

Schopenhauer: The Aesthetic

Primary Sources:

Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation I* (WWR I), Sections 34, 38, 39, 52 (Handout)

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Section 220 (in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, p. 338)

Background:

From the *Routledge Online Encyclopedia*:

Schopenhauer, one of the great prose-writers among German philosophers, worked outside the mainstream of academic philosophy. He wrote chiefly in the first half of the nineteenth century, publishing *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The World as Will and Representation*), Volume 1 in 1818 and Volume 2 in 1844, but his ideas became widely known only in the half-century from 1850 onwards. The impact of Schopenhauer's philosophy may be seen in the work of many artists of this period, most prominently Wagner, and in some of the themes of psychoanalysis. The philosopher most influenced by him was Nietzsche, who originally accepted but later opposed many of his ideas.

Schopenhauer considered himself a follower of Kant, and this influence shows in Schopenhauer's defense of idealism and in many of his central concepts. However, he also departs radically from Kant. His dominant idea is that of the will: he claims that the whole world is will, a striving and mostly unconscious force with a multiplicity of manifestations. Schopenhauer advances this as a metaphysical account of the world as it is in itself, but believes it is also supported by empirical evidence. Humans, as part of the world, are fundamentally willing beings, their behavior shaped by an unchosen will to life which manifests itself in all organisms. His account of the interplay between the will and the intellect has been seen as a prototype for later theories of the unconscious.

[For the section we are reading:] Aesthetic experience assumes great importance in Schopenhauer's work. He suggests that it is a kind of will-less perception in which one suspends one's attachments to objects in the world [**this is the "transition" which is the topic of Section 34**], attaining release from the torment of willing (desire and suffering), and understanding the nature of things more objectively [**the pleasure of this moment, called the "sublime", is discussed in Sections 38 and 39**]. The artistic genius is the person abnormally gifted with the capacity for objective, will-free perception, who enables similar experiences in others. Here Schopenhauer adopts the Platonic notion of Ideas, which he conceives as eternally existing aspects of reality: the genius discerns these Ideas, and aesthetic experience in general may bring us to comprehend them. Music is given a special treatment: it directly manifests the nature of the will that underlies the whole world [**in Section 52, he does a quick review of art, and then does his analysis of music**].

The tiny section from Nietzsche is critical of the aesthetic moment of "disinterest" (our loss of attachment to the objects in the world).

Questions:

- How do we lose ourselves when viewing art according to Schopenhauer?
- Why is this moment (the sublime) pleasureable according to Schopenhauer?
- Consider his “bold and venturesome idea” that “only a very intimate and devoted contemplation of nature can excite or justify [nature]”. What do you think about this? (He really does not provide much of a defense).
- What is his hierarchy of the arts? Why is music at the top of it?