

Schopenhauer and Hume on will and causation

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Schopenhauer and Hume on Will and Causation

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Abstract

One aspect of Schopenhauer's doctrine that the world is will, which can be assessed independently of his more ambitious metaphysical ideas, is the claim that our own agency provides us with a full understanding of causation which then permeates and structures our experience of the world in general. I argue that this claim can be defended against Hume's well-known objections, as they are based on a volitional theory of voluntary action, which Schopenhauer rightly rejected. Schopenhauer quite plausibly located an immediate experience of causation between at least some kinds of motives and our consequent actions. However, he was wrong in suggesting that this experience might be the source of our understanding of causation; since intentional action already presupposes that understanding, and cannot provide it. It is more plausible to argue that an understanding of causation is derived from our bodily encounters with material objects.

1.

'*The World is Will*' is the slogan with which Arthur Schopenhauer sums up his metaphysics. And metaphysics it is in the richest sense: offering an answer to the quasi-religious quest for the meaning of life. The world-will is meant to take God's place in an account of the world: an explanation of why things are as they are, and following from that, a recommendation of an appropriate attitude towards life and the world. However, I am not going into these big issues now. I shall deal merely with some of the things Schopenhauer says *on the way* to his grand metaphysical destination.

The first two major steps in Schopenhauer's reasoning are these:

(1) I am not merely an intellect: I am essentially an embodied creature with a will, i.e., striving to survive, to flourish and to produce offspring.

(2) My first-hand knowledge of willing allows me to reach a deeper understanding of the world as also essentially driven by will.

The first point may seem trivial, but it was not in the historical context in which Schopenhauer made it. 'I am a will' (meaning: an *embodied* will) is a direct reply to Descartes, who proclaimed: 'I am only a mind: an immaterial thinking thing'; a claim that was widely accepted among post-Cartesian philosophers. The British Empiricists, and Kant too, tended to regard a human being as essentially just a mind. But Schopenhauer's merit here is not just that he gave a timely reminder of what should have been obvious anyway. He did not merely say that we have a body and non-rational desires, he argued that rationality is not at the core of human nature. He assembled an impressive array of observations to show that our nature and character are to a far lesser degree governed by our intellect than was commonly assumed.

Schopenhauer's second step (from 'I am will' to 'the world is will') is more problematic. It seems quite appropriate as far as the animal kingdom is concerned. In fact, wild life is the area where Schopenhauer's vision of perennial strife and struggle appears most obviously correct. But to maintain that even vegetable life and the forces of inanimate nature manifest a will looks like a blatant instance of (what Ruskin called) the pathetic fallacy: the projection of our emotions into our environment. Schopenhauer's apparent determination to commit that fallacy is neatly expressed in this passage:

Spinoza says that if a stone projected through the air had consciousness, it would imagine it was flying of its own will. I add merely that the stone would be right. [*WWR1* §24, p.126]¹

And Schopenhauer goes on, unblushingly, to apply psychological terms like ‘persistence’, ‘determination’, ‘keen desire’ or ‘longing’ [*Sehnsucht*] to inanimate things such as magnets, pieces of iron or electric poles (*WWRI* §23, pp.117f.). Of course in poetry the pathetic fallacy is not a fallacy at all; it is an effective means of expressing a subject’s feelings towards the world. But it *would* appear to be a fallacy in philosophy — unless philosophy too is regarded as a kind of poetry, distinguished from other poetry perhaps by a more austere form and a more abstract subject matter. Occasionally, Schopenhauer expressed such a view. And it is noteworthy that among his most famous admirers were novelists, such as Tolstoy, Hardy, Proust and Mann, who admired him as a poet-philosopher; as someone who offered a comprehensive picture of the world that allows one to redescribe a great many phenomena in an illuminating, satisfying, or at any rate stimulating way.

However, what makes Schopenhauer particularly interesting is that beside being an eminent example of a poet-philosopher, there is also a good deal of the analytical philosopher in him. And his doctrine that the world is will is a case in point.

On closer inspection, it is not as fancifully animistic as it might at first appear. For Schopenhauer makes it quite clear that the will he sees active in inanimate nature is not *conscious* will:

if I say that the force which attracts a stone to the earth is of its nature ... will, then no one will attach to this proposition the absurd meaning that the stone moves itself according to a known motive, because it is thus that the will appears in man. [*WWRI* §19, p.105]

The will that pervades the whole world is, in itself, just a blind force. Only in animals this force is conjoined with consciousness, or (in human beings) even with self-consciousness. Why then does Schopenhauer not simply say: ‘The world is force, or energy’, thus avoiding the pathetic fallacy? — Because (he explains in *WWRI* §22, pp.111-12) he wants to make a point about the origin of some of our understanding of the world. The point is that from an experience of our voluntary actions we learn to understand how things happen in the world, and not the other way round. But what exactly is it that our actions can teach us about events in the world? — They provide us with a concept, or full understanding, of causation:

We recognise ... firstly the essential identity of causality under the various forms it is forced to assume on the different degrees of the scale ... [And] where we ourselves are the things set in motion, where therefore the kernel of the process is well and intimately known to us, ... we now apply the new knowledge we have acquired from within as a key to the knowledge of things outside us, and then we recognise the ... identity ... of our will with the hitherto mysterious x that remains over after all causal explanation as an insoluble residue. [WN, pp. 319-20]²

So here we have a perfectly sober-minded reading of Schopenhauer’s doctrine that the world is will:

(W) Our own agency provides us with a full understanding of causation which then permeates and structures our experience of the world in general.

But now an objection must be raised: Does this not contradict Schopenhauer's often repeated doctrine that the concept of causality is *a priori*: a form of our understanding, not derived from experience?

We have to distinguish two concepts of causation. They are both present in Hume's famous discussion of causation. There is first the rich concept of causation Hume is looking for, but cannot find, and secondly, the meagre concept of causation, which (Hume concludes) is all experience provides us with. The meagre concept of causation is that of constant conjunction. According to this concept, 'A causes B' means simply: 'A-type events are always followed by contiguous B-type events'. Hume claims that that is all experience can ever give us an idea of. But what he had hoped for was a fuller understanding of causation: an understanding of the *necessary* connexion between A and B; why, given A, it was absolutely necessary for B to follow. As it is, experience may have taught us that A-events have always been followed by B-events, but that seems to be just a brute fact. It might have been otherwise. We do not see anything in A that makes it absolutely necessary for it to lead to B, only repeated observation tells us that it does. Or so Hume claims.³

These two concepts of causation we re-encounter in Schopenhauer. When he says that causation is an *a priori* form of the understanding, he seems to be operating with a meagre, or Humean concept of causation, as constant conjunction. He seems to mean two things: first, that we have an innate disposition to pick up regularities, and secondly, that we can be certain *a priori* that all our experience will be subject to such regularities. (It is doubtful whether for this second claim Schopenhauer has any convincing argument.) So far, *a priori*, we have only a meagre or Humean concept of causation. Following the *a priori* nature of our understanding, we experience the

world as regular. Events of type *A* are always followed by events of type *B*; and every event must be preceded by another event in a regular way.

But now we move on to a fuller understanding of this ubiquitous causality. And it is our own agency that is supposed to give us such a fuller understanding. As Schopenhauer says with reference to his classification of representations in *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*:

[T]he first class of representations [viz., material objects] finds its explanation, its solution, only in the fourth class enumerated in that essay [viz., the will] ... accordingly, we must learn to understand the inner nature of the law of causality valid in the first class, and of what happens according to this law, from the law of motivation governing the fourth class.

[*WWR I* §18; p.102]

2.

This idea that our own agency teaches us about causation is not new. It was put forward by Locke, adopted by Berkeley,⁴ and critically discussed and dismissed by Hume. Locke wrote:

observing in ourselves that we do and can think, and that we can at pleasure move several parts of our bodies ... we ... get the idea of power.⁵

Hume denied that the experience of one's voluntary actions yields any real understanding of causal power.

The will being here consider'd as a cause, has no more a discoverable connexion with its effects, than any material cause has with its proper effect. So far from perceiving the connexion betwixt an act of volition, and a motion of the body; 'tis allow'd that no effect is more inexplicable from the powers and essence of thought and matter. Nor is the empire of the will over our mind more intelligible.⁶

As far as an experience of power is concerned, voluntary action is in no way more revealing than the observation of any other apparent case of causation in the world. All we can observe is a succession of two events: an act of will and, say, some bodily movement, while a connexion that would make one an effect, that is (for Hume) an inevitable consequence of the other,⁷ eludes us. Therefore, Hume insisted, the only possible source of the concept of causation is the observation of regularity: constant conjunction: that one type of event is always seen to follow another.

Hume follows Descartes and Locke in giving a *volitional* account of voluntary action. A voluntary bodily action is construed as a bodily movement caused by a volition, that is, a mental act of willing. And Hume argues that voluntary action cannot give us an understanding of causation because there is never an absolutely necessary link between a volition and its upshot. In a way, Schopenhauer accepts this latter point, but he draws a very different conclusion from it, namely that there is something wrong with the volitional theory.

Any mental event that might be thought of as a volition (something like a wish, a self-command or a decision) could occur *without* being followed by the intended action. And not only because I might suddenly be paralysed, but more

revealingly, because whatever I wish or decide to do may not really be what I want, as shown by my *psychological* inability to carry out my resolve. Schopenhauer mentions cases where we become ourselves doubtful about our ability to act according to our resolution:

Thus, if we have formed some great and bold resolution – which, however, as such is only a promise given by the will to the intellect – there often remains within us a slight, unconfessed doubt whether we are quite in earnest about it, whether, in carrying it out, we shall not waver or flinch, but shall have firmness and determination enough to carry it through. [WWR2 ch.19(3), pp. 210-11]

Obviously, as a volition one would not normally envisage such a *long-term* resolution, but rather one about the immediate future, the next moment, in which case there would not be any time for such doubts. Still, the main point holds regardless of the temporal distance between decision and planned action: namely, that a decision may not be carried out because we find (perhaps to our own surprise) that we have not got the pluck or desire to do it after all. Schopenhauer takes that to show that in the end our actions do not really depend on any decisions of the mind. Such a decision of the mind is not yet a genuine manifestation of the will; a genuine manifestation of the will is only the action itself. A decision, or resolution, in the mind can only be a prediction of what, under the circumstances, we will do: which of all our motives and desires will in the end prevail. Of course, such predictions (at least with regard to our behaviour in the immediate future) will almost always prove correct. They are highly reliable, but (as Schopenhauer stresses) not infallible (WWR2 ch.20, p.248). They are

reliable for two reasons. For one thing, because we know ourselves (our character: our will) quite well. We have a pretty accurate idea of how certain motives affect us. For example, I may know from experience that learning that I am in a café renowned for the quality of its strawberry ice cream will cause me to order some. And for another thing, as Schopenhauer himself remarks, decisions, even if they are only mental occurrences, are themselves manifestations of our will (or character) (*WWR2*, ch. 20, p.251). It is the same will (or character) that manifests itself in my decisions and (more definitely) in my actions. That makes it *a priori* probable that the two will usually be in agreement. If I am the kind of person that *resolves* to have a double portion of ice cream, it is quite likely that I am also the kind of person that *does* have a double portion of ice cream, and *vice versa*. – However, I may occasionally miscalculate the effect certain motives will have on me; and there may occasionally be a discrepancy between my decisions and my actions. It is 7.30 a.m.; I have to go to work soon; I seriously decide to get out of bed – and do not. Or again: I am up on the 10 feet diving board and command myself to take the plunge. And do I jump? No, I do not. ‘The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak’ (Matthew 26, 41). And it is not just in omissions that one can see the flesh’s weakness (or stubbornness) overrule the spirit’s intentions. I am asked a somewhat impertinent question; at the very moment of opening my mouth in reply a sincere resolve to remain polite crosses my mind; and yet, the next moment I find myself making a rude retort. On a volitional account, in such cases, where I mentally ‘will’ to do *A* but then find myself doing *B*, neither my doing *B* (making a rude remark), nor my omission of *A* (not getting up; not jumping off the diving board) could count as a voluntary action. Schopenhauer saw that that is wrong. We can and do hold people (notably ourselves) responsible for what they do or fail to do even if no mental resolve preceded the

action; indeed even if the agent honestly decided on a contrary (and perhaps more virtuous) course of action. Hence, voluntariness cannot lie in any mental act distinct from the action. There is no willing distinct from the actual doing.

So much for Schopenhauer's rejection of the volitional theory. In the 20th century further arguments have been added to Schopenhauer's observations, notably by Gilbert Ryle, which could be used to clinch Schopenhauer's case.⁸ But I shall not pursue them now.

3.

With the volitional theory out of the way, what is Schopenhauer's own account of voluntary action?

Every true act of [the subject's] will is also at once and inevitably a movement of his body; he cannot actually will the act without at the same time being aware that it appears as a movement of the body. The act of will and the action of the body do not stand in the relation of cause and effect, but are one and the same thing, though given in two entirely different ways, once quite immediately and once in perception for the understanding. [*WWRI* §18a; pp.100-1]

Schopenhauer held on to the expression 'act of will'. That is understandable, for in his philosophy the will has indeed a very active role ('will' becomes a shorthand for our non-intellectual nature); but it is somewhat misleading, for this expression is a hangover from the discarded volitional account. The redundancy of acts of will, as distinct mental acts, is precisely Schopenhauer's highly plausible negative point:

When I raise my arm, I do just that and nothing more. I need not perform any other act beside raising my arm. Hence, if one is determined to keep using the term ‘act of will’, then raising my arm is what it must refer to, for there is no other act involved. The act of will and the bodily action are identical. And saying that is just a somewhat artificial way of saying that I raised my arm voluntarily. And what is more: I am immediately aware of my agency. As Schopenhauer puts it: a bodily action is perceived ‘in self-consciousness as an immediate, actual act of will’ (*WWR2*, ch. 20, 248). I *know* that it was I who raised my arm. *How* do I know that? — Schopenhauer gives no answer, and rightly so, for there is no answer. This kind of case was to become a prominent theme in 20th century philosophy of mind. Such first-person authority is typically not based on any evidence, neither introspective nor observational. There is no interesting answer to the question ‘How do you know that you are in pain?’, nor to the question ‘How do you know that you raised your arm voluntarily?’.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, discusses this issue:

“How do you know that you have raised your arm?” — “I feel it.” So what you recognize is the feeling? And are you certain that you recognize it right?⁹

‘I feel it’ is the answer one would be inclined to give. If pressed, Schopenhauer might well have given the same reply. But of course, as Wittgenstein’s questions make us realize, our certainty about our agency is not really based on the recognition of sensations. For it is not based on any evidence. Wittgenstein continues:

You are certain that you have raised your arm; isn't this the criterion, the measure, of the recognition?

... So one might say: voluntary movement is marked by the absence of surprise. And now I do not mean you to ask "But *why* isn't one surprised here?"¹⁰

Of course, there is no awareness, let alone discussion, of the peculiarities of first-person authority in Schopenhauer. The simple fact is that he could not think of any further explanation of voluntariness apart from saying (in his terminology) that the agent is somehow immediately aware of it, independently of any possible mental acts preceding the action. However, by drawing on Wittgenstein's considerations one can show that Schopenhauer's reticence on this point can be justified.

4.

Agency is supposed to give us an idea of causation. But where do we find causation in human action if it is not caused by volitions? According to Schopenhauer, voluntary action is always caused by motives (i.e. reasons, perceptions, or thoughts that induce us to act).¹¹ And from the intimate experience of motivation in us we derive a proper understanding of causation: '*Motivation* (Schopenhauer says) *is causation seen from within*' (FR §43).

The idea is that the experience of acting on motives gives us an understanding of causation that goes beyond what Hume had to offer and what Schopenhauer thought we could establish *a priori* to be generally applicable, namely a concept of causation as constant conjunction. That is to say, what we are looking for inside is a link between cause and effect that is not merely inductive; not just a hypothesis of

constant conjunction to be confirmed by repeated observation. Does motivation provide us with such an experience?

Consider an example of an action whose cause can be cited as a 'motive': I hear the doorbell ring and get up to open the door. Now, is it only on inductive grounds that I could claim a causal link between that motivating perception and my action? I think not. My claim (that it was the doorbell that made me get up) is neither based on observed regularities, nor does it await confirmation or refutation through future experiments.

5.

But let us now return to Hume, and consider his more specific objections to the idea that our own agency might provide an understanding of causation, to see if, after some necessary modifications, those objections are not equally applicable to Schopenhauer's modified version of the view. (Remember: Hume's original discussion was directed at a volitional theory of voluntary action, which Schopenhauer replaced by a different account.)

First, Hume would probably object (to Schopenhauer) that we do not really understand why a certain 'motive' produces a certain action and not another one. — But, in many cases, that seems quite wrong: we do understand that kind of link. If the sound of the doorbell made me wiggle my toes, we would be puzzled. That indeed would look like an entirely contingent link that we might accept only as a hypothesis. But it is perfectly understandable why the sound of a doorbell should make a rational creature with certain beliefs and interests get up and open the door. It is a *reasonable* reaction.

Secondly, Hume mentions the case of a ‘man suddenly struck with a palsy in the leg or arm’.¹² In this case a reason, say, hearing the doorbell, will not produce the normal response: the man finds himself unable to get up and open the door. Hume might continue thus:

Here he is as much conscious of [the] power [of his reason to stir him into action], as a man in perfect health is conscious of [such a power]. But consciousness never deceives. Consequently, neither in the one case nor in the other, are we ever conscious of any power.¹³

Hume assumes that perceiving an object’s causal powers must enable you to predict exactly what it will cause. But that is false. You may know exactly what power a certain fork-lift has: it can lift weights up to three tons. So will it lift that big box over there? Obviously, you cannot tell if you do not know the weight of that box. Likewise, if you do not know whether you are paralysed or not, you cannot tell whether a certain reason will make you get up. But that does not prove your ignorance about the motive’s causal powers.

We all know that the same cause can have different effects under different circumstances. So all Hume could reasonably expect to be discoverable in a cause is a power to produce a certain effect *under certain conditions*. Can such a *conditional* causal power be found in a motivating perception? — I think, it can. There is a conceptual interdependence among a creature’s beliefs, desires, capacities and actions. If you know what an animal wants, what it is able to do, and what it does, you can infer (or even perceive) what it believes. If you know what an animal believes, is able to do and does, you can infer (or even perceive) what it wants.

Similarly, if you know sufficiently well what an animal believes, wants and is able to do, you can very often predict what it will do. In other words, at least of some beliefs you can say that conjoined with certain other beliefs, desires and capacities they will lead inevitably to a certain kind of behaviour. For example, the belief that a dangerous enemy is approaching will result in flight, provided that the creature is desirous to remain unharmed, believes itself unable to fight off the predator, yet is able and in a position to outrun it.

A belief is not an occurrence, but more like a disposition, so it might perhaps be said that it is not very well suited to play a causal role. That is why in my (doorbell) example I did not choose a belief, but a sense-perception as a 'motive'. A sense-perception is a datable event, and as the cause of a certain belief it can also be cited as a cause of that belief's possible behavioural manifestations. But insofar as it is identified partly in terms of the belief it engenders, it is analytic to say that it is a cause of any possible manifestation of that belief. Now, I hear that the doorbell is ringing. On Schopenhauer's behalf and against Hume it can be claimed that in this sense-perception I can detect the causal power to make me open the door *under certain conditions*, roughly: that I am familiar with the function of doorbells; that I want to speak to people who call at my house; that I believe opening the door is the only appropriate way of doing so; that I know I am able to open the door; and that I have no reason or inclination not to open the door. In general, it is analytic that:

If a person *A* has an all-in desire to ϕ if *p*, and knows that he is able to ϕ and in no way prevented from ϕ -ing, then perceiving that *p* will make *A* ϕ .

If A does not ϕ on seeing that p , we can conclude that not all of the conditions were fulfilled.

Thirdly, Hume might object that we cannot experience a motivating perception's bringing about an action, because there is no *direct* causal connexion between them. All the reason really causes is some movement in our nerves, passed on to other nerves and then to some muscles which eventually cause some bodily movement. — The reply is that even if Hume's original argument had some plausibility in the context of a volitional account, there is no such indirectness in the causation envisaged by Schopenhauer. For the motivating perception is not said to cause a bodily movement, a mere *event*, but a voluntary *action*, say, a person's opening the door. And the physiological occurrences Hume mentions are not causes of the action, intervening between motivating perception and action, they are involved *in* the action, features of it on another level of description.—

7.

To recapitulate so far: Schopenhauer seems to be right (contra Hume) that our intentional actions afford us an insight into causation that goes beyond a mere registration of regularities. But could a concept of causation derived from our voluntary actions be applied to anything but voluntary actions? Could, in other words, an experience of our own voluntary actions really help us to understand the actions of non-conscious or even inanimate agents? Berkeley, for one, denied that, and bravely accepted the consequence that we could not make sense of any action or causation in the world that was not due to a conscious agent,¹⁴ which (for Berkeley) means that if something is not caused by one of us, it must be caused by God. But of course, that was not Schopenhauer's view, who had not the slightest inclination to

deny inanimate agency. So we must consider whether the transfer from the intentional to the inanimate is licit. Again, we can draw on Hume for the contrary view. In a footnote in his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Hume says that people are prone to transfer descriptions of voluntary causation to the inanimate realm. And he makes it clear that he regards that as a bad mistake:

No animal can put external bodies in motion without the sentiment of a *nisus* or endeavour; and every animal has a sentiment or feeling from the stroke or blow of an external object, that is in motion. These sensations ... we are apt to transfer to inanimate objects, and to suppose, that they have some such feelings, whenever they transfer or receive motion.¹⁵

The absurdity of this assumption — that, for example, a stone feels the exertion of breaking a window — is probably the kind of absurdity many people are inclined to see in Schopenhauer's doctrine of the world as will: a preposterous animism. But Schopenhauer makes it quite clear that that is not his view. He is not concerned with the *feelings* accompanying our actions, but with the immediacy with which we realize that a certain force is activated by certain circumstances. The claim is that what we witness here is essentially what happens everywhere; though not always witnessed by anybody, nor accompanied by any feelings.

Here we encounter once more Schopenhauer's first claim, 'I am a will', his radical break with Cartesian mentalism. As noted above, the word 'will' in Schopenhauer in its primary psychological application to human beings and animals does not stand for a faculty of the conscious mind. Although we are mostly aware of our desires, that is merely because in us the will is conjoined with an intellect. On its

own the will has no consciousness. It is a blindly striving force. What is Schopenhauer's evidence for this claim, which anticipates some of Freud's teachings? It is the same kind of evidence you find in Freud: the fairly common phenomena of behaviour that can be appropriately described by saying that it manifests emotions or desires the agent was not previously aware of; or again, the fact that we can occasionally be surprised by our own behaviour.

We often do not know what we desire or fear. For years we can have a desire without admitting it to ourselves or even letting it come to clear consciousness, because the intellect is not to know anything about it, since the good opinion we have of ourselves would inevitably suffer thereby. But if the wish is fulfilled, we get to know from our joy, not without a feeling of shame, that this is what we desired; for example the death of a near relation whose heir we are. ... we are often entirely mistaken as to the real motive from which we do or omit to do something, till finally some accident discloses the secret to us ... For example, as we imagine we omit to do something for purely moral reasons; yet we learn subsequently that we were deterred merely by fear, since we do it as soon as all danger is removed. [WWR2 ch.19, pp.209-10]

To this Schopenhauer adds examples of instinctive behaviour: animals are frequently driven by their instincts to do certain things without any understanding why they do them. (One of Schopenhauer's favourite examples was that 'The larva of the stag-beetle gnaws the whole in the wood, where it will undergo its metamorphosis, twice as large if it is to become a male beetle as if it is to become a female, in order in the

former case to have room for the horns, though as yet it has no idea of these' (*WWRI* §23, p.114).)

But even if we are prepared to accept that the driving force that manifests itself in our actions is not all that different from other forces in nature, there remains a worry about the way it is normally set in motion, namely by motives. Schopenhauer acknowledges the differences between causation by motive, stimulus and purely physical cause (*WWRI* §23, pp.115-17; cf. *WWRI* §19, p.105, quoted above). Does such a difference in the kind of cause not set voluntary action too far apart from events in the inanimate world for the latter to be comprehensible as essentially like the former? I do not think so. Even if voluntary action provides us only with a concept of a rather special kind of causation, causation it is, and so it will do to overcome Hume's professed inability to experience a causal link in any particular instance. A more general concept of causation may then be constructed by abstraction.¹⁶

8.

However, there is another and more serious objection to Schopenhauer's account, namely, that as a *source* of the concept of causation motivation comes too late.

To act is to bring something about. Certainly to act on other objects is to have a causal impact on them. Hence to act on other objects *intentionally* is to act with the intention of having a causal impact on them. But (to take my example again) for the sound of the doorbell to make me *intentionally* get up and open the door, I must already *have* an understanding of what I am thus causing to happen. (Otherwise the perception would not motivate me to act in such a way.) Motivation *presupposes* an understanding of causation, and thus cannot be its source.

Nor could one argue that all it presupposes is a Humean concept of causation as constant conjunction. For *that* concept is not really applicable to agent causation —: If *I* cause my arm to go up (rather than a volition doing it), then there are not two kinds of events involved that could be found to be constantly conjoined. Furthermore, even where we have a causal impact on other objects by our moving our body, it is often quite obvious that we are actually unable to construe that as an instance of constant conjunction. We would have to say, for example: ‘Whenever I move my hands in a certain way, my shoelaces get tied’. But the only identifying description we can actually give of that movement is: that it is the movement of tying our shoelaces.

9.

So where *do* we get our (non-Humean) concept of causation? There is a very straightforward (empiricist) answer: *We can feel causation in our encounters with material objects.* We can feel our impact on other bodies and their impact on us. When pushing a heavy obstacle out of our way we feel, that is, perceive by touch, how the object puts up some resistance that is gradually overcome.

Now this direct sensory experience of causation is exactly what Hume thought was impossible to have. But that is because Hume was hampered by an unduly narrow conception of sense-experience. Following Descartes and Locke, Hume was inclined to construe all sense experiences as bodily sensations, that is, as experiences of one’s own subjective states, located in one’s own body, which only *indirectly* could tell us anything about the outside world. Consider again the passage from the *Enquiry* quoted above:

No animal can put external bodies in motion without the sentiment of a *nisus* or endeavour; and every animal has a sentiment or feeling from the stroke or blow of an external object, that is in motion. These sensations ... we are apt to transfer to inanimate objects, and to suppose, that they have some such feelings, whenever they transfer or receive motion.¹⁷

Now, of course inanimate things cannot possibly have such feelings. But inanimate things do have causal powers. So, Hume rightly concludes, causation cannot be explained in terms of such feelings,— that is, in terms of what we feel *in our body*.

But the word ‘feeling’ can also be used in a different sense. We can also feel things outside our body. Schopenhauer gives a pertinent example:

we feel directly and immediately how a burden, which hampers our body by its gravitation towards the earth, incessantly presses and squeezes this body in pursuit of its one tendency. [*WWRI*, §23, p.118]

Unfortunately, Schopenhauer failed to see how close he was here to a better explanation of our understanding of causation. For here is something we feel which we *can* take as a paradigm of causation and attribute even to inanimate things, because although felt, it is not a feeling. It is a physical process: our bodily impact on an object, or *vice versa*.

10.

To conclude, Schopenhauer was right to insist on agency as a source of a non-Humean understanding of causation. Moreover, he was right in his account of

voluntary action to get rid of volitions. Arguably, he was also right to locate an immediate experience of causation where he did: between at least some kinds of motivating perceptions and our consequent actions. But he was wrong in suggesting that this experience might be the source of our understanding of causation; since intentional action already presupposes that understanding, and cannot provide it. Although in many respects Schopenhauer pioneered breaks with the Cartesian tradition, here, like Hume, he was still too much in the grip of it: too much inclined to limit the range of our experiences to what we are aware of *within ourselves*.

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⁴ George Berkeley, *De Motu / Of Motion*, in: *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, eds: A.A. Luce & T.E. Jessop, Vol. 4 (London: Thomas Nelson, 1951) 1-52; §25.

⁵ John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed.: P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: OUP, 1975); 2.7.8.

⁶ David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed.: L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1978), p.632.

⁷ Hume, *Enquiry*, p.63.

⁸ See Gilbert Ryle: *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949), 62-9; cf. Anthony Kenny: *The Metaphysics of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 32.

⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr.: G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958); §625.

¹⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §§625 & 628.

¹¹ Whereas in English, the word ‘motive’ is used mainly for emotions or attitudes inspiring an action (pity, hatred, revenge, etc.), Schopenhauer applies the term ‘*Motiv*’ to all perceptions or thoughts that motivate our actions (*FN*, ch. III). Thus, in the case of intentional action ‘reason’ might be a better translation, but then, strictly speaking, what causes me to act (e.g., to seek shelter) is not the reason (e.g., the fact that it is raining), but the occurrence it identifies (e.g., the rain). As Schopenhauer says that ‘motives’ are *Vorstellungen*, I shall sometimes translate the term as ‘motivating perception’.

¹² Hume, *Enquiry*, p.66.

¹³ Adapted from Hume, *Enquiry*, p.66.

¹⁴ George Berkeley, *Philosophical Commentaries*, in: *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, eds: A.A. Luce & T.E. Jessop, Vol. 1 (London: Thomas Nelson, 1948) 1-139; §§499; 699.

¹⁵ Hume, *Enquiry*, p.78 n.

¹⁶ Besides, there is reason to believe that the non-inductive awareness of causation is not peculiar to causation by motives. A sudden noise makes me start, contact with a hot surface causes a reflex to withdraw. These are examples of the stimulus-response type.

¹⁷ Hume, *Enquiry*, p.78 n.