

NOTIONS OF FREEDOM. As Schopenhauer begins with a helpful distinction between various notions of freedom, he implicitly pushes against compatibilism. Recall that Hobbes interpreted every problem of freedom as a problem about material obstacles. As long as there are no obstacles, and as long as a creature endowed with voluntary actions (i.e. with a ‘will’) exercises its will, that creature is free. There is no other problem of freedom, and there is no special problem of free will. 35.4

But, Schopenhauer now says, this is just one notion of freedom—‘physical’ or ‘empirical’ freedom. There is also the notion of ‘moral freedom’. It is needed to account for the cases where we ask whether the choices were made freely. The (compatibilist) notion of physical freedom is inadequate for addressing these cases. Unlike physical obstacles, mental obstacles (motives, urges) may be overcome. 36.5

Example 1 (‘You came, I was alone...’). Suppose I’m on a diet, and you’re tempting me with a cake. After some hesitation, *internal* struggle, and lots of frustration, I eventually choose to eat the cake. Did I choose freely or not? Plainly, in the physical sense of it I chose freely. There was no material obstacle or compulsion. But what of my will itself? Was it free?

As Schopenhauer interprets the debate, a materialist compatibilist like Hobbes regards the fact of temptation as irrelevant. That’s because my ‘internal’ struggle was essentially metaphorical. There were never obstacles (desires and counter-desires) that I couldn’t clear. They were, therefore, unlike physical obstacles that I can’t physically clear (locked doors), in which case I would not be free to act. However, Schopenhauer objects, these internal obstacles may, for Perry Como anyway, be impossible to clear, too. 37.5

So there is a further problem of higher-order willing—whether, for example, I was willing to will to eat the cake. Or to put it perhaps less abstrusely, whether I was willingly willing to eat the cake. In the Example 1 it seems that I was not in fact willingly willing to eat the cake. This intuition clashes with Hobbesian compatibilism, since on that view, I *was* willingly willing to eat the cake, and trivially so. 37.6

This is an intuition as strong as any, but Schopenhauer doesn’t rest his case on it alone. He aims to show that the use of physical freedom to account for this case is compromised by some sort of a regress. One way to understand his explanation is to directly contrast it with Hobbesian compatibilism. The latter is supposed to say: 38.6

(6-1) SB willed to will (=willingly willed) to eat the cake.

But on his lips, this means simply that the will (a kind of desire) to eat the cake was caused by another desire—to will to eat the cake. Then we can ask further whether that higher-order will (=desire) is in turn caused by some other desire. Then either a regress ensues, or more likely, we face the possibility of an uncaused will. This novel idea is precisely the idea of ‘moral freedom’ (I think it’s better to call it ‘metaphysical freedom’, but let his terminology stay). 38.7

Before going further, it must be noted that a Hobbesian compatibilist won’t be impressed by this kind of reasoning. Whatever we say about the causal history of willing, it is irrelevant to the question of freedom. There is no free will, because such a notion is a pseudo-notion. The debate over free will is a pseudo-debate. There are only actions free of impediments or not. Therefore, I suspect, the appeal of any argument from regress mounted by Schopenhauer still rests on our intuitions about the cases like temptation.

In any event, Schopenhauer’s idea of moral freedom is not merely that of *uncaused* will. It is, more generally, a will without any ‘ground’ (*Grund*). In German, as in English, the word is often synonymous with ‘cause’, but Schopenhauer overtly intends it to cover all sorts of cases where it’s not appropriate to speak of physical causes and effects. For example, you might say: 38.7

(6-2) I am alive because my heart is beating.

Heart-beating does not cause you to be alive: being alive is not an *effect* of your heart beating. It constitutes your being alive. Equally, we might say that it is a ‘reason’ of your being alive. All

such cases are covered by *Grund*. Schopenhauer, then, proposes to understand a morally free will as something undetermined either by a physical causes, or by any other non-physical reason or ‘ground’. The question now is whether this notion of moral freedom is a viable one. 39.8

OUR INTERNAL EXPERIENCE OF FREE WILL. In plain terms, Schopenhauer’s strategy is to ask whether we have any ‘internal’, from the inside, evidence of a morally free will (or: of morally free acts), and whether we can have such evidence from the external world. Or in other words, do we have evidence of free will from the first-person point of view, and do we have from the third-person point of view? 45.15

As far as the internal evidence is concerned, his argument may be summarised thus: I am immediately aware of my willing to walk (say), but I can’t be aware of the fact whether my willing was self-determined, i.e. morally free. To be so aware I must enquire into the past conditions of my willing, and these lie outside of my immediate consciousness. When I deliberate about walking, I have a distinct feeling that I can choose to walk or choose not to walk. If my will is morally free, I should experience it as undetermined by any prior event. And this kind of experience I can’t have in principle. 45.16 46.16 52.23

Thus my consciousness can at best deliver experience of willing. It can’t deliver experience of willing freely.

Remark 2. Schopenhauer’s argument may be read as a direct response to Fichte who announced in the *System of Ethics* that ‘the appearance of freedom is an immediate fact of consciousness and certainly not a consequence of any other thought’ (SW IV.53).

THE INNATE CHARACTER: ECHOES OF LEIBNIZ. Like Kant, Schopenhauer grants that humans are subject to the causal law, as any other denizen of the empirical reality. Yet he develops this idea in a rather surprising direction. He maintains human action is determined by an innate, empirical, unchangeable character. People act the way they do because of what they *are*. 79.54ff

We try to combine two assumptions, that there is free will, and that there is a real difference between virtues and vice. As a factual premiss, we begin with the fact that people behave differently. More exactly, we see that two different people behave differently in the same situation.

Question 3. Does this claim hold up well?

This observed difference may, first, be attributed to people’s free will. Schopenhauer objects to this in a way not fully clear to me. I propose to take his remarks, creatively, as follows. If a person acts freely, he is able to ignore in his choice and action whatever causal factors they may be. He starts with a clean sheet, so to speak. This supposition is as implausible as Locke’s *tabula rasa*. 79.55

On the other hand, if the difference is attributed to external factors, then there is no free will, contrary to the original assumption. 79.55

The proponent of free will has another option, apparently chosen by Kant. The observed difference in moral behaviour is due to the difference in moral cognition. But then, Schopenhauer complains, ethics becomes a form of calculus. Ethical decisions will be made by logic alone. 80.55

The way out is to settle for an innate character. We get the following formula: 80.56

(6-3) Character(Motive) = Choice.

Example 4. Two different persons are tempted by a cigarette. One chooses to smoke, the other refuses. It may be that both are addicts to the same extent. Their desires are equally strong. Their different choices are explained not by their different motives, but by their different characters.

Another argument for the innate character harks back to Leibniz. In order to do something you have to *be* something. A human agent can’t be just a collection of properties. It must be a substance, endowed with its own nature (essence), that possesses certain properties. This essence is now identified with the innate character. 82.57

The upshot of this discussion is that, from the third-person point of view, from our engagement with the external world, we get no warrant of free will. The individual’s action follows inescapably from that individual’s character.

THE MORAL NECESSITY OF FREE WILL. To the question, ‘Is there free will? Are we free?’, Schopenhauer’s answer is negative. There is no internal or external warrant for asserting that there *is* free will. But then Schopenhauer backtracks. Ostensibly, he backtracks in the name of paying homage to Kant. We are told, pretty much out of the blue, that there is another fact of consciousness—that are authors of our actions. It is *I* who acts, and not a certain desire. This fact generates (apparently) the 112.93

‘feeling’ that we are responsible for our actions. We are responsible for them, Schopenhauer seems to say, because we are responsible for what we are—namely, for our character. Our actions are nothing but evidence of our character. 113.94

But responsibility is the only ground of moral freedom. Thus we should now attribute moral freedom to our character. 113.94

Remark 5. The idea of action’s authorship must be compared to the idea of agent-causation discussed by van Inwagen.

A SUBTLE DIG? Our character, by assumption, is empirical. So just like any other empirical phenomenon, it is subject to the law of causality. Thus we should attribute freedom to ‘intelligible character’, the transcendental condition of the empirical one. The empirical character is an appearance of the intelligible one. 155.96

It now seems that we are back firmly in the Kantian terrain. But, in comparison with Kant, more problems emerge. How can there be an innate character, if character is normally thought to be formed in the course of our actions? And how can we feel responsible for this *innate* character? Finally, is it legitimate to think of character as an appearance, as if it is an object in space and time? Consequently, is it legitimate to postulate the transcendental condition (‘transcendental character’) of the empirical character?

Myself, I prefer seeing this vindication of freedom as ironic. Schopenhauer concludes by saying that freedom is a ‘mystery’, not ‘readily accessible to our cognition’. Perhaps this is a subtle admission that the Kantian transcendental solution is in fact too obscure. Unprejudiced thought leads us to conclude that free will is not real. 177.98

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