

## **WILL TO HAPPINESS: THE ULTIMATE WILL?**

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### **Abstract**

The long-discussed dichotomy between “will” and “intellect” could also be explained through various other binaries – nature-culture, objective-subjective, immanent-non-immanent, *a priori-a posteriori* etc. The concept of will was also analyzed by Nietzsche who remained obsessed with “will to power” or *wille zur macht*, while Foucault dealt with the idea of “will to knowledge” in relatively recent decades. But, as one takes a cue from Schopenhauer, the battle between “happiness” and “ennui” which is also a bout between life and death is nothing but a quest for that ever-elusive happiness. Thus, be it the hedonistic principle of positive enjoyment of life’s pleasure in “will to live” or be it the renunciation or the “denial of the will to live”, all that matters is the quest for “will to happiness”. Thus, this paper is an attempt to introduce the concept of “will to happiness” as the culmination of all other forms of will.

**Keywords:** will, happiness, morality, monasticism, asceticism, *swadharma*

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The long-discussed dichotomy between “will” and “intellect” could also be explained through various other binaries – nature-culture, objective-subjective, immanent-non-immanent, *a priori-a posteriori* etc. However, it is seldom advisable to proceed further without first making sense of the concept that presents itself for scrutiny. Hence, one must analyze the idea of will in the largest possible detail before one undertakes further investigation. Schopenhauer distinguished between “will to live” and “will to reproduce” (Durant 1926). The concept received analysis of various kinds at the hands of others such as Foucault and Nietzsche. While Nietzsche remained obsessed with “will to power” or *wille zur macht*, Foucault dealt with the idea of “will to knowledge” in relatively recent decades. But, as one takes a cue from Schopenhauer, the battle between “happiness” and “ennui” which is also a bout between life and death is nothing but a quest for that ever-elusive happiness. The tussle is carefully explained by Schopenhauer in the following words:

“We are fortunate enough if there still remains something to wish for and to strive after, that the game may be kept up of constant transition from desire to satisfaction, and from satisfaction to a new desire, the rapid course of which is called happiness, and the slow course sorrow, and does not sink into that stagnation that shows itself in fearful ennui that paralyses life, vain yearning without a definite object, deadening languor.” (Schopenhauer 1909, 214-215).

Freud would call it the “pleasure principle”. The question to be asked here is: What does pleasure actually mean? Can it be objectively understood? Instincts, drives, innate feelings, natural propensity – all these are nothing but another way of identifying agents that produce sensations within us without letting their actuality known to us. The hide-and-seek game between this inner world and its outer manifestation in the form of the world of consciousness could not be ignored for long and for over two centuries, we have satisfied ourselves with labelling those inner sensations as abstract ideas designated as “things-in-themselves” owing to the modern genius of Immanuel Kant (1781). What exactly Kant meant when he introduced the term? Kant was seemingly grappling with the question of the starting point of all knowledge. He was out to devise an epistemology that would make sense both in the realm of science, especially Newtonian science (Kant paid his tribute to Newton by mentioning his name in the subtitle to his 1755 book, *The Theory of the Heavens*. The subtitle read as: “*An Essay on the Constitution and*

*the Mechanical Origin of the Universe, Treated According to Newtonian Principles*”) as well as in the domain of religion. The cause-effect kind of explanation needed a solid base in order to sound sound; and Kant most readily accomplished the task to good effect. With his schema of “things as they appear” and “things in themselves”, he at least assigned a term to things that were not known and could not be known. Since then, we have found much contentment in thinking of it as the unconscious and unknowable. Thus, we have constructed our own truth through the method of believing, something that could not evade the attention of William James who wrote about the “Will to Believe” (James 1896). James confessed:

“We want to have a truth; we want to believe that our experiments and studies and discussions must put us in a continually better and better position towards it; and on this line we agree to fight out our thinking lives.” (James 1896).

It was a prophetic thought that Nietzsche shared in the form of a letter with his sister, Elizabeth in 1865 where he categorically tried to distinguish between “truth” and “belief”. In the letter dated June 11, 1865, Nietzsche wrote:

“If we had believed since youth that all salvation came not from Jesus but from another -- say, from Mohammed -- is it not certain that we would have enjoyed the same blessings? To be sure, faith alone gives blessing, not the objective which stands behind the faith. I write this to you, dear Lisbeth, only in order to counter the most usual proofs of believing people, who invoke the evidence of their inner experiences and deduce from it the infallibility of their faith. Every true faith is indeed infallible; it performs what the believing person hopes to find in it, but it does not offer the least support for the establishing of an objective truth.”

He came up with his final verdict in the following manner:

“Here the ways of men divide. If you want to achieve peace of mind and happiness, then have faith; if you want to be a disciple of truth, then search.”

While Nietzsche’s was a lifelong journey of search and investigation that kept him busy till he was left insane, our focus here shall be upon the first part of Nietzsche’s statement. Why did he consider the act of believing or having “faith” as a precondition to happiness? Is it a sort of

intoxicating pill that keeps one happy even if one is not? Is it like Marx's "opium of the masses" that generates "false consciousness"? Whatever be its character, what should more concern us at this point is not the character of the term, "belief", rather we must go deep into the necessity that renders 'belief' as the last resort for the human mind unable to fathom the endlessly puzzling universe.

The early beginning of a world based on belief could be said to have its origin in the tales and fables often clubbed up into one category called mythology. Men like Vladimir Propp and Levi-Strauss have gone on to show that worldwide myths follow a particular pattern and exhibit a particular structure. Although constituent elements of a myth may vary, the basic structure of myths depicts astonishing similarity. A search for the cause behind such structuration in the world of myths reveals that every myth has a social role to fulfill. It has both a didactic function as well as an entertainment value. Thus, monism as a philosophy has a role to play when one finds patterned thinking among human beings separated by geography and culture living with similar concerns, joys and sorrows, feelings of elation and woes. Propp (1968) opines that every myth or folktale for that matter could be broken into 31 parts known as functions with a protagonist surviving all obstacles and odds to finally rescue the female protagonist vanquishing the "bad man" that sets the moral of the story for everyone to grasp quite obviously.

Why have myths been assigned the all-important task of teaching morality? A probable answer apparently comes from Schopenhauer when he writes:

"That which *sensu proprio* was and remained inaccessible to the great masses of all times and countries with their low mentality, their intellectual stupidity, and their general brutality, had to be brought home to them *sensu allegorico* for practical purposes, in order to be their guiding star." (Schopenhauer 1969, vol. 2, 629).

Thus, the meaning of morality must be considered at once before proceeding any further. Morality may have various definitions and could convey multiple connotations to its readers and believers; it is largely divided between the "collective" and the "individual". A common sense notion of the term brings it closer to the realm of religion and dogma wherein the collective will

sets the norms and mores for the people to follow and the resulting set of rules go on to be called “morality”. On the other hand, there stems from Indian philosophy something like the concept of “*swadharma*”, that is a descriptive morality that sets the rules for personal conduct and behaviour. Can a parallel be drawn between Indian concept of “*swadharma*” and the concept of *epimeleia heautou* in ancient Greece (Foucault 1986)? But that is not our immediate concern; instead, what is to be pointed out right away is that the obsession with the individual in Indian philosophy is a significant aspect of it that forms the main point of distinction when compared with western philosophy. While western philosophy has largely focussed on the collective and the morality of the masses, the principles of Indian philosophy enshrined in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* has a lot to say about “*swadharma*”. In fact the Bhagvad Gita (3:35) teaches us:

**“*Swadharme nidhanam shreyah paradharmo bhayaavahah*”**

Swami Sivananda translates it into English as:

“Better is death in one's own duty; the duty of another is fraught with fear.”

Thus, one should not quench one's thirst for understanding the universe through the lens of Indian philosophy here. Rather, one must analyze further and delve deep into the philosophy enclosed within the four “*mahāvākyas*” enumerated as under:

1. *Prajñānam Brahma*, that is, Consciousness is Brāhman;
2. *Aham Brahmā asmi*, that is, I am Brāhman;
3. *Tat Tvam Asi*, that is, That thou art;
4. *Ayam Ātma Brahma*, that is, this self is Brāhman.

What appeals to the more attentive faculties of the investigating mind is the fact that all these four sayings concern themselves with the individual. In fact it's about the relationship of the individual with his teacher or Guru who acts as a guide in his disciple's journey towards identifying and attaining the highest form of knowledge. First *mahāvākya* is the *Tatbodha vākya* that makes him aware of the fact that consciousness itself is the highest form of knowledge. In the second called *Anubhava mahāvākya*, the disciple experiences that it his own self, the “I” that is the highest form of knowledge. The third or the *Upadesha mahāvākya* convinces him of the fact that he is no different from the ultimate truth he is out to seek. The fourth and last *mahāvākya* is called the *Sakshatkara mahāvākya* that declares to the disciple that he himself is the embodiment of the ultimate truth. These *mahāvākyas* carry the essence of *Vedantic*

philosophy that tries to teach the philosophical-psychological method to train oneself in order to lead a life filled with happiness and gaiety.

In contrast to the above, Nietzsche (1887) classified morality into two types: one that is assertive and capable of command, the other being one of passive obedience.<sup>1</sup> Evidently, the this sort of classification emanates from Nietzsche's vantage point of keeping the collective at the forefront. Nietzsche was clear in his mind that there is a gradation of will in society and thus he remarked: "The 'un-free will' is mythology; in real life it is only a question of *strong* and *weak* wills." (Nietzsche 2002, 21).

It is on the basis of the strength of the will that people assume their own morality – Hero or slave morality. While much has taken place owing to interpretation and misinterpretation of this aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy, one must ponder upon the question: What exactly is the difference between wills based on the parameter of strength? How do we acknowledge and measure the strength of will? Although the strength of one's will could only be gauged with the help of the action one performs, one can't stop puzzling one's mind with trying to discover the source of such a will that translates into a particular kind of morality.

Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) in the process of devising his schema of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* did give it a thought and attributed the two forms of collective formations to two kinds of wills – *Wesenwille* and *Kurwille*. While the former is more about instinctual drives, the latter depicts the rational side of human beings. In short, it is again a sort of rational-irrational, nature-culture divide. Based on this difference in the nature of will, Tönnies (1887) found that there are two forms of morality as well. He explained it thus:

"There is, further, the dual concept of morality as a purely ideal or mental system of norms for community life. In the first case, it is mainly an expression and organ of religious beliefs and forces, by necessity intertwined with the conditions and realities of family spirit and the folkways and mores. In the second case, it is entirely a product and instrument of public opinion,

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<sup>1</sup> Will Durant (1926) labelled the former type as *Herren-moral* that is Hero-morality and the latter type as *Herden-moral* or slave-morality. The other translation of Nietzsche's "*On the Genealogy of Morals*" (1887) by Ian Johnston (2009) calls the two as "noble morality" and "slave morality".

which encompasses all relations arising out of contractual sociableness, contacts, and political intentions.” (Tönnies 2002, 223).

This classification by Tönnies is again suggestive of two kinds of morality based on a continuum from individual to collective, the former being “less collective” and tending towards the individual while the latter turns out to be “more collective” in nature.

Whatever be the nature of morality, it acts as a set of commandments that plays the dual role of enabling as well as constraining. While pessimists such as Schopenhauer (arguably though)<sup>2</sup> and Nietzsche would look at it as playing the latter role to a larger extent, morality is actually an enabler for many a life without purpose. Never has the world existed without interplay between “materialism” and “spiritualism”. Even in ancient times, when people were largely thought to be treading the path of religion, what do the temples, cathedrals and palaces of grandeur depict? Neither religion nor material happiness alone was the driving force behind human lives. They believed in what pacified them to an extent so that they could lead a life without much botheration. What they believed could have been religion but what they practised was morality. David Hume with his empirical approach to knowledge came close to this conception of morality. In his book, *An Enquiry Concerning principles of Morals*, Hume (1751) argued that there is no empirical basis for people to believe in miracles, yet the ubiquity of such belief is a reality. While it's religion that reinforced superstitious ideas such as miracle, morality is something different and independent from religion. Kant takes a more sociological position with regard to the existence of morality in human society with his concept of “practical reason” (Kant 1787). Practical Reason, according to Kant, is a more calculated and rational approach based on rules of the social game learnt over a period of time. All this in the name of achieving the elusive state of mind called happiness.

One of the most unambiguous thoughts on the topic comes to our aid from Schopenhauer's minute understanding of the vital significance of happiness in life. He claimed:

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<sup>2</sup> Bryan Magee published the first edition of his book, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* in 1983 where he doesn't consider Schopenhauer a pessimist philosopher, although parts of his works definitely reflect pessimism. In contrast to Magee's view Frederick Copleston wrote a full book on Schopenhauer entitled, *Arthur Schopenhauer: Philosopher of Pessimism* (1946).

“The most perfect development of *practical reason* in the true and genuine sense of the word, the highest point to which man can attain by the mere use of his faculty of reason, and in which his difference from the animal shows itself most clearly, is the ideal represented in the *Stoic sage*. For the Stoic ethics is originally and essentially not a doctrine of virtue, but merely a guide to the rational life, whose end and aim is happiness through peace of mind.” (Schopenhauer 1969, vol. 2, 87).

Schopenhauer (1818) found Stoic ethics to be different from other systems of ethics such as Platonic, Christianity and Vedic in the these systems lay fundamental emphasis on virtues first, and then consider the question of happiness which is taken to be a consequence of a virtuous life. Nonetheless, he makes it clear that the focus on virtues is itself taught in order to further realize the ideal of happiness, even by Stoicism. He admits:

“Yet the Stoic ethics teaches that happiness is to be found with certainty only in inward calm and in peace of mind (*ἀταραξία*), and this again can be reached only through virtue.” (Schopenhauer 1969, vol. 2, 87).

What, then, is happiness itself? Is it synonymous with what the ancients called “ataraxia”, that is a calm and unperturbed state of consciousness? Is it a real, tangible entity or is it an abstraction or an ‘ideal type’ which can never be experienced and proved on the basis of our perception of the world “out there”. Does it owe its existence to the world of ideas or is it a blissful state of mind that emanates from the brain? Those adhering to ‘physicalism’ would like to attribute every psychological state of mind with particular states of brain. In that sense, then, happiness refers to particular brain states with its elaborate architecture and process involving neurons, synapses and neurotransmitters. Interestingly, some modern research proves that in order to feel pleasure the *dopaminergic reward system* in the human body must be activated that securely causes adequate amount of *dopamine* to be released in the brain. There are a whole lot of neurotransmitters and hormones that catalyze the process of feeling happy, but what’s important is the set of social conditions and externality that provides one with the cause to be happy. Of all animal species, it is the humans who own the distinction of being able to release stress hormones due to psychological reasons (Sapolsky 2004). Thus, our happiness lies in the sources of our thoughts,

and not just in the brain states. The brain states and neurotransmitters that make it possible get triggered only when there are particular situations which infuse that feeling of happiness in us. Hence, the role of values in society can hardly be discounted while trying to investigate the concept of happiness. Now then, let us ask: Happiness for whom? Can happiness ever be a collective act? Can we be happy in groups, not just “be” happy, rather feel “collective happiness”? As far as experience teaches, we just can’t. For happiness seems to be dependent on individual existence. One needs to be happy all by oneself. It is something that can’t be lent, borrowed or outsourced. Thus, is it a selfish venture? The “virtue of selfishness” (Rand 1964)<sup>3</sup> was also alluded to by Nietzsche in order to prove the worth of the *Übermensch* and to come up with the justification of his leading a selfish life. Thus, while happiness could be felt *for* others, it could actually be felt *by* one’s own self alone.

Does that ascertain the location of happiness? Let us now move on to the moorings or social locations of happiness. Schopenhauer’s will is the actor and the world is the canvas acted upon. But, is there anything called absolute will? It could probably be assumed that will in Schopenhauer is the “unconscious” of Freud, unfathomed and concealed. Had this will been absolute, there would exist but one and only one will in the entire world of men and women, a commonality among all members of the society. But, why are there labels such as “will to live”, “will to power” and “will to knowledge”. Are these varieties of will not reflective of the limitations that ‘lived experience’ exerts? The anchorage of the very concept of will stands to be decided by the dimensions in which it has the freedom to manoeuvre. Although free will among humans has not been proven to be a truism so far, the degrees of freedom that the human mind enjoys in its attempt to contemplate regarding various aspects of the universe could be indicative of the number of different flavours it could acquire. At times and societies not much complex, will to survive or preservation might be the strongest. But, owing to the process of “sublimation” and man’s ability to embark on the path of becoming the *ubermensch*, other “wills” do crop up. Nietzsche supported the idea that suffering is an integral part of human life and instead of making us weak; it rather infuses us with greater strength once it’s overcome.

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<sup>3</sup>Ayn Rand (1964) inspired millions with her discussion on selfishness or “egoism” as a virtue. Her book, *Virtue of Selfishness* is an all-time bestseller.

Can Nietzsche's will to power be a replacement for the will to live? If Nietzsche was asked, he would say yes as he argued:

“Assuming, finally, that we succeeded in explaining our entire life of drives as the organization and outgrowth of one basic form of will (namely, of the will to power, which is *my* claim); assuming we could trace all organic functions back to this will to power and find that it even solved the problem of procreation and nutrition (which is a single problem); then we will have earned the right to clearly designate *all* efficacious force as: *will to power*. The world seen from inside, the world determined and described with respect to its “intelligible character” – would be just this “will to power” and nothing else.” (Nietzsche 2002, 36).

It was his firm belief that in the quest for one to attain an exalted, elevated self, one might face the peril of an early death. That is Nietzsche's will to power that carries the precept for one to constantly work towards overcoming one's weaknesses in order to chase and attain a higher form of self. A close parallel could be drawn with the teachings of the four *mahāvākyas* that aim to equip one with the intellectual-psychological armoury needed for sublime behaviour in one's transaction with the world. Let's not forget the blissful state of realization that one enjoys when one completely understands the meaning of the fourth *mahāvākya* – “*Ayam Ātma Brahma*” translated as “I am the Brahman”. Thus, there could be times when even self-preservation becomes a lower ideal to be chased. Such is the impact of conditions in which one lives.

In trying to establish the primacy that knowledge assumes in today's society, Michel Foucault (1969) tries to dig deep into the “archaeology of knowledge”. What he finds is that power comes from knowledge and thus, the prime will worthy of expression and pursuit in our society is the will to knowledge. How about “will to affluence” or the “will to individualize” then? In more recent times, owing to rapid individualization, human concerns have shifted more and more from political to personal, that is to say, from public to private. Hence, the best form of self-expression that one finds is in the array of one's possessions. Zygmunt Bauman (2000) is of the view that shopping is an addiction and through it one attains happiness in fact rediscovers one's own self. While the will to self preservation was superimposed with will to power and knowledge, can it

be further seasoned with a new flavour of will to possession? Whatever be the case, one thing that underlines all this is the fact that it's the will to happiness that is never lost sight of.

Even in this aspect of happiness as a consequence of possession, one could notice two modes of deriving that happiness – one simply at the thought and probably sight of something one wishes to possess, the other being the condition of physically possessing the thing one desires. There could also be a partial feeling of possession in the course of a conversation about the thing. Hence, we find the elaborate network of mass media engaged in disseminating vital information to prospective consumers through teleshopping. While the strike rate of all the advertisement may not be very high, a comparison with the viewership of such TV channels and websites can easily reveal the kind of happiness people derive from simply seeing and thinking about particular items of their choice. That is why Bauman (2000) says that we shop more outside shops than within them.

If all that so far sounds like the “will” being an ambitious adolescent always willing to risk its utmost to secure the highest possible pleasure for itself, it must not be forgotten that ever since the world acquired the notion of material accumulation and affluence, there were thoughts about the worthlessness of worldly desires and possessions. There was asceticism and monastic life that tried to keep itself away from ordinary pleasures of life. In Christian thought, the justification came from the belief among monks that they suffered to attain oneness with the suffering that the Christ himself went through. Even someone like Martin Luther was not left untouched by somewhat similar concerns in the early years of his life when he led the life of a monk. In more eastern traditions, life of simplicity was a life worthy of reverence and emulation. Not without reason was an average human life divided into four “*ashramas*” in the Vedic tradition of India, the last two, that is half the duration one lived, to be spent aloof, meditating upon questions of life and universe. Very closely mirrored are thoughts found in Buddhism and Jainism where again one finds glorification of a life of hardship. Can we afford to work out a two-tier classification between materialism and spiritualism based on these examples? Moreover, can we still be hedonizing our pursuits in life in seeking all pleasure in material happiness? What inspired these monks and ascetics and *sanyasis* to have renounced the sweetness and warmth of worldly pleasures to take the life of an endless wandering mind and eternally tired limbs? It was

perhaps happiness of a different kind that Schopenhauer thought emanated from “denial of the will-to-live” (Schopenhauer 1818).

Schopenhauer thought that it is a reflection of attainment of a higher form of knowledge that renders one to understand the futility of the worldly affairs, the prime concern of the will to live, when one begins to contemplate about the sweeter fruits of non-existence and hence, denies his own will. From ancient Christianity to Hinduism and Buddhism, there were monastic orders institutionalized in order for such enlightened beings to be able to realize the end they vied for. Monasticism is what is more commonly known, according to Schopenhauer as nothing but a “methodical denial of the will” (Schopenhauer 1969, vol. 2, 625). Although the domain of monasticism and asceticism generally belongs to the field of theology, probably that of mysticism, ethical concerns have caused every religion and sect to preach certain values that provide mental peace and happiness to its followers. Schopenhauer argues, “as long as our will is the same, our world cannot be other than it is.” (Schopenhauer 1969, vol. 2, 605). Thus, in order to deny one’s will to live, the will itself needs to undergo a kind of transformation through knowledge of a different kind. Schopenhauer’s reference to the conversion of Abbé de Rancé who re-established one of the strictest monastic orders in France known as the Trappists could be one example of the process that accompanies the denial of the will to live. Mahatma Gandhi in twentieth century India could be another example who began his career as a lawyer in South Africa and ended up leading a life of celibacy and other strictures, always being clad in the least possible linen. Similar was the case with Swami Vivekananda who embraced an early death because he thought his soul had grown too large to be contained by his body.

Although the reason why such strictures have been extolled and celebrated as the ultimate means to gain happiness could be traced back to the teachings enshrined in religious scriptures of all religions, the empirical proof of its effectiveness is nevertheless good enough to suggest it is one way in which men and women seek the ever elusive happiness in this world. Hence, be it will to live or denial of the will to live, both subscribe to the idea of will to happiness.

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