

ISTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY ★ GRADUATE SCHOOL

**MUSIC AS REFUGE FROM REALITY: SCHOPENHAUERIAN AESTHETICS
WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF PHILOSOPHICAL PESSIMISM**



M.A. THESIS

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Department of Musicology and Music Theory

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JANUARY 2026

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İSTANBUL TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ ★ LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ

**GERÇEKLİKTE SİĞINAK OLARAK MÜZİK: FELSEFİ PESİMİZM
PERSPEKTİFİNDEN SCHOPENHAUERYEN ESTETİK**

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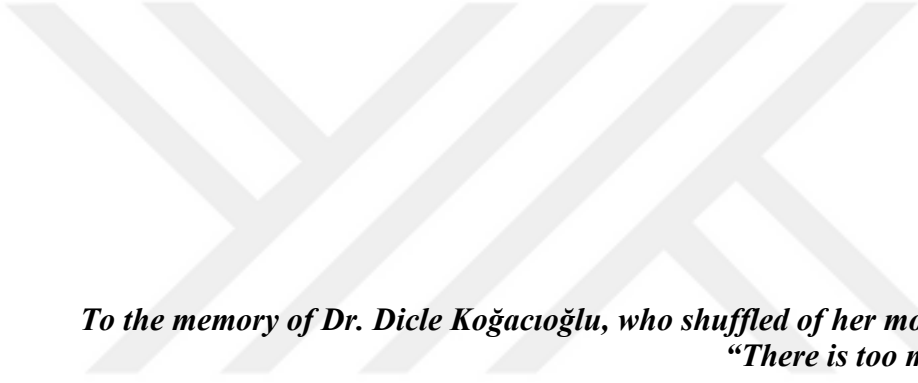
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*To the memory of Dr. Dicle Koğacioğlu, who shuffled of her mortal coil, stating
“There is too much suffering.”*



FOREWORD

Having perused the canonical texts of Western thought at a relatively early age, I first encountered Schopenhauer, through *Studies in Pessimism*, in a tiny bookstore with one of its feet in the grave. The following line contained therein was radically different from all that I had hitherto read: “One can look upon life as an episode unprofitably disturbing the blessed calm of nothingness.” Thus began my fascination with continental philosophy, and German Idealism in particular.

It was almost inevitable for me, therefore, to write an honors thesis dealing with this field before graduation. The result was *A Glimpse into the Nature of Reality: Music as ‘Revelation’ in Schopenhauerian Thought*, a mere exposition of Schopenhauerian aesthetics in Turkish, fueled by a melodramatic, youthful ambition from which I have gradually recovered. On this matter, I must thank Dr. Gonca Girgin for accepting my request to advise my thesis on such short notice. Her patient guidance and selfless editorship made my wrestling with my native language much more manageable. Many a time I was graciously saved from making a fool of myself by employing the wrong Turkish terminology for concepts well-established in English and German. Additionally, Dr. Belma Oğul’s suggestions of literature critiquing and contrasting Schopenhauer in numerous aspects helped the study feel whole—to the extent that true holisticness is ever achievable, that is. During this time, a private study I authored on philosophical pessimism was published at the outset of the pandemic. I encourage the reader to check that book out, provided its content is of interest to them.

That all said, I extend my special gratitude to Dr. Ozan Baysal, whose professorship during my undergraduate years provided me with knowledge and wisdom far beyond my horizon, and whose thesis advisorship over the last few months has been a source of helms and stability, helping me appreciate the Vincian maxim that “simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”

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Selim GÜRE



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ABBREVIATIONS

WWR	: <i>The World as Will and Representation</i>
WWR+	: <i>The World as Will and Representation Vol. 2</i>
WSG	: <i>Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde</i>
PP	: <i>Parerga und Paralipomena</i>
CPR	: <i>The Critique of Pure Reason</i>
MFP	: <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i>
OTT	: <i>On the Tragic</i>
MKTI	: <i>Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas</i>
DMW	: <i>Dissonanzen. Musik in der verwalteten Welt</i>
UWN	: <i>Ueber den Willen in der Natur</i>
GKW	: <i>Geschichte des Konzertwesens in Wien, Die moderne Oper</i>
GT	: <i>Die Geburt der Tragödie (aus dem Geiste der Musik)</i>
PM	: <i>Philosophie der neuen Musik</i>
KU	: <i>Kritik der Urteilskraft</i>



MUSIC AS REFUGE FROM REALITY: SCHOPENHAUERIAN AESTHETICS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF PHILOSOPHICAL PESSIMISM

SUMMARY

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) has long held fascination from composers, music enthusiasts and musicians alike, owing chiefly to his elevation of the discipline above all else in the fine arts hierarchy he delineated. In Schopenhauerian epistemology, music performs a revelatory function; unlike painting, sculpture, or literature, which merely represent the world of appearances. These representational arts mediate our grasp of the Platonic Ideas, presenting only indirect images of the underlying noumenal reality: the thing-in-itself. Music, by contrast, bypasses conceptual mediation entirely and strikes directly at the heart of the will. This radical claim has resonated deeply with creative practitioners seeking to articulate experiences that defy verbal description.

In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer arranges the arts in a graded schema according to their proximity to the will. At the lowest level lie architecture and sculpture, which operate within the realm of spatial form. Above them, painting and poetry ascend by introducing the temporal dimension and abstract ideas, respectively. Yet it is in music that Schopenhauer discerns the purest expression of being: for him, the melodies and harmonies we hear are not mere symbols of inner striving, but its direct incarnation. Accordingly, the composer assumes the role of a metaphysical interpreter, translating the imperceptible urgencies of the will into audible form. Performers and listeners enter into an ontological communion, momentarily shedding the prism of personal desire to recognize the will's pervasive force.

It is within this grand metaphysical panorama that Schopenhauer introduces the concept of 'aesthetic contemplation' (*ästhetische Betrachtung*). Aesthetic contemplation is, in his formulation, a state of disinterested absorption in an artwork, be it a painting, a sculpture, a literary text, or a musical composition that suspends the subject's self-centered willing. In this suspended state, the individual does not act out of desire or fear, but beholds phenomena as pure presentations. Time seems to stand still, the burdensome chain of wants dissolves, and the mind rests in serene equanimity. Schopenhauer often depicts this moment as revelatory: the contemplator gains a fleeting glimpse into the noumenal substratum of existence.

In the present study, however, I propose a complementary reading of aesthetic contemplation — one that shifts our focus from the metaphysical 'revelation' of the will to the psychological 'refuge' that contemplation affords. While Schopenhauer himself emphasized music's capacity to disclose the will's inner nature, the more pressing benefit in everyday human experience may lie in music's power to distract and soothe. In the pessimistic literature that he helped shape, life is oftentimes depicted

as “a pendulum that swings between pain and boredom,” wherein every living creature is bound by the shared fate of striving and fleeting moments of contentment. It is not only philosophical doctrine but also common human testimony that existence tends toward dissatisfaction. Aesthetic contemplation offers a momentary reprieve, a respite from the relentless churn of desire; even if it does not ultimately alter the will’s fundamental character.

Crucially, I employ the term ‘refuge’ rather than ‘escape’ to describe this function. ‘Escape’ connotes an irreversible departure, a flight from reality that seeks to sever ties with the source of suffering. But ‘refuge’ implies a temporary sanctuary, entered with the intention of eventual return. In aesthetic refuge, one does not renounce the world; one simply withdraws from its immediate pressures to amass strength for the journey ahead. Schopenhauer’s own language occasionally gestures toward this nuance as well: he portrays art as a shelter, not as an exit door. The sanctuary of aesthetic contemplation enables the suffering subject to regroup, to let the corrosive demands of the will subside long enough for genuine rest.

Within this interdisciplinary framework, aesthetic contemplation becomes more than an ivory-tower ideal; it emerges as a practical tool for coping with life’s inherent suffering. Music therapy, for instance, leverages flow and emotional regulation to alleviate symptoms in conditions ranging from chronic pain to mere existential *ennui*. Therapeutic protocols often focus on improvisation, guided listening, and songwriting to evoke flow-like states that mitigate distress. Educators, too, are incorporating immersive art experiences into curricula to strengthen students’ attentional capacities and emotional resilience. In each of these applied contexts, the sanctuary of aesthetic engagement mirrors Schopenhauer’s refuge, albeit stripped of its overtly metaphysical trappings.

In sum, extending Schopenhauer’s concept of aesthetic contemplation into the realm of refuge may yield a dual insight. First, it preserves his core intuition that art provides a special relation to the will, one that suspends the ordinary flux of desire and delivers a distinctive experience of presence. Second, it aligns this intuition with modern understandings of psychology and neuroscience, demonstrating how immersion in music fulfills basic human needs for emotional relief and cognitive restoration. The confluence of philosophical depth and empirical validation may render aesthetic refuge a compelling model for both theorists and practitioners.

GERÇEKLİKTE SİĞINAK OLARAK MÜZİK: FELSEFİ PESİMİZM PERSPEKTİFİNDEN SCHOPENHAUERYEN ESTETİK

ÖZET

Frederick Beiser, *Weltschmerz* adlı eserinin giriş paragrafında şöyle yazar: "Kötümserliğin karanlık bulutu Almanya'nın üzerine çökmüştü." Gerçekten de 19. ve erken 20. yüzyılın *zeitgeist*'i (zamanın ruhu), "felsefi pesimizm" olarak adlandırılan — yani bir şeylerin var olmasındansa hiçbir şeyin var olmamış olmasının daha iyi olacağı görüşünün — etkisi altındaydı. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), bu oldukça kasvetli hissiyatı sistematik bir felsefeye dönüştüren ilk düşünür olarak kabul edilir. Daha da önemlisi, onun estetik teorisi, müziğe atfettiği ayrıcalıklı konum nedeniyle müzikolojik bir incelemeyi gerekli kılar. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Schopenhauer'in müzik anlayışını, öncüsü olduğu felsefi pesimizmle ilişkili olarak anlamaktır. Bunu yaparken, öncelikle pesimizmin yüzeysel bir tarihsel incelemesi sunulmakta; ardından *İstenç ve Tasarım Olarak Dünya* (*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*) üzerine bir açıklama gelmektedir. Schopenhauer estetik teorisini bu eserin üçüncü bölümünde aktarır; bu nedenle en çok üzerinde durduğum kısım burasıdır.

Felsefi pesimizmin temel önermesi — hiç var olmamış olmanın daha iyi olduğu düşüncesi — emsâlsiz değildir; kökleri çok eski zamanlara dayanmaktadır. Başlangıç olarak Antik Yunan'da, ne şairler ne de düşünürler yaşamın doğasında var olan trajediler hakkında konuşmaktan çekinmezlerdi. Homeros'un, serbest bir çeviriyle, "insanlığın bu gezegenin yüzünde yürümüş en mutsuz tür" olduğunu söylediği bilinir. Antik Çağın büyük oyun yazarlarından Menandros şöyle yazmıştır: "Tanrıların sevdikleri genç ölür." İlk atomculardan ve bildiğimiz anlamda bilimin atalarından biri olan Empedokles, yaşamın aralıksız bir işkence örneği olduğunu beyan etmiştir. Platon bile *Apologia* (Sokrates'in Savunması) eserinde Sokrates'in kişiliği üzerinden, eğer ölüm her türlü duyumun ortadan kalktığı bir uyku gibiyse, bunun bir lütuf sayılması gerektiğini söylemiştir. Antik çağın büyük oyun yazarı Sophokles de metinlerin yaşamı olumlamayan ifadelerle dolu olduğu birçok oyununda benzer bir hissiyatı paylaşmıştır.

On ikinci yüzyıl Fransa'sında ortaya çıkan Gnostik bir kült olan Katarlar (Cathari), dünyevî varoluşun karakter bakımından tamamen kötü olduğuna inanırdı. İnançlarına göre, Eski Ahit'in Tanrısı bizzat Şeytan ile eşdeğerdi. Dünyayı hiçlikten yaratmış ve ardından insanları tarif edilemez acılar çekmeleri için yeryüzündeki bedensel bir varoluşa sürgün etmişti. Budizm'deki döngüsel yaşam kavramına benzer şekilde, Katarcılıkta da ruh, çileci uygulamalar aracılığıyla gnosis — gizli, ezoterik bilgi — edinmediği sürece sonsuz bir dünyevi felâkete mahkûmdur. Bu nedenle, Katarların sadık üyeleri üremeyi reddetmişlerdir; zira bu, en başta asla talep etmemiş bir ruha acı çektirmek anlamına gelirdi.

Kötümserliğin popüler bir vecizesi, Eski Ahit'teki Vaiz 4:3 bölümünde yer alır. Burada Kral Solomon, ölülerin yaşayanlardan daha mutlu olduğunu ilan ederken şu sonuca varır:

“Fakat her ikisinden de iyisi,
henüz doğmamış olandır;
güneşin altında yapılan kötülüğü henüz görmemiş olan.”

Hayata yönelik bu yoğun negatif yaklaşım sadece Batı ile sınırlı değildir. Benzer nitelikteki fikirlere Ömer Hayyam gibi pek çok düşünürün eserlerinde de rastlanabilir. Ancak hayata dair en dehşet verici ifadelerden biri Arap şair Ebû'l-Alâ el-Maarri'ye aittir; mezar taşında şöyle yazar: “Bu, babamın bana karşı işlediği suçtur; bense onu hiç kimseye karşı işlemedim.” Dahası, yaşamı olumsuzlayan bir ifade bulmak için tarihin derinliklerine inmeye gerek yoktur. Kurgu yazarları, soğuk hakikâti sıklıkla ahlakî açıdan tartışmalı karakterleri aracılığıyla aktarırlar. İnsanın aklına, bir sarhoşun haykırışlarının hayata dair yürek parçalayıcı olguları barındırdığı o ikinci sınıf Rus romanları gelir.

Her şeyden öte, Schopenhauer, aksi takdirde "hayata dair kasvetli bir bakış açısı" olarak addedilecek olanı sistematik bir felsefeye dönüştüren filozof olarak kalmıştır. Bolluk içinde servete sahip başarılı bir tüccar olan babasının zamansız kaybı, ailenin derhal dağılmasına ve varlıkların tasfiye edilmesine yol açtı. Annesi ve kız kardeşi Weimar'a giderken, genç Alman, babasının izinden gitmek üzere bir çıraklık eğitimine başladı. Ancak ticaret alanındaki iki yıllık isteksiz eğitimin ardından, tıp okumak için Göttingen Üniversitesi'ne gitmek üzere aile mesleğini bıraktı. Schopenhauer, ikinci yılında felsefe alanına geçiş yaptı ve kendini Platon ile Immanuel Kant'ın metinlerine adadı. Bir yıllık eğitimin ardından, felsefe müfredatının yetersiz olduğundan endişe ederek Göttingen'den ayrılmaya karar verdi. Berlin'e taşındı ve çalışmalarına şehir üniversitesinde devam etti. Burada geçirdiği süre boyunca, Prusya ve Fransa arasındaki gerilimin bir sonucu olarak askeri bir işgal ihtimaliyle giderek daha fazla kaygı duymaya başladı. Bu nedenle Berlin'den kaçtı ve Rudolstadt'ta bir nevi münzevi hayatı yaşamaya başladı; yakınlardaki ormanlara ve dağlara geziler yaparak vaktinin çoğunu kendi başına geçirdi. *Yeter Sebep İlkesinin Dört Katlı Kökü Üzerine (Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde)* başlıklı tezini de Rudolstadt'ta tamamladı. Schopenhauer bu eserinde, var olan her şeyin bir "nedeninin" olması gerektiğine dair felsefi nosyonun temellerini inceledi. Tezini Jena Üniversitesi'ne sunduktan sonra, gıyabında doktora derecesini aldı.

Schopenhauer daha sonra, ileride en önemli eseri olacak olan *İstenç ve Tasarım Olarak Dünya (Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung)* üzerinde çalışmaya başladı. Kiralık bir odada kendi isteğiyle girdiği dört yıllık bir inzivanın ardından ilk cildi tamamladı. Yaklaşık otuz yıl boyunca kitap halk tarafından tamamen fark edilmedi ve akademik çevrelerde sistematik olarak görmezden gelindi.

Dünya Tasarımıdır

Schopenhauer'ın ana eserinin ilk bölümü, aynı zamanda şu meşhur ifadenin doğduğu yerdir: "Die Welt ist meine Vorstellung." Filozof bu cümlede, modern felsefenin en etkili ilkelerinden birini özetler: özne ve nesne arasındaki ikilik. Bu ikilik sayesinde anlarız ki; dünya, bir algılayanın algısıdır; o algılayan ise karşılığında bir başka algılayanın algısıdır. Schopenhauer, yegâne *a priori* gerçek olarak kabul ettiği bu önerme üzerine bilgi felsefesi kuramını inşa eder. Burada, yeter sebep ilkesi bağlamındaki nedensellik ve uzay-zaman gibi meseleler incelenir. Ayrıca bu bölümde Kant'ın etkisi oldukça belirgindir. Schopenhauer, Kant felsefesini başarılı bir katarakt ameliyatına benzetir. Numen (kendinde şey) ve görüngü arasındaki ayrım, modern felsefi incelemenin dönüm noktası olarak kabul görmektedir.

Dünya İstencimdir

İkinci bölümde dünya, "istenç" (*Wille*) olarak incelenir. Schopenhauer, istencin varoluşun *sine qua non*'u (olmazsa olmazı) olduğunu öne sürer. İstenç, organizmaların eylemlerini motive eder ve yazarın ifadesiyle "doğanın her kör kuvvetinde" oldukça barizdir. Birçok yönden Schopenhauer'ın istenci, selefi Kant'ın "kendinde şey" (*Ding an sich*) kavramına benzer. Ancak aralarında hayati bir fark vardır: Kant, kendinde şeyin hiçbir koşulda bilinemeyeceğini savunurken; Schopenhauer, bireyin bakışını kendi içine çevirerek istence erişim sağlayabileceğini ileri sürer.

Estetik

Filozof, evreni estetik bir biçimde deneyimleme yetisinin, aksi takdirde katlanılamaz olan varoluş halini meşrulaştıran nadir şeylerden biri olduğunu savunur. Hayatın "acı ile can sıkıntısı arasında bir sarkaç gibi ileri geri sallandığı" bir dünyada, estetik deneyim, istemenin sancılarından geçici bir kurtuluş sağlar. Uzak Doğu öğretilerinin sekiz katlı yoluna benzer şekilde; filozof, takipçilerine "istençsiz" (*willenlos*) bir duruma ulaşmak için belirli pratikler reçete eder. Güzel sanatlar, istencin sesini susturmanın en etkili yolu olarak görünmektedir.

Etik

Felsefi pesimizmin ahlakî göreceliliğe yol açtığını ileri sürmek cazip bir fikir olabilir. Başka bir deyişle, pesimizmde nesnel bir ahlakın varlığı en iyi ihtimalle şüpheyle, en kötü ihtimalle ise alayla karşılanır. Ancak bu durum, pesimistin herhangi bir ahlak teorisine bağlı olmadığı anlamına gelmez. Aksine, ahlak teorileri, pesimistin "tüm canlılar arasındaki ızdırap kardeşliği" olarak algıladığı durumu azaltmadaki etkinliklerine göre değerlendirilir. Schopenhauer, böyle bir etiğin ancak evreni ve yaşamı tek, bütünsel bir varlık (yani istenç) olarak kavrayan ve böylece başkalarının talihsizliklerini kendi talihsizliği gibi gören bireylerce uygulanabileceğini ileri sürer. Esas olarak bu muhakeme yoluyla Schopenhauer, bir merhamet etiğini savunur.

Sığınak Olarak Müzik

Çalışmamın odak noktasını oluşturan bu bölüme; Schopenhauer'ın müziğe, dinî veya ruhanî bir vahiyle benzer bir işlev yüklediğini öne sürerek başlıyorum. Düşünür, bu işlev sayesinde özne, başka hiçbir uygulama yoluyla elde edilemeyecek bir içgörünün mümkün olduğunu iddia eder. Bu içgörü, kendini “varoluşun doğasına bir bakış” olarak sunar: Yüzeyde geçici olsa da, özünde kalıcı bir bilgeliktir. Kant'ın epistemolojiye yaklaşımı, *kendinde şeye* dair her türlü sorgulamayı reddediyordu. Yani, insanoğlu hem teorik hem de uygulamalı bilimlerde ne kadar ilerlerse ilerlesin, varlığın hakikî doğası asla başarılı bir şekilde bilinemeyecekti.

Zekâ ile donatılmış bir türün üyeleri olarak, gerçekliğe dair nispeten güçlü bir anlayış geliştirebiliriz. Hem analitik hem de sentetik bilgiyle meşgul olabilir, gelecekte belirli olayların nasıl gelişeceğine dair hesaplamalar yapabilir, uzak galaksileri keşfedebilir veya ölümcül hastalıkların biyolojik mekanizmalarını tersine mühendislikle çözerek çareler üretebiliriz. Yine de, algılanan gerçekliğin özünü — Kantçı anlamda *kendinde şeyi* — asla anlayamayacağız. Doğası gereği metafiziksel olan bu bilgi, bizim için her zaman gerçekliğin görünmez ve erişilemez bir parçası olarak kalacaktır.

Schopenhauer'ın, Kant'ın algılanan ile hakikî arasındaki metafiziksel ayrımını benimsediğini söylemenin isabetli olacağına inanıyorum. Fichte ve Hegel gibi Alman idealistleri de bu ayrımı takdir etmiş ve evreni mükemmelliğe doğru ilerleyen rasyonel bir süreç olarak tahayyül ederek bu temel üzerine inşa etmişlerdi. Ancak Schopenhauer'ın istenci kör ve rasyonel olmayan bir güç olarak görmesi, evreni idealistlerin gördüğü şekilde göremeyeceği anlamına geliyordu. Schopenhauer, tüm yaşamın *varlık nedeninin* (raison d'être), yalnızca kendisini ve beraberindeki tüm doğal ızdırapları sürdürmek olduğunu savunur. Basit mikrobiyomlardan karmaşık memelilere kadar tüm organizmalar, genlerini ve kendilerini mümkün olduğunca uzun süre hayatta tutmak için çabalarlar. Bu, temel hayatta kalma ve üreme içgüdülerinden kaynaklanır. Tüm yaşam dayanmaya ve çoğalmaya çabalar; bu da bir arzuyu tatmin edip onun yeniden doğuşuna tanıklık ettiğimiz kısır bir döngü yaratır. Susarız, sadece su içmek ve sonra tekrar susamak için. Bir sonraki aşırma anına kadar açlığımızı yatıştırmak için yiyecek ararız. Zihinsel ya da fiziksel olsun, bir hazzı ulaşırsınız ve hazzın kendisinin geçici, arzusunun ise kalıcı olduğunu görürüz. Aralıksız uğraş verdiğimiz kişisel veya meslekî bir dönüm elde ederiz ve sonunda beklenenden daha az bir hoşnutluğa sahip oluruz. Döngü, biz zamansız bir ölümle karşılaşana ya da yaşlılıktan tükenene kadar devam eder.

Schopenhauer, kişinin istencin pençelerinden tamamen kurtulamayacağını, çünkü bireyin de bizzat istencin kendisi olduğunu; ancak istencin sesini ‘istençsizlik’ (willenlos) noktasına yaklaşacak kadar susturmayı hedefleyebileceğini öne sürer. İstençsizlik durumunun nasıl bir his olduğunu betimlemek için estetik bir nesneye bakma örneğini verir. Bu nesne büyük bir sanat eseri olabileceği gibi doğanın güzel bir manzarası da olabilir. Bu tür durumlarda, insanın kendisini sonsuz çabadan koparması ve dünyayı saf bir estetik fenomen olarak deneyimlemesi mümkündür. Örnek vermek gerekirse, kendimizi volkanik bir dağın büyüleyici manzarasında kaybettüğümüzde, temel kaygılarımız bir an için duraksar ve bu da manzaradan zamansız bir şekilde keyif almamızı sağlar. Schopenhauer, daha sonra çeşitli güzel sanat dallarını, özneye sağladıkları istençsizlik derecesine göre hiyerarşik bir düzene koyar.

Bu nedenle Schopenhauer estetiğinde, bir sanat eserinin soyutluk düzeyi, onun ifşa niteliğindeki potansiyeliyle doğru orantılıdır. Saf enstrümantal müzik, fiziksel gerçeklikle hiçbir ilgisi olmayacak kadar soyut olduğu için tam olarak güzel sanatlar hiyerarşisinin tepesinde yer alır. Libretto veya arya gibi sözlü müziklerde kelimelerin, "tasarım olarak dünya"daki nesnelere dair yan anlamları vardır veya onlardan türetilmiştir. Değerbilimsel terminolojiyle ifade edilirse, ne zaman kelimeler işin içine girse müzik için değerini kaybeder. Örneğin bir ağıt, çok yaygın bir fenomen olan yas hakkında anlam iletir. Bir aşk şarkısının da yaygın bir biyopsikososyal olgunun tezahürü olan duygulardan başka sunabileceği özel bir içgörüsü yoktur. Schopenhauer işte bu muhakeme yoluyla salt müziği bir kürsüye oturtur ve ona güzel sanatlar hiyerarşisinde eşsiz bir yer verir. Tam olarak ifade etmek gerekirse, Schopenhauer'e göre müzik güzel sanatlar hiyerarşisinin de ötesindedir; bir sanat eserinin veya müziğin yargılanması gereken kriterleri aşar.

Ancak ben bu metinde, Schopenhauer'in kendi sisteminde estetik tefekküre yüklediği "ifşa edici" işlevin ötesine geçerek, bu bilinç hâlinin asıl değerinin başka bir yerde aranabileceğini savunuyorum: estetik tefekkürün, yaşama için olan acı ve kaçınılmazlık hissiyatından — yani pesimist literatürde 'yaşayan her şey arasındaki ızdırap kardeşliği' olarak tanımlanan olgudan — bireyi bir süreliğine uzaklaştırma becerisinde. Bu anlamda estetik deneyim, hakikâte bir pencere açmaktan ziyade, hakikâtin dayanılmaz ağırlığından bir sığınak sunar. Müziğin doğası gereği zamanla akıp gitmesi ve dinleyiciyi kendi iç ritmine çekmesi, bu sığınak işlevini özellikle güçlendirir.

Burada 'kaçış' yerine 'sığınak' kelimesini tercih ediyorum, çünkü 'sığınak' kavramı, 'asıl yere geri dönme niyetiyle bir kaçış alanı' anlamına gelirken, herhangi bir kaçış eylemi zorunlu olarak bir geri dönüş niyeti taşımayabilir. Bu doğrultuda, 'akış' teorisi ve 'müziğin işlevselliği' üzerine yapılan çeşitli ampirik araştırmalardan faydalaniyorum. Neticede, müziğin Schopenhauer'in öne sürdüğü gibi mutlaka 'varlığın gerçek doğasına' açılan bir kapı olmasa da, eserlerinde sıkça tasvir edilen soğuk hakikâten geçici bir sığınak sağlayabileceğini ileri sürüyorum.



1. INTRODUCTION

“Whatever can go wrong will go wrong.” This, arguably, is one of the most commonplace bromides of pessimism. Even those who operate exclusively in a world of sunny thoughts ought to agree that the absence of perfection, sooner or later, leads to disaster. Whatever *can* go wrong surely *will*.

It comes from Edward A. Murphy Jr., an American aerospace engineer who worked on a variety of significant projects in the mid-20th century. The exact circumstances that led to the creation of Murphy’s Law are somewhat uncertain, but it is often attributed to his work on safety systems for high-speed aircraft in the late 40’s and early 50’s. As per one account, Murphy was working on a project to test the effects of sudden deceleration on the human body when he found that a technician had installed some of the sensors backwards, resulting in the failure of the experiment. Frustrated with the error, Murphy reportedly quipped the following statement: “If there are two or more ways to do something, and one of those ways can result in a catastrophe, then someone will do it.”

There’s the rub: the universe is a vile enough place that there will always be problems no one could foresee — or even imagine, for that matter. This ultimately means that, when push comes to shove, things *will* go wrong.

Think about the state of the world us moderns inhabit: nuclear warheads, bioweapons specifically engineered to take out whole swaths of organisms at one fell swoop, ideological discrepancies bound to result in gory violence, and a potentially devastating climate change on the horizon. Whence this trajectory toward doom?

A brief look at history, would reveal that this state of being is not new. Humanity has always had its fair share of catastrophes. Fatal tectonic shifts, plagues, genocides, cruel oppression and mass slave trade are but a few of the atrocities that haunted the last millennium. Since human life as we know it is a constant cycle of birth and death, every new generation tends to have their own share of problems; but people simply ‘expire’ before the solution arrives. Strides forward come too late: polio vaccine arrives after hundreds of millions die horrible deaths, veganism gains popularity only after the necks of more than a trillion livestock have been slashed with dull blades, feminism achieves traction after a half of the species had been treated by the other like industrial-sized ovens and selfless maids for ages. In times past, we had the divine order to explain why some peoples’ hardwork was valued less than their counterparts living overseas. Today, we have the global financial system doing a similar job with its abstract instruments; if things go too-overboard, war will come to the rescue. Peace, on the other hand, never truly arrives. Nor is it likely to.

The facts adumbrated heretofore are accepted as *truth* only by a tiny minority of every living generation. The rest are peacefully kept in a state of slumber by a syndicate of shepherds sending down a chain of commands on how this life — which, in effect, is seen by not a few as a cosmic shortchange — ought to be lived. But in a world where ever-increasing entropy is the rule, pessimism is bound to have adherents for ages to come. For what is the point of staying cluelessly optimistic in a place where you *can* catch a strain of flesh-eating bacteria and meet a very ‘intriguing’ demise? This is one of the billion things that *can* go wrong; hence, Murphy. It is best, therefore, that we attempt to understand pessimism on a broader scale, rather than sweep it under the rug as ‘too negative’.

The pessimist is an animal capable of realizing that meaning, or the lack thereof, is an unsurmountable issue; yet she still craves it. She looks at nature from without but also feels herself as its part. From a mechanical vantage point, the sole task of nature seems to be to produce things it will eventually destroy — a cosmic meat grinder that feasts upon itself. She understands that chaos prevails but feebly attempts at some form of order: the home, the country, the family, the nation, the *cause*.

The more she denies by means of constructed identity what she *is*¹ the easier she faces adversity. For the predicament of being a human, a mere creature of the earth destined for decay, there is no cure. But the arts, of which Schopenhauer unapologetically deemed music the noblest, is a strong palliative.

In the latter half of the 19th century, Schopenhauer had been one of the most influential thinkers in the German-speaking world (Schubbe & Koßler, 2018). His presence is conspicuously observed in the writings of Nietzsche, who initially considered him his master and finally nemesis (*Meditations*, 1874). Freud's tripartite² theory of the self, too, has primarily been attributed to the influence of the philosopher (Gupta, 1975). There have also been numerous studies attempting to establish an intellectual link between Darwin's *The Origins of Species* and Schopenhauer's *WWR* (Asher, 1871; Baptista et al., 2019; Lovejoy, 1911). The findings indicate that Darwin indeed studied Schopenhauer yet omitted any personal references in his works for fear of unoriginality (Lovejoy, 1911). Among composers, Wagner is known to have publicly disclosed the philosopher's gargantuan influence on him, and his later operatic productions are rife with tropes of Schopenhauerian abnegation (Barry, 1925). In a similar vein, one of Nietzsche's works that intended to transcend Schopenhauerian pessimism and its roots in Judeo-Christian morality, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, was set to music by Richard Strauss (Franco, 2021).

Besides the aforementioned, the name Schopenhauer has been enjoying a cult-following among philosophers of music. To quote Lydia Goehr, "...no philosopher's writings about music have proved more influential" (Cheetham, 1997). Not least of all, while the Schopenhauerian worldview has been heavily criticized for its overwhelming negativity bias in the psychological and psychiatric circles, a considerable number of interpretations view it in a positive light. Among the most popular examples, perhaps, is existential psychologist Irving Yalom's novel, *The Schopenhauer Cure* (Gabbard, 2006). The story revolves around a therapy group led by a psychiatrist named Juilus Hertzfeld, a man diagnosed with terminal illness.

¹ That is, as long as she believes she is *someone somewhere*, not some *thing* that's *everywhere*.

² The (in)famous division of the self between *id*, *ego*, and *superego*, as it was first contained in *Das Ich und das Es*, 1923.

The group members, each with their unique psychological struggles, draw inspiration from the German pessimist to confront their existential anxieties and find meaning in life (Huang, 2015).

One should note that refutations of the Schopenhauerian worldview have been beyond abundant, philistine presentisms, argumenta ad populum³, and attempts at retrospective psychodiagnostics comprising the majority.

As a privileged and frugal individual, whose part of the family inheritance conservatively invested in astronomical sums of government bonds yielded annually more than two times a *privatdozent*'s salary, it has often been said that his petite bourgeoisie life of relative ease might have fueled his philosophy of despair.

Further, explaining away Schopenhauer's impenitent pessimism via the premature, suicidal death of his father and the consequent dissolution of his familial relationships before coming of age also have been common. It is without doubt that the biographical approach has its merits. From a purely eristic standpoint, however, a biographical rebuttal of Schopenhauer's pessimism would not amount to anything more than the dour ad hominem. For this very reason, such approaches ought to be treated with skepticism; hence, Oscar Wilde: "Everyone has disciples, and it is always Judas who writes the biography."

1.1 Purpose of Thesis

The study at hand is concerned with a prominent component of Schopenhauerian thought: its emphasis on music's 'revelatory' potential. Taking my departure from the third section of *The World as Will and Representation (WWR)* I investigate how Schopenhauer situates music not merely as an aesthetic phenomenon, but as a privileged medium through which the underlying metaphysical force — the Will — can be both intuited and momentarily transcended. Further, I explore how such a

³ Philosophical pessimism, of which the thinker in question is considered a principal exponent, has consistently positioned itself in opposition to the historically dominant view that life constitutes a net positive.

conception enables music to function as a momentary refuge from what is commonly worded in pessimistic literature as ‘kinship of suffering between everything alive.’⁴ It is important to note here that I posit, in stark contrast to Schopenhauerian thought, that music — that is, music in any form or genre — cannot serve as an epistemological instrument by virtue of which the subject gains privileged metaphysical insight into the nature of being.

That said, it would be a farce of immense proportions to claim neutrality in a study which holds art as its object. Mine is but a humble attempt to market the idea to the musicological circles, in as brief a manner as possible, that Schopenhauerian aesthetics, and philosophical pessimism’s place therein, may have value to offer.

1.2 Literature Review

Both in English and German-speaking spheres, works dealing with music in Schopenhauerian thought have been more than abundant. Indeed, musicoaesthetics in the English language seems to be experiencing a Schopenhauerian renaissance, as evidenced by the sheer number of academic publications and doctoral dissertations produced on the thinker in question. For purposes of brevity, I hereby discuss mainly the interpretations & critiques of the more prominent names in Schopenhauer research.

Scholars such as Bryan Magee (2001) (*The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*) and D.W. Hamlyn (1980) provide detailed interpretations of Schopenhauer's hierarchy of the arts, emphasizing music's privileged status. They underscore how Schopenhauer correlates the bass with the lowest grades of the Will's objectification (inorganic nature) and the melody with the Will's highest objectification (the individual human will), making music a sonic analogy of the world's inner nature.

⁴ The quote here, which belongs to a seminal text, *The Last Messiah*, by Norwegian ecophilosopher Peter Wessel Zapffe is modified by yours truly on self-initiative so as to match that which is considered standard in contemporary English from “the brotherhood of suffering between everything alive.”

Key works delve into the distinction between music and the other arts (architecture, painting, poetry) which *do* copy the Ideas. Dale Jacquette (2005) explores the structural analogy, arguing that music's temporal and mathematical relationships mirror the formal structure of reality governed by the Will.

A persistent question is how feeling relates to the Will. Schopenhauer states music expresses feelings *in the abstract*, without the specific motivations or representations that trigger them in life. Julian Young (2005) and Mikel Dufrenne examine this, noting that music is a feeling-template or a "pure representation of the inner stirrings of the Will" experienced by the listener.

Dieter Borchmeyer (1994), a leading scholar on Wagner and Schopenhauer, emphasizes how this analogy attempts to rationalize the perceived emotional depth of music. Borchmeyer also professes that Schopenhauer effectively transformed music from a pleasant sensory experience into a philosophical instrument capable of expressing cosmic truth. The Germans saw Schopenhauer's theory materialize most dramatically in the work of Richard Wagner. As analyzed extensively by Borchmeyer (1994) and others, Wagner sought to realize the metaphysical ideal in his *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Total Work of Art). Wagner's leitmotifs and chromatic harmony were seen as expressions of the ever-striving, never-resting Will, particularly in *Tristan und Isolde*, which became the quintessential Schopenhauerian musical drama (Kalkavage, 2016).

In a similar vein, essays by Theodor Adorno (2006) and Ernest Newman's (1933-1946) biography of Wagner, meticulously traces Schopenhauerian pessimism and the concept of redemption through art in works like *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Ring* cycle. Schopenhauer's philosophy provided Wagner with the theoretical framework to move away from operatic realism toward the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) that directly conveys metaphysical truth.

While later rejecting Schopenhauer, Nietzsche's early work, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, is deeply indebted to Schopenhauer's musical metaphysics. Alexander Nehamas (1992) analyzes how Nietzsche's Dionysian principle—the non-rational, primal, musical force—is essentially a restatement of the Schopenhauerian Will expressed in sound.

Historical musicologists have also traced this influence through figures such as Mahler and Schoenberg, investigating how the drive toward atonality and the expression of abstract, internal psychological states in music aligns with Schopenhauer's idea of music as the language of the inner self (Young, 2005).

That said, not all treatments of the Schopenhauerian oeuvre have been doxological. Contemporary aestheticians challenge Schopenhauer's unique designation of music. Chief among whom is Peter Kivy (2001), who questions the necessity of invoking the Will to explain music's emotional power, suggesting that his claims are ultimately unverifiable and unnecessarily metaphysical.

Again, critics address the tension between music being a "direct copy of the Will" (an unstructured, blind striving) and the undeniable, highly complex structure of music (harmony, rhythm, form). The late Roger Scruton (1997), conservative thinker and cultural critic, and others argue that Schopenhauer's theory undervalues the role of musical understanding and rational engagement, which are based on intellectually grasping these structures.

More recent literature attempts to synthesize Schopenhauer's metaphysics with phenomenological approaches. Aaron Ridley (2006) explores how Schopenhauer's account anticipates ideas about music as a presentation of temporality and a unique mode of *experience*, focusing on the listener's subjective encounter rather than the metaphysical object being copied.

Additionally, some of the work in the field highlight the symbolic contrast between the world of *Day* (falsehood, social constraint, *Representation*) and the world of *Night* (truth, unity, desire, the Will) as a dramatic transposition of Schopenhauer's phenomenal and noumenal realms (Tanner, 1996).

While adopting the pessimism of the Will, Wagner adapted Schopenhauer's proposed release mechanism: two paths to escape the Will's suffering: aesthetic contemplation and *ascetic renunciation* of desire (Schopenhauer, 1969).

Wagner, however, offers *Love-Death (Liebestod)* — a blissful, ecstatic, and desired annihilation through mutual love. The literature on this particular matter generally agrees that this is a non-Schopenhauerian solution, replacing the philosopher's cold, ascetic negation with a tragic, romantic, and passionate one (Nietzsche, 1888; Magee, 1983).

The central theme — the destructive nature of insatiable, absolute desire — is read as a direct musical and dramatic realization of the suffering caused by the Will (Beckett, 2005). The famous "Tristan chord" and its prolonged, unresolved harmonic language are frequently interpreted as a musical analogue to the eternal, unquenched striving of the Will (Adorno, 1952).

It would be near-criminal not to mention the elephant in the room: Schopenhauer's misogyny in his later years: one that is quite blatant even for the inherently sexist era in which it had been produced. In this vein, feminist scholarship offers a sharp and focused critique of Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy of music, particularly by examining his views on gender and how they intersect with his aesthetic theory. While Schopenhauer elevated music as the highest art form, feminist critiques argue that his misogynistic understanding of women's nature, much like his nemesis/contemporary Hegel, inescapably limits their potential as both composers and philosophical interpreters of this art (Neumann, 1991; Citron, 1993).

Neumann (1991), for starters, points out that Schopenhauer's concept of genius, which requires an ability to transcend the Will's desires and apprehend the Platonic Ideas, is implicitly gendered as masculine. By confining women to the level of the species, as servants of the Will for reproduction, Schopenhauer denies them the metaphysical and intellectual freedom required for true artistic creation, thus limiting their capacity to be great composers.

Citron (1993) also explores how the association of music with the sublime and the masculine in the nineteenth century was compounded by Schopenhauer's philosophy, creating an intellectual environment that systematically barred women from the compositional profession.

If music directly expresses the noumenal truth of the universe, and women are denied access to this truth, their ability to create such music is philosophically negated. Paradoxically, while excluding women from composing true music, Schopenhauer's definition of music itself often aligns with cultural stereotypes of the "feminine."

Critics such as McClary (1991), writing on nineteenth-century musical aesthetics more broadly, note the pervasive cultural dichotomy that labeled melody, emotion, and immediate sensation as "feminine," while associating harmony, structure, and intellect with the "masculine." While Schopenhauer values music precisely for its lack of *representation* (i.e., its pure immediacy as Will), the literature suggests that his philosophy inadvertently reinforces the gendered nature of musical experience, associating the raw, irrational *Will* with a generalized, stereotypically feminine emotionality, only to be grasped and *ordered* by the superior, masculine intellect of the genius-composer.

The feminist lens questions the universality of the listener's transcendence. If Schopenhauer posits that genius overcomes the Will; and women are, by his account, subservient to the Will, then their ability to experience music as a purely aesthetic, non-volitional contemplation is theoretically compromised (Citron, 1993).

Additionally, Schopenhauer's philosophy offers redemption from the suffering of the Will through asceticism, compassion (*Mitleid*), and aesthetic contemplation. Feminist readings question how this path is accessible to women within his framework. Neumann (1991) also argues that the path of *Mitleid* and asceticism, which requires a conscious, intellectual denial of the Will to Live, is largely positioned as a male philosophical journey. Women, bound to the Will through their biological role, cannot authentically participate in this denial without renouncing their very nature as defined by Schopenhauer. The redemption offered by music thus becomes an idealized, cerebral experience available primarily to the male intellectual.

The critique extends to the use of Schopenhauer by composers like Wagner (as discussed in earlier literature), where the destructive and ultimately redemptive power of music and love, as seen in *Tristan und Isolde*, is often framed in terms of the female character's complete self-annihilation and sacrifice, reinforcing traditional gender roles under the guise of metaphysical destiny (McClary, 1991).

Following the strides achieved by the interpretations and critiques of Schopenhauerian aesthetics hitherto mentioned, dismantling Schopenhauer's philosophy of music for being 'too mystical' or merely on the grounds for its dated treatment of gender would be reaching for a low-hanging fruit. By the same token, ignoring the influence of such philosophy or actively disregarding it in spaces where it is well-received would be throwing the baby out with the bathwater, if not an outrightly academic-equivalent of cancel culture. For this very reason, I will be attempting a non-invasive rebuttal of Schopenhauerian aesthetics, superseding its mystical qualities with a reconsideration of what it means 'to be lost in music' by attributing to it the function of a mental refuge.

1.3 Hypothesis

My claim, as briefly posited in the ending of the preceding subchapter, is that scholarship on Schopenhauer has been datedly treating music transcendently, precisely because the theory of revelation through aesthetic contemplation, as put forth in *WWR*, suggests that music does not stand on the same epistemological or ontological footing as the other arts in Schopenhauer's system, and therefore, its relationship to the Will is direct and immediate, rather than mediated through the Platonic Ideas.

An alternate reading that takes philosophical pessimism's gargantuan presence on Schopenhauer's aesthetics, therefore, may be useful for understanding the deeper, tragic significance he attributes to aesthetic contemplation and its temporary power to liberate the will from suffering. This approach is necessary because Schopenhauer's aesthetics are fundamentally interwoven with his overarching doctrine of the Will—the blind, insatiable, striving force that drives reality and is the root of all sorrow. By emphasizing this pessimistic foundation, the function of art shifts from a mere appreciation of the beautiful to a crucial, temporary escape from the Will's tyranny, where the individual, driven by desire, transforms into a "pure, will-less subject of

knowledge." The great value of art, for Schopenhauer, lies precisely in its ability to halt this relentless striving, offering a brief, blissful, and vital moment of truce; however, the temporary nature of this reprieve ultimately reinforces the tragic core of his pessimism, showing that one must inevitably return to the realm of willing and suffering. It is this inescapable return that lends aesthetic experience its peculiar bittersweet gravity in Schopenhauer's thought, and it is what any adequate account of his philosophy of music must take seriously, rather than dissolving it into the vocabulary of transcendence. The inescapable return to willing and suffering is not, therefore, a peripheral footnote to Schopenhauer's aesthetics but its very center. Any reading of his philosophy of music that abstracts it into pure transcendence quietly suppresses this tragic structure, leaving us with an elevation of music that is philosophically flattering but ultimately hollow. To restore the pessimistic foundation is not to diminish music's singular status in Schopenhauer's system, but to understand why that status matters, as well as at what cost it is won.



2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE WORLD AS REPRESENTATION (WWR)

Before proposing an alternative interpretation to Schopenhauerian aesthetics, wherein music is pretentiously ranked above all the fine arts for its metaphysically revealing potential, it would be beneficial to go through, in brief a manner as possible, the four branches of Schopenhauerian thought as it is laid out in *WWR*: its treatment of epistemology (Book I), ontology (Book II), aesthetics (Book III) and ethics (Book IV). This concise summary will then be followed by an equally-succinct exposition of the main tenets of philosophical pessimism, a working grasp of which is key to the incitement of the need for a refuge.

2.1 That which is ‘seen’

“The world is my representation,” begins the first chapter of *WWR*. This is the first principle upon which Schopenhauer’s epistemology is built; and it could easily be said that, with the benefit of hindsight, this statement has its grounds in the Kantian system. Kant postulated that whatever can be known through our senses, our intuition, or even faculties of deduction and induction, falls within the world of *phenomena* — the world as it seems. On the flipside lies *noumena*: the world as it is, the inaccessible bedrock of all reality (Walsh, 1976). Grasping this dichotomy is thought to be crucial in truly comprehending Schopenhauerian metaphysics, which puts forward a rather disillusioning epistemic conclusion that the world we observe is not real, but a mere representation of the thing-in-itself (*ding an sich*).

2.2 That which is

Instead of positing a benevolent creator or a rational first cause (*causa causarum*), Schopenhauer identifies the ultimate ground of reality with an unconscious, aimless, and irrational principle: the will (*Wille*). In contrast to the theistic traditions which envision the universe as a deliberate creation imbued with purpose, Schopenhauer's metaphysics asserts that existence itself is the manifestation of a blind striving, devoid of teleological direction.

The most salient empirical trace of this primordial will is its relentless impulse toward self-perpetuation — what Schopenhauer denominates *der Wille zum Leben* ("the will to life"). This drive, indiscriminate of the myriad forms through which it actualizes itself — from the simplest unicellular organism to the complex structures of human consciousness — seeks nothing beyond its own perpetuation. As Janaway (2015) observes, the Schopenhauerian will's sole, insatiable aim is to replicate, endure, and assert itself *ad infinitum*, heedless of suffering, death, or the futility of individual striving.

Thus, Schopenhauerian metaphysics offers an inversion of classical religious cosmology. It does not merely deny the existence of a deity; it systematically deconstructs the very metaphysical grounds upon which the consolations of traditional religion are built.

Within this context, *WWR* emerges not merely as a philosophical treatise but as a kind of anti-theological scripture — the "unholy book" of philosophical pessimism. If the Christian consults the Bible, the Jew the *Tanakh*, the Hindu the *Upanishads*, and the Muslim the *Qur'an* in search of the ultimate truths of existence, then the pessimist may find in Schopenhauer's magnum opus an equally foundational, if not infinitely more disheartening, guide to the nature of reality. As Mara Van der Lugt (2021) aptly characterizes, *The World as Will and Representation* stands as the "canonical text" for those who would seek to understand existence not through the lens of divine providence, but through the cold logic of metaphysical despair.

Unlike religious scriptures, which tend toward affirmations of purpose, redemption, and ultimate harmony, Schopenhauer's text offers a diagnosis of existence as an essentially tragic phenomenon. The world, seen aright, is a ceaseless interplay of striving, frustration, and ephemeral satisfaction, culminating invariably in death — and all of it underwritten by an impersonal will whose activity is utterly without rational justification. In this regard, Schopenhauer may be said to have instituted a form of negative metaphysics: a system that reveals not the fullness of divine being, but the emptiness and suffering at the heart of existence.

The metaphysical bleakness of Schopenhauer's thought extends beyond his depiction of the will to his treatment of human agency itself. The recognition that all phenomena, including the phenomenon of volition, are mere manifestations of the will radically undermines the traditional conception of free will. Rather than being autonomous agents capable of self-determination, human beings are revealed as mere epiphenomena of a blind, impersonal force.

Thomas Ligotti, in *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, poignantly captures this aspect of Schopenhauerian pessimism, describing existence as a “puppet dance of replication in a puppet universe where the strings pull themselves” (Ligotti, 2018, p. 216). The metaphor is instructive: there is no puppeteer, no transcendent intelligence directing the movements from beyond. Rather, the strings are animated from within, pulled by the self-propagating necessity of the will itself. Human consciousness, with all its aspirations toward freedom and individuality, is but an elaborate illusion spun by forces it neither comprehends nor controls.

This vision renders the very notion of free will illusory. The supposed autonomy of action collapses under the inexorable weight of causality. Every choice, every action, is but the necessary consequence of antecedent states, themselves blindly determined by the will. As Russell (2017) argues, within the framework of philosophical pessimism, compatibilist attempts to reconcile determinism with meaningful agency are fundamentally untenable. In the Schopenhauerian cosmos, causality reigns supreme, and human beings are irrevocably fettered by its iron chains.

Thus, the problem of free will — a perennial preoccupation of philosophical inquiry — finds in Schopenhauer's pessimism not resolution but obliteration. There is, ultimately, no place for the illusion of freedom in a world where the will governs all, where striving is inevitable, and where individuality is but a fleeting manifestation of an unreasoning cosmic force.

The metaphysical pessimism heretofore discussed effectively institutes a negative theology: a vision of existence that retains the systematic rigor of what has been known traditionally as religious metaphysical thought but radically repudiates its traditional

affirmations. Instead of a world created in love or wisdom, there is only a ceaseless, aimless striving: *der Wille zum Leben*. Instead of a soul's journey toward redemption, there is the inescapable bondage of life to suffering.

And instead of the freedom to shape one's destiny, there is only the grim law of causality operating under the blind mandate of the will.

Here, *WWR* does not merely stand alongside religious texts; it fundamentally inverts them. It does not offer salvation, but a diagnosis; not hope, but a mirror held up to the ineluctable agony of being. If existential inquiry is, in part, the enterprise of coming to terms with the human condition, then Schopenhauer's contribution may lie in the brutal clarity with which he articulates the dire constitution of existence — and the near-impossibility of any genuine liberation from it.

2.3 That which is 'aesthetic'

Central to Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory is the thesis that the value of an artwork is determined by the extent to which it brings the will into the realm of appearance. The proper function of art, therefore, is the revelation of ideas⁵ and through them, the partial unveiling of the will itself. Artistic creation and appreciation consist in the capacity to abstract from the empirical particularities of phenomena and to apprehend the essential patterns that underlie them. The aesthetic object is thus evaluated according to its metaphysical depth: the degree to which it captures and discloses the inner essence of the world, rather than merely reproducing its surface appearances.

Over and above, indulging an aesthetic object may result in the temporary suspension of the will-to-life. In everyday life, the human subject is dominated by desire, fear, and practical concern — all manifestations of the underlying will. In aesthetic contemplation, however, the subject becomes, in Schopenhauer's famous phrase, a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge." Detached from personal striving, the individual attains a condition of serene objectivity, wherein the world is perceived not as an object for manipulation, but as a revelation of being.

The capacity of an artwork to occasion this transcendence is directly proportional to its level of abstraction from empirical immediacy. Those forms of art that most

⁵ *Ideen*

successfully liberate perception from individual willing, and thus approach the pure objectivity of Ideas, attain the highest aesthetic dignity.

Schopenhauer's ranking of the arts follows from this metaphysical and epistemological framework. The arts are ordered as per the extent to which they disclose the Ideas with clarity and immediacy, thereby facilitating the contemplative transcendence of the will.

At the lower end of the hierarchy stand architecture and artistic fountainry, which engage primarily with the inanimate forces of nature — gravitation, rigidity, mechanical resistance. These arts express the most elementary objectifications of the will, the Ideas associated with inorganic matter. Though capable of evoking the sublime through the depiction of vastness, mass, and permanence, they remain relatively distant from the organic and subjective dimensions of existence.

Landscape gardening achieves a higher degree of aesthetic value by incorporating the vitality of plant life. Through the artistic arrangement of flora, the gardener evokes the Ideas of organic growth and natural harmony, yet the medium remains tied to environmental contingency and lacks the immediacy of individualized will that higher forms of art convey.

Sculpture and painting ascend yet further, as they render the Ideas of sentient life, and particularly the human form, with an intensity unavailable to the plastic arts. In sculpture, the frozen dynamism of the body reveals the will's striving within organic form; in painting, the play of color, light, and shadow brings forth the inner life of beings, offering an intimation of subjectivity. Particularly in portraiture, the painter captures the individuated manifestation of the will in character and expression.

Poetry, in Schopenhauer's estimation, transcends the visual arts by virtue of its capacity to depict the inner landscape of consciousness. Through language, poetry articulates the passions, conflicts, aspirations, and tragedies that constitute human existence. It thus brings the will into direct focus, not merely through the representation of external forms, but through the evocation of the inner life in all its tumult and pathos.

Finally, occupying the pinnacle of artistic achievement is music, which, uniquely among the arts, does not operate through the medium of the Ideas at all, but instead offers a direct representation of the will itself.

2.4 Music As A Portal Between That Which Is ‘Seen’ And That Which Is

Schopenhauer's elevation of music to the highest place among the arts marks one of the most distinctive and consequential aspects of his aesthetic philosophy. In contradistinction to the other arts, which imitate the Ideas and thus only indirectly manifest the will, music, Schopenhauer asserts, bypasses the Ideas altogether and articulates the will in its pure, unmediated form.

As he states:

Music is thus by no means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but the copy of the will itself, whose objectivity the Ideas are. This is why the effect of music is so much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts, for they speak only of shadows, but it speaks of the thing itself (Norman et al., 2010).

Music's structure — its melodic motion, harmonic tension and resolution, rhythmic development — mirrors the fundamental dynamics of the will: striving, conflict, hope, despair, and reconciliation. It does not represent particular worldly events or objects; rather, it embodies the inner movements that animate all phenomena. The listener, therefore, experiences music not as the signification of something external, but as a direct communication of the metaphysical essence underlying all experience.

This accounts for the profound universality and immediacy of musical experience. While literature and painting are embedded within the contingencies of culture, history, and language, music speaks to the pre-conceptual core of the human being. It requires no translation, no contextual knowledge; it resonates with the listener by virtue of their shared participation in the metaphysical condition of will.

Indeed, Schopenhauer ventures to suggest that a symphony or musical work constitutes a kind of unconscious metaphysical treatise, a revelation of the inner architecture of

the world expressed through the medium of sound. Thus, the peculiar "truth" of music is not propositional but experiential: it is a truth lived and felt rather than abstractly conceptualized.

Within Schopenhauer's system, where life is construed as an essentially painful and ceaseless striving, the aesthetic experience emerges as one of the rare modalities of redemption. In contemplating 'the beautiful,' the subject is momentarily emancipated from the imperatives of the will, attaining a stance of pure, disinterested knowledge. The arts, to varying degrees, facilitate this transcendence by disclosing the metaphysical structures that undergird phenomenal reality.

Music, standing at the summit, does not merely assist in this transcendence but accomplishes it with unparalleled immediacy, revealing the will itself and permitting a confrontation with the noumenal ground of existence. In doing so, it offers an intimation of liberation not through the fulfillment of desires, but through their suspension.

Thus, in Schopenhauer's aesthetic philosophy, art is not an embellishment of life but a metaphysical necessity: a peek beyond the veil of *Maya*, the illusion of phenomenal multiplicity, toward the inner truth. It is through this aesthetic rapture, and most supremely through music, that the human spirit momentarily escapes the bonds of the will and tastes, albeit in brevity, a glimpse into the nature of being.

Prima facie, it would be unsurprising to discover that the ethical system aligned with philosophical pessimism makes no claim to objective moral truth. Rather, pessimism, properly understood, acknowledges the absence of any transcendental foundation for morality, seeing ethical norms as historically contingent, socially constructed, and ultimately devoid of intrinsic sanction. Adopting a Nietzschean lens may deepen this diagnosis. According to Nietzsche, any appeal to a supposedly objective morality is less an appeal to truth than a manifestation of underlying power relations. The invocation of moral standards, far from demonstrating virtue or righteousness, often betrays a position of weakness, resentment, or ressentiment. As Nietzsche (1887) controversially observes in *The Genealogy of Morals*, appeal to morality may oftentimes serve to invert the hitherto-established hierarchies, valorizing weakness while pathologizing strength.

Nature itself, as both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche contend, is fundamentally amoral. It recognizes no principles of justice or fairness; it sanctions no action as inherently right or wrong. The spectacle of a predator savaging its prey — the deer writhing and screaming as its flesh is torn away — is not a violation of any cosmic moral code, but merely an instance of the will to life asserting itself against another instantiation of the same force.

In human society, the amoral structures of nature persist, albeit in more sophisticated and insidious forms. Manipulative leaders exploit entire populations for political and financial gain. Corrupt medical practitioners violate their fiduciary duties to vulnerable patients, driven by greed. Private prison corporations collude with the legal and law enforcement systems to ensure a steady influx of incarcerated individuals, thereby maximizing profits under the guise of justice (Hernández, 2019). Multi-level marketing enterprises construct intricate, quasi-legal financial traps that prey on the credulous (Nat & Keep, 2002). The elite, operating as a modern aristocracy of influence, engage in insider trading and market manipulation, often to the catastrophic detriment of those outside their rarefied circles (Goergen et al., 2019; Perino, 2020). Even in ostensibly 'civilized' societies, 'good morals' often appear less as genuine ethical imperatives than as ideological instruments designed to regulate, pacify, and extract labor from the many for the benefit of the few (Dopf, 2011).

In light of such realities, any invocation of an objective moral order — one allegedly grounded in reason, natural law, or divine command — appears increasingly untenable. In a world manifestly governed by self-interest, exploitation, and unregulated will, morality is revealed as a contingent artifact, a convenient fiction, or at worst, an instrument of control.

Yet, within this uncompromisingly pessimistic framework, Schopenhauer carves out a narrow claim to moral objectivity. Despite his radical critiques of human nature and existence, Schopenhauer refuses to concede that all ethical discourse must collapse into mere relativism or nihilism. If there is to be any objective grounding for ethics, he argues, it must be located not in abstract rational duties or social contracts, but in the immediate, non-rational experience of compassion (*Mitleid*).

Schopenhauer (1998) held that compassion is to spring from the insight into the indivisiveness being. By this token, true compassion necessitates the transcendence of the principium individuationis — the principle that supports the illusion of division among entities. In compassion, one recognizes the suffering of the other not as something external or foreign, but as intimately connected to one's own being.

Thus, for Schopenhauer, compassion constitutes the only authentic basis for moral action. Systems of ethics founded upon reason, divine command, or social utility inevitably reduce to forms of self-interest; only compassion, as the direct, affective apprehension of another's suffering, transcends egoism and points toward an ethical objectivity rooted in the shared ontology of all life.

Subsequent thinkers have elaborated similar views. Sober and Wilson (2000), for instance, argue that altruism and empathy may be evolutionarily rooted but possess a structural logic that lends them a kind of objectivity independent of individual will or cultural contingency. If ethics is to have any claim to universal validity, it must rest not on dictates imposed from without, but on the lived recognition of the interpenetration of suffering selves.

In the final analysis, philosophical pessimism neither naïvely affirms the traditional moral orders nor capitulates entirely to nihilism. Instead, it undertakes the arduous task of rethinking morality from within the tragic structure of existence itself. Recognizing that nature is indifferent and that human society is often organized around structures of exploitation and domination, pessimism locates the sole basis for ethical objectivity in the phenomenon of compassion.

Thus, while the dominant tendencies of nature and society suggest a moral void, Schopenhauer's thought suggests that out of this very void arises the possibility — fragile, rare, and contingent though it may be — of a genuine ethical relation. Compassion, in this view, becomes not merely a sentimental ideal but the metaphysical bridge between beings otherwise locked in the solipsism of will.

Far from offering consolation, this ethical vision remains firmly anchored in the pessimistic recognition of suffering as the primary datum of existence. Yet it simultaneously resists the descent into a total moral nihilism, maintaining that

wherever compassion truly manifests, there shines, however faintly, the possibility of an objective morality in an otherwise indifferent cosmos.

The *will*, as aforementioned, constitutes the metaphysical bedrock upon which Arthur Schopenhauer sets up his *philosophy of disenchantment* — an apt designation rendered by Edgar Saltus, the 19th-century novelist and incisive man of letters, in his early biographical portrait of the German (*Saltus*, 1885). Unlike the prevailing metaphysical currents of his time, wherein reality was frequently regarded as imbued with rational structure or divine intentionality, Schopenhauer presented a starkly original vision: the essence of the world is not reason, order, or spirit, but an insatiable, aimless striving — an ontologically primordial *will* devoid of telos and blind to suffering.

Whereas traditional monistic philosophies sought to subsume the multiplicity of phenomena under an underlying unity of being—whether in the rational dynamism of the Hegelian Absolute or the serene substance of Spinoza—Schopenhauer’s monism uncovers a principle fundamentally tragic. The only imperative is the perpetuation of existence, regardless of the means or the consequences, thereby engendering a world suffused with pain, conflict, and inevitable frustration. Life, in its ceaseless dynamism, is condemned to self-cannibalization: a relentless cycle of need, temporary satisfaction, and renewed desire, culminating invariably in death.

Thus, within Schopenhauer’s system, metaphysics becomes inseparable from a devastating ethical insight. The will, whose manifestation is life itself, is that which should not be. Existence, rather than a triumph or a gift, appears as a fundamental error: a manifestation of a principle whose blind striving inflicts immeasurable suffering upon all sentient beings. In his piercing ontological-moral judgment, Schopenhauer reverses the traditional valuations of being; that is, non-existence, rather than existence, is the preferable state.

Upon assimilating this ‘dark revelation’—the recognition that one’s very being is nothing more than the ephemeral theater of an impersonal, self-devouring will—the thinking individual is inevitably plunged into a state of existential crisis. The dissolution of consolatory myths and inherited certainties exposes a void beneath the veneer of ordinary life: a confrontation with meaninglessness that Schopenhauer does not shy away from but rather articulates with merciless clarity.

This confrontation, if endured without evasion, can provoke a descent into malignant nihilism: a profound collapse of the structures of hope, purpose, and even the will to continue living. Unlike passive resignation, malignant nihilism threatens the organism's survival directly, for it corrodes the very psychic supports that make endurance possible. Without the illusions woven by the 'veil of Maya'—the phenomenal world's apparatus of deception—the naked reality of suffering existence becomes intolerable.

Schopenhauer recognizes the perilousness of this realization. It is not sufficient merely to unmask existence; the individual must be offered a means of subsisting in the aftermath of revelation. Otherwise, despair becomes lethal.

Thus emerges one of Schopenhauer's most critical insights: the possibility of salvation through aesthetic contemplation. Art, in its highest forms, offers not an escape into delusion, but a temporary transcendence of the will's demands.



3. A BRIEF CASE FOR PHILOSOPHICAL PESSIMISM

It would not be a long shot to assume that everyone who has lived long enough would agree with the following statement: the world in which we live is far from being ideal (Plumacher, 1879). Life feeds on life (Rowe, 2019). Parasitic microorganisms devour bodies from the inside out, tectonic shifts demolish cities to the ground, international criminal organizations traffic humans, species go extinct, whereas war does not (Bauhn, 2024; Caddick, 2024, 2024; Cvetković et al., 2024; Kaleeva & Rusev, 2024; Lacerda et al., 2012; Martínez-Carrasco et al., 2007; Van Steenberghe, 2024). And on top of this is added the certainty of annihilation that awaits us all (Ariso, 2015).

3.1 Cultural Pessimism

Culture, that intricate web of collective illusions, acts as a buffer against the often-gruesome aspects of our being (Becker, 2010). For starters, a great deal of humans on the planet believe that they are not vicious predators with canine teeth and bowels which are the decaying graves of myriad animals that once lived, but rather members of a deity's favorite creation in a universe of perfect harmony (Ghorbani et al., 2024).

Ernest Becker, in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Denial of Death*, postulates that the most prominent function of culture is what he calls "death-denial" (Wallace, 1979). Humans — who are inclined to live in tribes even in metropolitan settings — concoct myths that defy death: a hereafter to which the soul travels postmortem, where every wrong is corrected, every evil appropriately punished. In the hands of a skilled writer, such myths can effortlessly transfigure into instruments of social control that are then utilized by the mighty & influential leaders of organized religion (Goudsblom, 2015). The legitimacy that organized religion provides to the masses is central to the establishment of 'absolute' morality, the bedrock of civilized life (McKay & Whitehouse, 2015).

What is peculiar is that whenever two radically different death-defying tales come across one another, conflicts may arise. For the legitimacy of the so-called 'original' myth is put at risk. In the last thirty years, there has emerged a subfield in psychology, Terror Management Theory (TMT), that studies the structures underlying this phenomenon (Greenberg & Arndt, 2012). Researchers around the world conducted experiments with the intention to measure the effect of mortality salience on individual or group behaviour (Harmon-Jones et al., 1996). Some of the findings are as follows:

- Self-esteem is key to reducing death anxiety, also known as *thanatophobia* (Zhang et al., 2019).
- Self-esteem springs from the belief that one's cultural matrix — which may consist of religious, national, racial, political, familial, or ideological anchors — is valid, and one occupies a desirable position in said matrix (Greenberg & Arndt, 2012).
- Whenever mortality salience is triggered, individuals tend to hold stronger onto their cultural matrix and become territorial/defensive. For instance, when reminded of their mortality through a song about death, German passengers on a boat sat far from their Turkish counterparts on a boat (Schimel et al., 1999). Similarly, judges who were exposed to mortality salience triggers in a control study issued higher fines to a low degree felony compared to the judges who weren't triggered (Arndt et al., 1997).
- Self-esteem can be reinforced by engaging in goals and projects thought to be valuable in one's cultural matrix (Greenberg & Arndt, 2012).
- Challenges to the legitimacy of one's cultural matrix directly attack one's self esteem. If the cultural matrix is shattered, high mortality salience with low self-esteem may bring about existential terror and a plethora of mental ailments (Pyszczynski & Kesebir, 2011).

3.2 A Negative Ontology of the Self

Further, even the legitimacy of 'the self' may be in jeopardy. According to contemporary philosophy of mind, personal identity is a functional illusion (Struhl, 2020). That is to say, in order for a complicated organism such as a human to go about in the natural world with little

to no trouble, it ought to have a mind that computes and knows itself as “someone.” In other words, a mind that suffers from an identity — the illusory feeling of being someone somewhere — is crucial for the maintenance of the illusions. Just as a computer’s hardware needs an operating system to realize its function, peoples need their cultural worldviews to which their identities are attached so as to be able to operate within a shared framework (Metzinger, 2004). In light of all these investigations, it would be hard not to cultivate a generally pessimistic outlook.

Philosophical pessimism, of which Schopenhauer is considered the forerunner, is the view that existence is such an unfavorable condition it would have been better had *nothing* existed instead of *something*. Within the hedonistic framework, the amount of suffering outweighs the scarcely disseminated contentment. And since the often-gruesome process of aging & dying is the final condition of life, coming into existence is deemed a ‘net loss.’ To put it in the financial lingo that permeates contemporary society, every life is driven to have an unacceptable debt-to-equity ratio; hence, Schopenhauer: “Life is a business that does not cover the costs.”

As of lately, there has been a renaissance of philosophical pessimism both in academic and mainstream circles. The emergence of climate activism brought with it a plethora of pessimistic narratives in which the continuity of the human race, along with non-human animals & organisms on the planet, is in danger. Additionally, antinatalism has emerged as a logical conclusion of philosophical pessimism: all things considered; it would have been “better never to have been.”

3.3 Natal Pessimism

David Benatar, South African philosopher and professor of bioethics, holds that it is always immoral to bring new people into existence (Benatar, 1997). He builds his antinatalism on the most basic principle of hedonism — that pain is bad, and pleasure is good. The argument is as follows:

1. If one never comes into existence, one cannot be subjected to any suffering. This, in and of itself, is good.
2. By the same token, without coming into existence, one cannot derive pleasure from anything. This, in and of itself, is not necessarily bad.

3. The bottom line is that coming into existence leads to non-consensual harm precisely because it brings about guaranteed suffering for which one has never signed up.

It goes without saying that the argument above may have little to no practical consequences, as most humans in a given generation will have neither the financial means nor the individual volition to ponder one of the most debilitating questions to have ever arisen in our consciousness and conclude in a minor key. The proponents of antinatalism, of course, know that conscious life is less likely to go extinct by means of rational decision-making on a species level than it is via an external event — a nuclear upheaval, a solar explosion, a fatal ice age, or one of any other ‘gifts’ of entropy.

The argument also helps explain the apparent lack of existential reflection on an aggregate level, since highly pessimistic populations/communities tend to be negatively-selected in the gene-pool, thereby dying out.

3.4 Eco-Pessimism

Evolutionarily speaking, therefore, over-inclination for existential/axiological reflection is a negative trait (Newall, 2021). Norwegian ecophilosopher Peter Wessel Zapffe (1899-1990) words this phenomenon thusly:

The tragedy of a species becoming unfit for life by over-evolving one ability is not confined to humankind. Thus it is thought, for instance, that certain deer in paleontological times succumbed as they acquired overly-heavy horns. The mutations must be considered blind, they work, are thrown forth, without any contact of interest with their environment. In depressive states, the mind may be seen in the image of such an antler, in all its fantastic splendor pinning its bearer to the ground (Zapffe & Tangenes, 2004).

Zapffe figured that humans have managed to avoid falling victim to the dark recesses of their consciousness mainly by dint of four defence mechanisms:

1. **Isolation:** The most vital of the psychological defences, isolation works by picking out the angst-inducing thoughts and locking them up in a remote corner of the mind. Such thoughts include life's meaning — or the lack thereof — creatureliness, the inevitability and omnipresence of death. The isolated themes are not to be brought about in polite culture, and whenever they are, it is quite frowned upon.
2. **Distraction:** Anything we do to keep the isolated thoughts at bay. The aggregately shared enthusiasm of the masses toward a sports team, the countdown for the new year, watching a rocket shoot into space, the next world cup, the next Super Bowl, the next Eurovision. The list is virtually endless.
3. **Anchoring:** The most vital of defences, anchoring works by dedicating oneself to 'something greater than oneself'. The family, the nation, the religion, the corporation, and the cause are among the commonest anchors used by almost everyone. When a given anchor is lost, a new one should take its place lest the individual is lost to the turbulent void of meaning.
4. **Sublimation:** The rarest of defences, an individual has to be of creative nature to employ this mechanism. In sublimation, the cruellest realities of life are neither denied nor isolated but wholly absorbed to be transfigured into something aesthetic. By virtue of this transfiguration, phenomena that would otherwise have to be defended against via the aforementioned mechanisms can be faced by the masses. She who sublimates — the artist, the playwright, the composer, the poet, and so forth — enjoys a defence available only to her kind: the artistically-inclined. By sublimating the terror, she starkly faces the everyday, the banal — a terror others deny on a daily basis — she defends against insanity in her own way.

3.5 Social Pessimism

One facet of pessimism springs from the crushing socioeconomic inequality that permeates all communities governed by any form of state (Goode & Godhe, 2017). Few exceptions aside, almost every society is segregated by class (Resnick & Wolff, 1989). Late history proves that what were known as serfdom and lordship have but shapeshifted.

In days past, the right to own and rule was bestowed by God upon a select few: the royalty, the clergy and the ‘holy army’ under its command. Now, the determiner is the religion of capital, the collective belief in the existence of currencies as a legitimate form of exchange, securities that can be liquidated, acquired, hedged or sold short, and the superiority of those who have access to them (Curran, 2015). It would not be a long shot to posit that, even if the current state of affairs were demolished and the die was cast anew, there will always exist people who lie and concoct stories to herd the masses in their favour (Collier, 2018).

In that respect, the Western tradition has produced numerous ‘social pessimists’ who believed that seeing the status quo as it really was ought to incite a revolutionary spark. Among the most notorious proponents of this view are Karl Marx, Philipp Mainlander, and Agnes Taubert, who criticized Schopenhauer’s pessimism for being utterly defeatist (Jensen, 2024). It is possible, they profess, to create a society in which injustices are abolished and everyone is given an opportunity to unleash their true potential. Whether such a dream can ever be achieved, the suffering of the masses will be for naught in the meantime.

4. WHY NEED A REFUGE?

In such a bleak world as the one depicted throughout the preceding chapters, creating other worlds and escaping into them may come in handy; hence, the abundance of fantasy content in nearly all media outlets. Of contemporary authors, the highest earners write fiction — J.K. Rowling, Jim Davis, Paulo Coelho, Stephen King — and people watch far more fictional shows than they do documentaries via streaming services or legacy technology such as TV broadcasts. It seems, therefore, that we tend to have an aversion toward reality *as it is*, thus we escape into a fictional narrative where reality is *as it should be*. Instead of a real world where one fights evil to no avail, a make-believe world where the good eventually perseveres in the face of evil is celebrated.

4.1 Refuge as a Concept

J.R.R. Tolkien, in his 1947 essay, *On Fairy Stories*, expresses a similar sentiment:

But the ‘consolation’ of fairy-tales has another aspect than the imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires. Far more important is the Consolation of the Happy Ending. Almost I would venture to assert that all complete fairy-stories must have it. At least I would say that Tragedy is the true form of Drama, its highest function; but the opposite is true of Fairystory” (Tolkien, 1947).

With little doubt, Tolkien’s assertion that people seek out a joyful finale in fiction is apt because real life rarely provides one. A significant number of lives resemble an unfinished melody: they all begin on the tonic, with hopes of showcasing modulations and cadences in the face of harmonic pulls but are often cut abruptly. Even in the developed parts of the world, only the 16% of a given population make it to the age of 65, after which the vicissitudes of life may make one regret having advanced so far (Nuland, 1995).

In fairy tales — or the genre modernly known as fantasy fiction — the reality is not portrayed as it *is*, but as it *ought* to be. The hallmark of tragedy, on the other hand, is that it sublimates suffering. In a tragic play — for reasons which do not make themselves readily apparent — even a terrible event such as murder can be made beautiful. The audience witnesses evils intrinsic to life itself yet is able derive aesthetic pleasure from it. In stark reality, such phenomena could never be perceived as beautiful. As Hannah Arendt eloquently puts in the epigram of the present section: “From beauty no road leads to reality.”

Even a miniscule exposition to music theory reveals that a melody which ends on the tritone could not be as satisfying as one that ends on its tonic. By the same token, a life that ends before both the cultural and personal goals are reached is not necessarily considered a good one. For this very reason, youth deaths are grieved more heavily than those of the elderly by the community, which stems from the belief that the former are somehow ‘wrong’, as if they do not belong to reality as it is *ought* to be. Kierkegaard begs to differ: “Once you are born in this world, you are old enough to die” (Kierkegaard, 2004).

4.2 Musical Refuge

Absolute music — one without lyrics or a stage setting — has no purpose other than itself. That is to say, notes and sounds in absolute music are ends in themselves, rather than being mere means to an external end. Whereas in other forms such as marches, songs, anthems, or arias, the music acts as an instrument to the end. In Schopenhauerian language, absolute music bypasses the world as representation and penetrates right into the world as *will*. The philosopher himself formulates this thought thusly:

...it never expresses appearance but only the inner essence, the in-itself of all appearance, the will itself. Therefore, it does not express this or that individual and particular joy, this or that sorrow or pain or horror or exaltation or cheerfulness or peace of mind, but rather joy, sorrow, pain, horror, exaltation, cheerfulness and peace of mind as such in themselves, abstractly, as it were, the essential in all these without anything superfluous, and thus also in the absence of any motives for them (WWR I, 309).

Albeit presented within a different context, the sentiment is that of a refugal essence. The highly-aware individual, having witnessed the world as it is — having realized the kinship of despair amid all things animate — seeks in hurry somewhere to which she can momentarily escape, metaphorically and literally speaking. Institutions such as the church, the mosque, the university, or the corporation, while being cultic in nature, provide to an extent the desired retreat from life's vicissitudes. And they will exist insofar as the communities at whose expense they flourish believe in their worthiness.

The modern world provides so many options for media consumption that mere broadband access can easily turn an individual into a either beacon of wisdom or a fiend. It is within a click's reach to reimburse one's worldview via frequenting online echo chambers, or by virtue of the same technology, plunge into myriad conflicting worldviews and conclude that one is as fictitious as the other.

Decades of interpretation confirm that the core of Schopenhauer's philosophy is the tragic realization that "to live is to suffer" (Janaway, 1999, p. 320). The Will, being blind and without ultimate purpose, manifests as an insatiable force, ensuring that all individual existence is marked by pain.

Early interpretations, such as those by Santayana (1900), recognized Schopenhauer's aesthetics as a direct response to this pessimism, arguing that aesthetic pleasure is derived precisely from its ability to afford a moment of "deliverance from the pressure of the Will" (p. 23). More contemporary analyses, like those of Gardiner (2006) and Magee (1997), stress that art's redemptive power is not found in transforming the world, but in transforming the subject's mode of apprehension. The Will demands continuous striving; the aesthetic mode demands a cessation of this striving. This crucial suspension is what constitutes the "refuge."

Schopenhauer himself directly states that the "aesthetic pleasure in the beautiful... consists in this: that in contemplating the beautiful, we are not attending to the Will" (Schopenhauer, 1969, Vol. I, 38). The literature is unified in understanding this shift as a transition from the individual subject, bound by the Principle of Sufficient Reason (which dictates the world of empirical causality and need), to the "pure, will-less subject of knowing" (Schopenhauer, 1969, Vol. I, 34; see also Neill, 1999, p. 110).

This transition, though momentary, is vital, as it offers the only non-ethical means of escaping the metaphysical *Schuld* (guilt/debt) of existing.

The necessity of a refuge in Schopenhauerian aesthetics is the inevitable result of his diagnosis of the human condition. Given that existence is defined by unceasing, irrational suffering generated by the Will, any suspension of this volition is not merely a source of pleasure but an absolute metaphysical necessity for the suffering individual. Music, as “the supreme art” that directly reveals the noumenal core of the world while simultaneously arresting the practical, agonizing demands of the individual will, constitutes this ultimate sanctuary. It provides a momentary, blissful glimpse of the truth of existence, granting an essential, if temporary, release from the *der Wille zum Leben* and thereby establishing its vital role as the deepest and most profound refuge available to humanity.

5. REFUGE AS A FUNCTION OF MUSIC: WHAT DO I MEAN BY IT?

Herein, the phrase ‘function of music’ is not merely used in the raw evolutionary sense, whereby music can be interpreted as a medium of signaling that implies safety and biological fitness, but also as a practical phenomenon in which an object is used as means to an end (Miller, 2000). Though musical mastery could not be useful in the wicked survival environments of primitivity in the way hunting, homebuilding, or fishing could be, it could nonetheless counter signal that the organism is well-off enough to be spending precious time and resources on something that has no intrinsic survival value (Cross & Morley, 2002). There are also adaptive functions. Falk (2004a) has argued that music may have evolved out of a mechanism that consolidates the bond between mother and infant. Whenever the mother had to engage in an activity that necessitated the use of both of her hands, singing tunes or lullabies would momentarily take the place of physical embrace so as to prevent the baby from crying in terror of perceived abandonment (Falk, 2004b). To repeat a point discussed in the previous chapters, another adaptive function of music may be to mediate death-anxiety. This idea stems from the philosophy of (Becker, 1997), who posits that much of human culture and psychology is predicated upon the denial of death. Individuals, within the context of their cultures, engage in ‘immortality projects’ — actions that promise either literal or symbolic immortality. Literal immortality is achieved through procreation. A craving for symbolic immortality can be satiated through creativity or a momentous deed: a piece of music, writing, painting, sculpture, architecture, what have you. Music culturally perceived as ‘high art’ more often than not serves this function (Becker, 2010).

5.1 Social Functions of Musical Escape

On the social front, music may serve various functions: identity formation, identity expression, self-actualization, and so forth. It is common knowledge that athletes use music as a tool of motivation during physically and mentally challenging workouts. Different genres of music are utilized in advertisements, TV series, or movies to

enhance the narrative. Patriots of a given country feel an empowering sense of unity while singing their national anthem; sports fans enjoy a not too dissimilar form of harmony through chanting. Perceived transcendence in religious settings is often achieved through music (dhikr, church service, Islamic verse recitations). Individuals otherwise complete strangers to one another congregate in nightclubs to dance en masse, thereby sharing a sense of intimacy.

In some contexts, music may also serve a hedonistic function through which pleasure is derived by both the listener and the performer (Schubert, 2009). Another hedonistic function, which is highly pertinent to the focal point of my argument, is the suppression of suffering through escapism. This can be achieved by putting the individual in what's known in the psychological literature as a 'flow state'. On that note, empirical studies suggest that a flow-state may be incited via musicking (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

On a similar note, Schopenhauer (1819) writes extensively on the 'will-less' state in which the subject loses oneself during aesthetic contemplation. Symphonies are composed in a manner to capture the undivided attention of the audience over a relatively long period of time. Documented clinical experience indicates literal mitigation of pain to be possible through musical activity (Bailey, 1986). A study on burn victims found that music therapy helps make bearable excruciatingly painful activities such as change of clothing and washing. This might be because a shift of attention from bodily discomfort to the music itself induces a 'flow state'. Patients demonstrate "lower pulse rates, lower pain and anxiety levels, and reduced tension levels" (Lima et al., 2017).

5.2 Psychoformational Implications

There has been a motivation, especially in the arguably-dated psychiatric literature, to assemble a link between poor mental health and preference for specific genres of music. Martin et al. (1993) hold that young people with familial discord prefer metal/rock primarily because the themes of such genres correlate with their mood. They also add females who opt for metal/rock present more mental pathology—suicidal ideation, depression, delinquency—compared to males. Another study on adolescents found a significant correlation between increased substance use and

preference for reggae, punk/hardcore, and techno/hard-house (Mulder et al., 2009). A psychiatric study by Doak (2003) suggests a correlation between clinical depression and preference for rap, heavy metal, techno; along with mood disorders and preference for hard rock, heavy metal and alternative music.

A more recent study by Merz et al. (2021) challenges some of the conclusions from previous studies, stating that genres generally perceived as intense/rebellious “do not share strong relationships with psychopathology and facets of aggression and behavioural dysregulation above and beyond other generally non-scrutinized musical genres.”

There also appear to be connections between mood, music preference, and its intensity. Listening to highly preferred music proves helpful in managing negative affect as well as increasing felt levels of happiness and peace. By the same token, having to endure disliked music manifests a negative state of mood (Hunter et al., 2010). Results from another study suggest that listening to music reduces state anxiety insofar as the subject prefers the music being played (Jiang et al., 2016).

An individual's musical taste is not only shaped but also limited by her cultural soundscape. That is to say, preferences can vary insofar as the cultural soundscapes in which they arise allow it. Someone who grew up in a culturally isolated community with little to no exposure to the ‘outside world’ will, and can only, prefer the music of her culture. By the same token, those who grow up surrounded by music streaming services will have relatively eclectic tastes. Besides music preference, tolerance for dissonance, too, proves to be heavily influenced by culture. A group of MIT scholars travelled to the Amazon to conduct experiments with the Tsimane’, an isolated tribe without any external influence. It was found that the members of the tribe had no preference for consonance over dissonance, whereas the same experiment on westerners revealed a strong affinity towards consonance (McDermott et al., 2016). Another study supporting the intimate link between music preference and cultural background took place in China, where a crushing majority of the subjects preferred Chinese popular music largely because C-Pop permeated their sonic atmosphere (Huang et al., 2020).

By dint of the numerous studies mentioned heretofore, I infer that music, regardless of the genre, may as well function as a tool of mental seclusion — a refuge from everyday reality — as much as it does as a tool of motivation, propaganda, signalling, and any other possible utilization of music.



6. CONCLUSION: A SELF-CRITIQUE

Within the framework of contemporary thought, it would seem rather futile to continue conceptualizing music in metaphysical terms, as Schopenhauer did in his era. In the time of Schopenhauer, the intellectual landscape was markedly different from that of today: the division between persuasive rhetoric and empirical science, while distinct, was not as pronounced as it would later become with the advent of Karl Popper's doctrine of falsifiability. Schopenhauer's intellectual environment was one where, though the discourse certainly engaged with the metaphysical, there was a prevailing assumption that sound argumentation, bolstered by reiterated consensus truths, could substantiate the validity of a given theory. This is evident in one of his later publications, *On the Will in Nature* (1836), where Schopenhauer proposes a metaphysical model of will and its manifestation in nature.

This pre-Popperian era of scientific thinking seems to have allowed for a certain flexibility in theoretical claims. The metaphysical testimony to music's ability to bypass appearances, to reveal to the listener a glimpse into the essence of being in its purest, most direct form, was a natural extension of the philosophical currents of the time. It made sense within the intellectual milieu to argue that music held a unique metaphysical significance, that it could lift one out of the banalities of everyday life into a higher realm of being. Thus, when Schopenhauer claims that music provides access to the metaphysical will he is able to do so without requiring that his theory be subjected to the rigor of falsifiability, as demanded by contemporary standards.

However, in today's intellectual climate, where the scientific paradigm has long embraced Popperian falsifiability as its central criterion, Schopenhauer's metaphysical claims about music are more difficult to sustain. The scientific method, as it is understood today, demands that theories be falsifiable; that is, they must be testable by empirical means in such a way that they can be disproven. From this perspective, music as a conduit for metaphysical insights, for transcendental experiences, faces a serious obstacle: it is not a theory that can be verified or falsified through empirical data.

As such, Schopenhauer's metaphysical understanding of music becomes a relic of a bygone age, a fascinating but ultimately speculative position that finds little resonance in modern scholarship.

Despite this shift in intellectual frameworks, it would be remiss to dismiss Schopenhauer's ideas outright, for his metaphysical conception of music is not entirely irrelevant to contemporary discussions of aesthetics. On the contrary, a reevaluation of his thought through the lens of philosophical pessimism, albeit with minor help from psychology, may provide valuable insights into the role that music plays in the lives of contemporary listeners. What I propose here, then, is not a wholesale repudiation of Schopenhauer's ideas, but rather a reframing of his metaphysical claims in a manner that is more compatible with the current ideological and philosophical climate.

The first step in this rethinking involves recognizing that Schopenhauer's conception of music, while metaphysical, is deeply connected to his understanding of human suffering. According to Schopenhauer, the will, as the fundamental force underlying all existence, is the root of human suffering. It is only when we transcend our individual wills and perceive the world from a more universal perspective that we can experience moments of relief from suffering. Music, for Schopenhauer, is a key to this transcendence. He argues that the aesthetic experience of music allows the listener to momentarily escape the grip of the will and access a higher realm of being. Music, in this sense, becomes a refuge from the pain and struggle of daily existence, offering a temporary reprieve from the incessant demands of the will.

In contemporary terms, we might not accept Schopenhauer's metaphysical framework of the will as an ontological force, but his insight into music as a temporary escape from the hardships of life still holds relevance. In fact, recent empirical research on the psychology of music supports the idea that music can provide a kind of emotional refuge. Numerous studies have shown that music has a profound impact on mood regulation, emotional well-being, and stress reduction. In a world that is often characterized by uncertainty, suffering, and existential angst, music can offer a brief respite, a momentary escape from the burdens of everyday life. Whether it is through listening to a favorite song during a commute or through the catharsis of a powerful symphony, music has the power to transport the listener to a different emotional and psychological space.

Further, it is crucial to recognize that this conception of music as a refuge is not an endorsement of metaphysical speculation but rather a psychological and social reality. The key difference between Schopenhauer's era and our own is that, while he relied on metaphysical reasoning to explain music's transcendent effects, today we are more likely to look to empirical data to understand how and why music affects us in the ways it does. The proposition that music serves as a refuge from the hardships of life can only be validated through empirical research, such as studies that examine how different genres of music affect emotional states, or how music therapy is used to alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression.

This brings us to an important point: in the context of social phenomena, the act of verification often requires a more nuanced and flexible approach. It is not enough to simply demonstrate that music can serve a particular function—such as providing solace or motivation—through empirical data. We must also recognize that the variables at play in social phenomena, particularly those involving aesthetic experiences, are not fixed but rather fluctuate based on the individual. The listener's emotional state, cultural background, personal tastes, and even the specific circumstances under which they encounter music all influence how they experience it. As such, while we can draw general conclusions about music's capacity to offer refuge, these conclusions must be understood as contingent and context-dependent, rather than universal and absolute.

Moreover, this reading opens up new intellectual avenues for scholars of music and aesthetics. While Schopenhauer's metaphysical theory of music may no longer hold sway in its original form, the questions he raises about the role of music in human experience remain relevant. By exploring the emotional, psychological, and social functions of music — particularly its ability to provide solace and transcendence in times of hardship — we may uncover new ways of understanding both the aesthetic and therapeutic dimensions of music.

In conclusion, my proposition that music functions as a refuge from the slings and arrows of everyday life, whether it be the unforgiving nature of rural living, or the relatively-tolerant social scapes of the city, offers a contemporary reimagining of Schopenhauer's metaphysical views on music.

By reframing his ideas within the context of modern empirical research and social theory, I have attempted to offer a more nuanced and flexible understanding of music's role in alleviating the dour aspects of human existence. This is not to say that Schopenhauer's metaphysical conception of music is entirely irrelevant, but rather that it must be understood in a new light: one that acknowledges the complexity of human experience and the limitations of metaphysical speculation. Ultimately, this rethinking of Schopenhauer's philosophy within the framework of philosophical pessimism may open up new possibilities for exploring the relationship between music, aesthetics, and the human predicament, offering a richer and more diverse understanding of the ways in which music functions as a temporary refuge from life's dour aspects, which, as per the German's writings, tragically abound.



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