maintain its existence by the constant destruction of some other" (5).

Regarding us, humans, Schopenhauer quoted Plauto (254-184 BC): "Lupus est homo homini, non homo, quom qualis sit non novit", which has been translated as follows: "A man is a wolf rather than a man to another man, when he hasn't yet found out what he's like" (5).

Given the selfish tendency of the will, Schopenhauer is pessimistic about nature and about human beings in particular; in this sense one can

talk about his 'ontological pessimism'. Young (1) conceived this as an 'evaluative pessimism' -- for example "existence is certainly to be regarded as an erring (error), to return from which is salvation" (6): -- and he contrasts it with a 'descriptive pessimism', such as "every biography is the history of suffering" (5) (see below for a further discussion). As regards evaluative pessimism, Schopenhauer profoundly differed from Hegel who envisaged an identity between the 'being and the good'. As a consequence, Hegel was optimistic about the future of humanity in general, whereas Schopenhauer only conceived an individual salvation through the denial of the will.

9) In humans, as in all the living beings, the intellect is secondary, subordinate and conditioned by the will. Hence, Schopenhauer conceives the "true being of men as more willing than knowing" (6).

10) The will is free because it is not under the rules of time, space or causality. By contrast, phenomena are not free because they are absolutely determined by the causality chain within space and time (5).

11) The philosophical and existential salvation requires the denial or renunciation of the will. What does Schopenhauer mean when he refers to salvation? Given the insatiability and selfishness of the will, the philosopher does not expect a global, universal and durable harmony and peace. At the individual level, we humans, oscillate between the frantic search of desire satisfaction and boredom, without a stable and satisfactory middle point. In this context, individual salvation means escaping from the struggle between unlimited desire and boredom by denying the will (stopping desire) and turning into compassion and asceticism.

Schopenhauer conceived the denial or renunciation of the will as a path (6) where the individual human being goes through three experiences:

A. The aesthetic experience, which in philosophical terms refers to the contemplation of the platonic 'ideas'. One fundamental psychological correlate of the aesthetic experience is stopping the desire. In Schopenhauer's terms this refers to know instead of will. Contemplation, in general, and art in particular, are ways to reach this goal: "The comprehension of an Idea, the entrance of it into our consciousness, is only possible by means of a change in us, which might also be regarded as an act of self-denial; for it consists in this, that knowledge turns away altogether from our own will, thus now leaves out of sight entirely the valuable pledge intrusted to it, and considers things as if they could never concern the will at all. For thus alone does knowledge become a pure mirror of the objective nature of things. Knowledge conditioned in this way must lie at the foundation of every genuine work of art as its origin". In this state, "the object separates itself ever more from the subject, and finally introduces the state of pure objectivity of perception, which of itself eliminates the will from consciousness, and in which all things stand before us with increased clearness and distinctness, so that we are conscious almost only of them and scarcely at all of ourselves" (6).

To exemplify this, Schopenhauer quotes Goethe: "Why has the sight of the full moon such a beneficent, quieting, and exalting effect? Because the moon is an object of perception, but never of desire": "The stars we yearn not after, delight us with their glory" (6).

Even though Schopenhauer considered all arts as a pathway to awareness, he placed special emphasis on music and tragedy. For example, he stated that the melody "records the most secret history of this intellectually-enlightened will, pictures every excitement, every effort, every movement of it" (5).

Regarding tragedy, Schopenhauer asserts: "...it is to be regarded, and is recognized as the sum-

mit of poetical art, both on account of the greatness of its effect and the difficulty of its achievement. It is very significant for our whole system, and well worthy of observation, that the end of this highest poetical achievement is the representation of the terrible side of life. The unspeakable pain, the wail of humanity, the triumph of evil, the scornful mastery of chance, and the irretrievable fall of the just and innocent, is here presented to us; and in this lies a significant hint of the nature of the world and of existence" (5). Schopenhauer further discusses how the whole artistic field of tragedies can be classified in three types. "It may happen by means of a character of extraordinary wickedness, touching the utmost limits of possibility, who becomes the author of the misfortune. Secondly, it may happen through blind fate, i.e., chance and error. Lastly, the misfortune may be brought about by the mere position of the dramatis persona with regard to each other; through their relations; so that there is no need either for a tremendous error or an unheard-of accident, nor yet for a character whose wickedness reaches the limits of human possibility; but characters of ordinary morality, under circumstances such as often occur, are so situated with regard to each other that their position compels them, knowingly and with their eyes open, to do each other the greatest injury, without any one of them being entirely in the wrong. This last kind of tragedy seems to me far to surpass the other two, for it shows us the greatest misfortune, not as an exception, not as something occasioned by rare circumstances or monstrous characters, but as arising easily and of itself out of the actions and characters of men, indeed almost as essential to them, and thus brings it terribly near to us" (5).

**B.**The ethical experience refers to perceiving the unity of the universe, by penetration of the principium individuationis: "But the sight of the uncultured individual is clouded, as the Hindus say, by the veil of Maya. He sees not the

thing-in-itself but the phenomenon in time and space, 'the principium individuationis', and in the other forms of the principle of sufficient reason. And in this form of his limited knowledge he sees not the inner nature of things, which is one, but its phenomena as separated, disunited, innumerable, very different, and indeed opposed. He sees the ills and he sees the wickedness in the world, but far from knowing that both of these are but different sides of the manifestation of the one will to live, he regards them as very different, and indeed quite opposed, and often seeks to escape from ills by wickedness, i.e., by causing the suffering of another" (5).

For Schopenhauer, the ethic experience allows one to be aware of 'eternal justice'. This is a very abstract concept in itself that is better understood when it is contrasted to 'temporal justice'. The latter "has its seat in the state, as requiting and punishing, and has seen that this only becomes justice through a reference to the future... and requires time in order to triumph, equalizing the evil deed by the evil consequences only by means of time" (5).

Eternal justice, having its seat in the will, is not tied to time. Moreover, as the will is a unity, there is no essential separation between the aggressor and the victim in a horizon without space or time. Therefore, the moral responsibility is for both.

The principle of "eternal justice" rests upon a fundamental metaphysical postulate: "The living knowledge of eternal justice, demands the complete transcendence of individuality and the principle of its possibility. In the Vedas it is expressed in various ways, but especially by making all the beings in the world, living and lifeless, pass successively before the view of the student, and pronouncing over every one of them that word which has become a formula, and as such has been called the «Mahavakya: Tatoumes», more correctly, 'Tat twam asi', which means, 'This thou art' (You are That)" (5). The

psychological relevance of this postulate will be discussed below.

**C.**The metaphysical experience denies the will by turning to compassion and asceticism: "... but, on the other hand, that knowledge of the whole, of the nature of the thing-in-itself which has been described, becomes a quieter of all and every volition. The will now turns away from life; it now shudders at the pleasures in which it recognizes the assertion of life. Man now attains to the state of voluntary renunciation, resignation, true indifference, and perfect will-lessens" (5).

For Schopenhauer, compassion appears when one "takes as much interest in the sufferings of other individuals as in his own, and therefore is not only benevolent in the highest degree, but even ready to sacrifice his own individuality whenever such a sacrifice will save a number of other persons" (5). Regarding asceticism, the philosopher asserted "Voluntary and complete chastity is the first step in asceticism or the denial of the will to live". He also added "Asceticism then shows itself further in voluntary and intentional poverty... Since he himself denies the will which appears in his own person, he will not resist if another does the same, i.e., inflicts wrongs upon him. Therefore he bears such ignominy and suffering with inexhaustible patience and meekness, returns good for evil without ostentation, and allows the fire of anger to rise within him just as little as that of the desires" (5).

The denial of the will is an exclusively human action where the phenomenon (a human being) behaves freely: "So that the freedom which otherwise, as belonging to the thing-in-itself, can never show itself in the phenomenon, in such a case does also appear in it, and, by abolishing the nature which lies at the foundation of the phenomenon, while the latter itself still continues to exist in time, it brings about a contradiction of the phenomenon with itself, and in

this way exhibits the phenomena of holiness and self-renunciation" (5).

Schopenhauer acknowledges that the perception of suffering in others and in oneself is often a pathway for denying the will: "For to him who does works of love the veil of Maya has become transparent, the illusion of the principium individuationis has left him. He recognizes himself, his will, in every being, and consequently also in the sufferer (5) "... but suffering in general, as it is inflicted by fate, is a second way of attaining to that denial" (5).

### Psychological implications

1) In Schopenhauer I could not find any formal attempt to explore the causes of mental illnesses. What he did in his own way was to describe what the ill mind does, but not why and how the mind becomes ill (5).

2) The well-being is 'negative' in the sense that it is imperceptible and runs unnoticed. Only when we have an unsatisfied desire does a 'positive' experience arise. It is positive in the sense that it is perceptible, salient, and one tries to put an end to it. Therefore, one does not realize well-being except when an unsatisfied desire appears.

3) The will is insatiable: "The satisfaction of a wish ends it; yet for one wish that is satisfied there remain at least ten which are denied. Further, the desire lasts long, the demands are infinite; the satisfaction is short and scantily measured out. But even the final satisfaction is itself only apparent; every satisfied wish at once makes room for a new one; both are illusions; the one is known to be so, the other not yet (5). Introspection always shows us to ourselves as willing", stated Schopenhauer in his doctoral dissertation (13).

4) This willing is endless and incomprehensible. One can know what one wants in that precise moment, but not what one wants in general.

5) The will is free, because it does not follow any of the principles of sufficient reason. By con-

trast, phenomena, therefore human beings are not free; *"The phenomena, on the other hand, we recognize as absolutely subordinate to the principle of sufficient reason in its four forms. The whole content of nature, the collective sum of its phenomena, is thus throughout necessary, and the necessity of every part, of every phenomenon, of every event, can always be proved, because it must be possible to find the reason from which it follows as a consequent."* "...all that is object for the knowing subject as individual, is in one aspect reason, and in another aspect consequence; and in this last capacity is determined with absolute necessity, and can, therefore, in no respect be other than it is" (5). Accordingly, every single human act, except the will denial, can be analyzed through one or several of the four forms of that principle.

6) Given the insatiability of the will and that *"every grade of the objectification of will fights for the matter, the space, and the time of the others"* (5), selfishness is our most natural tendency.

7) The will is guided by 'motives', which for Schopenhauer are mental events related to phenomena. As a general consequence, phenomena are always trying to use other phenomena for their own benefit.

8) Based on Kant, Schopenhauer describes three character dimensions. The intelligible character *"is the will as thing-in-itself so far as it appears in a definite individual in a definite grade, outside time, and therefore indivisible and unchangeable"*. The empirical character, also unchangeable, is named that way because one does not know it a priori but a posteriori by observing one's own behavior along time. The empirical character is *"the manifestation of this act of will, developed and broken up in time and space and all the forms of the principle of sufficient reason, as it exhibits itself for experience in the whole conduct and life of this man"* (5).

9) Self-knowledge is the insight one develops by

observing one's behavior and emotions (the empirical character) along time. This self-knowledge may change behavior by modifying the motives that the will pursues. This is the acquired character.

Schopenhauer provides the following example. *"Thus, for example it is immaterial whether a man plays for nuts or for crown; but whether a man cheats or plays fairly, that is the real matter; the latter is determined by the intelligible character, the former by outward circumstances (the empirical character)"* (5).

Through self-knowledge I can direct my "cheating" tendency to obtain resources to aid people in need; this would be my 'acquired character'.

#### **Applications in psychotherapy and psychoeducation**

Schopenhauer's thought could be used as a set of meta-therapy principles to be discussed once symptoms have been controlled with the specific technique at play, and once a space is set for discussing and checking topics for relapse prevention, quality of life improvement and communication with relevant fellows.

Schopenhauer's pathways to salvation (contemplation, insight of the unity of the universe, compassion and asceticism) are at the core of many religions (atheistic or God-centered), practical philosophy, well-being movements, meditation techniques, ecology, etc.

What is, then, the expected originality of Schopenhauer's proposal for psychotherapy and psycho-education? In broad terms which will be extended below, I would say that his philosophically-derived critical reflections about our emotions, thoughts, behavior and creations (particularly art), by being clearly expressed in a non-technical style, may allow an otherwise elusive insight about some deep human motivations operating in inner life and in interpersonal relationships.

#### **Literature review**

A PubMed and PsycINFO search conducted in January 20, 2016 with the following entries 'Arthur Schopenhauer and/or psychiatry' and 'Arthur Schopenhauer and/or psychology and 'Arthur Schopenhauer and/or psychotherapy' did not find any published article.

As previously stated, Schopenhauer is not mentioned in emblematic contemporary texts of psychiatry & philosophy (16), psychoanalysis (17), psychology (18-20) and cognitive neuroscience (21,22). He is not mentioned either in Dr. Robert Cloninger's writings about well-being, where this author extensively discusses modern research about the quantum aspects of the mind (23). This absence of reference to Schopenhauer in Cloninger's texts is surprising because Schopenhauer's analysis of the originating will may be considered as a quantum analysis of some psychic phenomena (5). Finally, Schopenhauer is barely mentioned in an iconic text of philosophical counseling (24).

I therefore strongly believe that it is not an overstatement to assert that Schopenhauer is neglected by American contemporary authors in psychiatry and psychology. Since in 2018 we will commemorate two hundred years of the publication of his capital work (*The World as Will and Representation*), it is perhaps high time to consider the relevance of his thought for mental health professionals.

In 2002, Deborah Anna Luepnitz, a psychoanalyst, described how she used the Schopenhauer's well-known fable of the porcupines to work on the important issue of ambivalence in personal relationships (25). Here is the fable:

*"A troop of porcupines is milling about on a cold winter's day. In order to keep from freezing, the animals move closer together. Just as they are close enough to huddle, however, they start to poke each other with their quills. In order to stop the pain, they spread out, lose the advantage of commingling, and again begin to shiver."*

*This sends them back in search of each other, and the cycle repeats as they struggle to find a comfortable distance between entanglement and freezing"* (9).

In his 2005 novel *The Schopenhauer Cure*, Irvin Yalom (4) explained how and why Schopenhauer thought helped one patient in his group therapy: 1) the Kantian proposal that time, space and causality are innate knowledge; 2) the insight that the perception of our body desires is a direct path way in knowing the will; 3) the prominent role of sexuality in human life that was endlessly emphasized by Schopenhauer; 4) the insatiability of the will that leads to the insight that egoism is a natural predisposition in most of us, and how individual salvation may be achieved by cultivating compassion, charity, empathy and asceticism; 5) living the individual life with a 'meaning'; 6) to be surrounded by the thought of the great thinkers of the world, and, last but not least, 7) the insight that pain and suffering are inevitable, inescapable, and essential to life.

More recently, Alonso (26) in his autobiographical essay described how Schopenhauer's writings helped him overcome his mid-life crisis. The author emphasized how his reading improved his self-acceptance, and how his extremely high expectations clouded and distorted his actual achievements. Alonso quoted a fine expression of Schopenhauer: *"...for to measure a man's happiness only by what he gets, and not by what he expects to get, is as futile as to try to express a fraction which shall have a numerator but not denominator"* (10).

I shall now synthesize the Schopenhauer's theoretical contributions to the broad mental health field. Regarding the practice of psychotherapy, I shall focus on his ontological pessimism and on his proposed pathway to existential salvation. Additional reflections and detailed bibliographical sources are published elsewhere (27).

### Theoretical contributions

Schopenhauer anticipated and popularized some features of psychoanalysis, evolution theory, and cognitive neuroscience.

Regarding psychoanalysis, Schopenhauer's concept of the will contains the foundations of what in Freud became the concepts of the unconscious and the id (28) and described mental processes that are analog to some defense mechanisms, such as repression and displacement (5). He also anticipated the significance of slips of the tongue and the interpretation of dreams (25).

As for evolution theory, the struggle for survival may be considered as a common ground with Schopenhauer's will. Besides, his discussion about the Metaphysic of Romantic Love, by emphasizing reproduction as an unconscious ultimate goal, anticipates the metaphor of Richard Dawkins' selfish gene (29).

However, Schopenhauer did not anticipate either Darwin's proposal of the continual evolution of the species or his approach to teleology (1). Specifically, Schopenhauer conceived the will as blind. Hence, living beings were created as replications of the ideas. Not a single kind of knowledge was involved, and the ultimate goal of life was to materialize the ideas. Darwin revolution posited that species' ultimate goal was to survive and reproduce as long as they were successfully adapted to a given environment; otherwise, they would extinguish.

Finally, by stating that our body desires provide direct access to the will, Schopenhauer thought is connected to modern cognitive science, particularly to the notion of the 'embodied mind' (21,22). This concept states that the most important philosophical concepts, such as the self, moral, time, causality and events are conceptualized as metaphors or metonymies related to our bodily functioning. This so-called second generation cognitive science movement challenges the role of reason as a transcendent instance

of mind. This is coherent with Schopenhauer's notion that the intellect is secondary to the will.

To my standpoint, what is particularly relevant is Schopenhauer's description of our body as a direct expression of the will, like any other phenomenon. The following quote may be considered as an anticipation of the concept of embodied mind: *"And thus his willing which develops itself in time is, as it were, a paraphrase of his body, an elucidation of the significance of the whole and its parts; it is another way of exhibiting the same thing-in-itself, of which the body is already the phenomenon. Therefore, instead of saying assertion of the will, we may say assertion of the body"* (5).

### Practical contributions

At the practical level, I will focus on Schopenhauer pessimism, which could be reframed as 'ontological' pessimism. By 'ontological' I refer to the 'beings in general as long as they exist'. Schopenhauer conceived all living beings (including human beings) in their ordinary life as needy, insatiable and, therefore, selfish in general. Within this ontological framework, there is no room for global hope or optimism. This is why Schopenhauer did not have a social project. In fact, this is one of the most severe criticisms he received (see below).

As stated before, Schopenhauer's pessimism has also been labeled as 'evaluative' instead of 'descriptive' (1). The former emphasizes the preeminence of suffering over happiness in the world, thus providing a quantitative and objective global pessimism, whereas the latter offers a space for individual optimism by allowing a place for a meaningful life in spite of the scarce moments of durable well-being in an individual lifetime.

For Schopenhauer, such a meaningful life must be conceived within the general context of atheism and of a world where suffering is always present and unavoidable. In such a world, as

previously discussed, 'salvation' is individually reached by developing contemplation, a view of universal unity, compassion and asceticism.

I will describe a hypothetical set of statements and self-questions that in a mindfully-reflective state, our ideal patient keeps as an accompanying 'inner voice' once she/he has finished her/his conventional therapy.

1) My wishes are endless: for one that is satisfied, ten more may show up.

My natural state is egoistic. In my whole life, I will oscillate between three states: selfishness, malice (wickedness) and compassion (Fig. 1). I will constantly check in which state I am. Compassion is my ideal attitude, but it is a rare psychological state that does not depend on my reason and is not easily arisen, but I will constantly remind myself about it. Art, contemplation, meditation and my open eyes for the suffering of all creatures, including myself, can lead my mind to compassion. Egoism is not necessarily bad if I live with it in the context of the win-

win interaction style, for example the tit for tat model of game theory (30). Malice is in general unacceptable. Am I training myself in 'knowing instead of willing' through art, contemplation, meditation and the realization of the inevitability suffering in all beings, including myself?.

2) What I think of me, particularly my selfish tendency, also applies to other humans and living beings. We are all equal in general.

3) As I know myself by seeing me at play, I can change the motives that my will desires, and make my actions less damaging and more useful to me and to others. This is my 'acquired character'.

4) Human suffering can be caused by extreme wickedness and/or extremely unfortunate events, but more often it comes from the day to day and ordinary human interactions. Hence, I will be more careful with the apparently trivial events of everyday life and about my role in my own suffering and that of others. Have I learned from the art of tragedy?

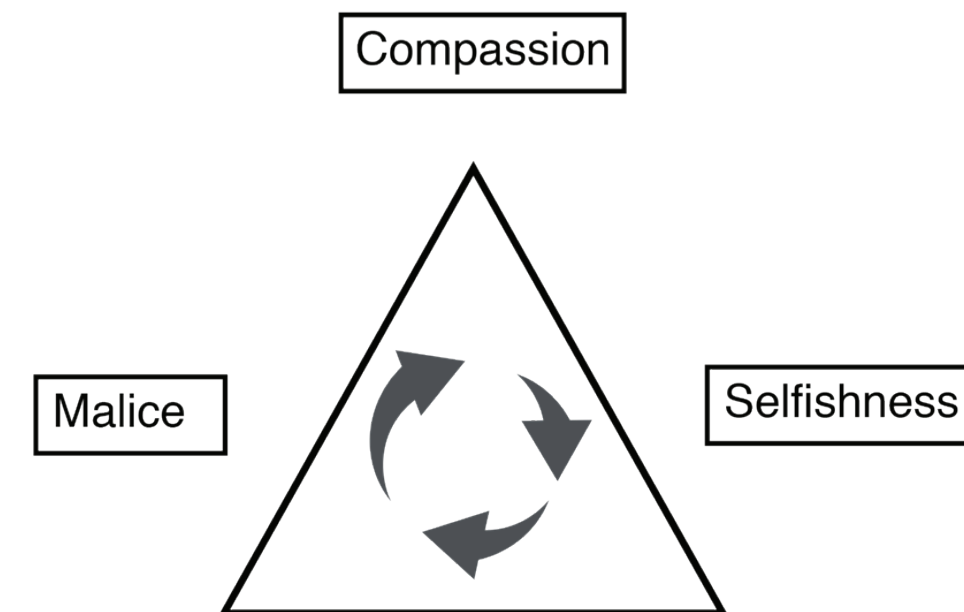


Fig. 1. The three fundamental springs of human actions (7)

**Ontologically optimistic (pitiless) model:**

**Patient:** I feel depressed today.

**Therapist:** ¡Look at this beautiful and good world that was made by God for your happiness! Why you don't enjoy it? Why are you so ungrateful? Look at as everybody is happy. Look at as they are different from you. Why you are not happy? Why are you so bad?

**Ontologically pessimistic model**

**Patient:** I feel depressed today.

**Therapist:** ¡Look at this world of suffering! ¡It rather seems made by a devil! Look at some much pain around, including yours, which in fact, I validate and feel as genuine. Look at how many unhappy people around. Look at as they are equal to you. Let's do something for you and for the world.

5)Am I cultivating asceticism?

How asceticism by conceived in contemporary terms? For our average fellow with emotional suffering, asceticism does not refer to the extreme self-denial and privations of worldly pleasures as depicted in some religious traditions. A parsimonious, but meaningful, asceticism can logically arise from recognizing the insatiability of the will and the restless lifestyle that derives from such insatiability. Hence, asceticism can be reframed as a healthy state of mind that includes some degree of austerity and detachment.

I will now illustrate the overall spirit of a Schopenhauer-inspired psychotherapeutic environment by describing an imaginary dialogue between a patient and his/her therapist. This dialogue contrasts a hypothetical ontologically-optimistic world's vision -- which Schopenhauer actually described as 'wicked or pitiless' (5) -- with a hypothetical ontologically-pessimistic Schopenhauerian view. I purposefully copy Schopenhauer's strong and ironic style in the dialogue.

**Why Schopenhauer's thought could improve psychotherapy outcome?**

Disease, by inflicting suffering, promotes

selfishness in the ill. Indeed, the impairment of cooperative behavior in people with psychiatric disorders has been well documented (31). Schopenhauer psychological insights (the insatiability of the will, selfishness as a natural state, the healing power of contemplation [instead of willing], openness to compassion and asceticism) enhance awareness and mindfulness.

After emotional symptom intensity has been lessened by the specific psychotherapeutic procedures, the patient's awareness expansion (32) facilitated by these philosophical reflections may redirect his/her existential interest beyond himself. This may enhance resilience and quality of life and improve the global outcome of the specific mental disorder. The psychological benefits of art, particularly of music, are a scientific fact (33). The positive psychological impact of training in self-compassion and compassion to others is currently being investigated (34).

**Clinical vignettes**

In this section I briefly describe how I used Schopenhauer's thought with four patients in my own clinical practice. Permission was obtained from these patients, and their identity is here concealed.

1)This is a 63 year-old college professor who, while preparing his retirement, sought therapy to address his defensive attitude and the need he felt for being the center of attention in social encounters. Both features strongly deprived him from enjoying otherwise pleasurable activities. Therapy focused on assessing his cognitive distortions and rehearsing coping strategies before social interactions. He was particularly impressed by Schopenhauer's aesthetic step to salvation (see page 456 above) of knowing without desiring and felt that by practicing contemplation, he could control his excessive need for attention, and thus, enjoy the present moment. He constantly remembers Goethe's expression: "The stars we yearn not after delight us with their glory" (6).

2)This refers to a 46 year-old prosperous physician with a severe anxiety disorder. In spite of significant symptom reduction obtained through cognitive therapy and medication, he had a pervasive feeling of emptiness. He did an insightful reflection about the selfish and insatiable features of the will that he compared to his self-centered disposition, itself aggravated by the anxiety disorder. As an additional coping strategy during his anxiety crisis, he now sympathetically reflects about his families and friends' unmet needs and how he can help them. He is thus developing compassion.

3)This is a 24-year old girl with mild attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, non-incapacitating phobias, moderate irritability and performing anxiety. She came to therapy asking for help to face a critical step in her university career and to treat vaginism and dyspareunia in a long-awaited romantic relationship. She was shocked to find out that, after having successfully passed her exams and overcoming her sexual dysfunctions, she became even more anxious and worried. When discussing the pervasive feature of the insatiability of the will, she thought Schopenhauer's expression "yet for one wish

that is satisfied there remain at least ten which are denied" was very compelling. She identified herself with that thought and adopted it as an emphatic inner voice that now assists her in counterbalancing her negative evaluation of her achievements.

4)After a very difficult divorce, a 50 year-old lady became obsessed about why things in her life happened the way they did. I introduced her to Schopenhauer's approach to the art of tragedy (see page 457). Tragedies may arise from: extraordinary wickedness..., blind fate... but more commonly by the mere position of the dramatic persona with regard to each other, through their relations... (5). She found it very relevant when assessing her externalizing-prone attribution style. This reflection opened a door for her personal growth in such an important time in her life.

**An evaluative overview of Schopenhauer thought**

It cannot be expected that the average patient in psychotherapy would read Schopenhauer's main work. However, it could be interesting to write a user friendly text whose psychological impact could be empirically assessed.

Schopenhauer has been either commended or severely criticized. I shall now draw a selective list of some of the positive and negative evaluations relevant for the present discussion.

**Commendations**

1) "Schopenhauer exposes the motive for solidarity shared by men and all beings" (Max Horkheimer [1895-1973] cited by (1).

2) Schopenhauer is the most elegant and attractive modern philosopher, even though one has to acknowledge how unpleasant and heartbreaking his doctrine can sometimes be (Marcelino Menéndez-Pelayo [1856-1912]) translated by Trino Baptista and Françoise Salager-Meyer from (35).



3) Thanks for Schopenhauer, who, perhaps deciphered the universe (Jorge Luis Borges [1899-1986]) translated by Trino Baptista and Françoise Salayer-Meyer from (36).

4) "It may be that his doctrine of the resignation of the Will must sound even stranger to the hunger for life among the inhabitants of the First World today than it would have to Schopenhauer's contemporaries, the progressive positivists and the world revolutionaries with their faith in humanity; yet today, as well, it reminds us that the unbounded hunger for life will not be able to solve the problems created by its free exercise by intensifying itself even more" (37).

### Criticisms

1) "Schopenhauer was superficial and insincere" (Bertrand Russell, [1872-1970] cited by Young (1)).

2) His rough empiricism denies complete abstraction; he distrusts all collectives: society, state, nation. The aesthetic of pessimism represents the sarcastic consumption of the ethic of evasion. (José-Francisco Ivars [1935-]) translated by Trino Baptista and Françoise Salager-Meyer from (38).

### CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH AGENDA

1) For Schopenhauer 'will' is the essence of the universe. We do not perceive the world as it is in itself, but we have a 'representation' of it. Perceiving our desires is a direct path to universal will. These are his philosophical principles.

2) Schopenhauer anticipated some relevant features of psychoanalysis, evolution theory and cognitive neurosciences.

3) The insight about the ubiquity of suffering, the insatiability of the will and hence, our natural selfish tendencies, may expand the individual's awareness beyond himself. Those insights, along with the contemplative state induced

by art in all its expressions, promote a unitary perception of the world. Compassion (to oneself and to others) and a healthy asceticism may thus arise and improve the psychological outcome.

4) Schopenhauer's atheism and misogyny may be shocking to some readers. The former is the groundwork of his philosophical thought. The latter is unacceptable in most contemporary societies that reject sexual discrimination and may reflect the irony by which Schopenhauer's faced his own personal experiences. However, I strongly believe that these features are compensated and surpassed by the humanitarian value of Schopenhauer emphasis on contemplation as a way to calm the will down, on the sense of unity with other beings, compassion, and a healthy asceticism. These existential principles may be powerful enough psychological skills to assist patients with mental disorders beyond the specific psychotherapeutic technique being used.

5) Asceticism and compassion may be difficult to understand and accept in a time when the existential slogan appears to be 'me first, me second, me third'. Besides, emphasis on asceticism and compassion could be considered as contrary to the expected philosophical neutrality of standard psychotherapeutic techniques. I think, that expressed as healthy austerity and detachment (in the case of asceticism) and cooperation (in the case of compassion), those ethical principles may be considered as inherent to any successful psychotherapy. Besides, these principles may be well integrated with the specific techniques of the so called 'positive psychiatry' (39).

6) How to present these principles in a friendly way and determine which subjects could benefit from them could be empirically studied.

7) A Schopenhauer's based psychotherapeutic program faces a sort of fundamental paradox, which is that "denial of will, that entrance into freedom, cannot be forcibly attained to by intention or design, but proceeds from the inmost relation of knowing and volition in the man, and

therefore comes suddenly, as if spontaneously from without" (5). That is why Schopenhauer's ethic is descriptive and not normative. It does not make futile the present endeavor, but rather reminds the psychotherapists how challenging it may be to translate abstract philosophical issues into practical and useful psychotherapeutic tools.

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