

Schopenhauer e o pensamento universal

Unity and universality in Schopenhauer's spherical cosmology

Unidade e universalidade na cosmologia esférica de Schopenhauer

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this speech is to present the philosophical image of the sphere, used by Schopenhauer, as a privileged hermeneutic resource for the understanding of his metaphysics and cosmology. With this image, it is possible to articulate a set of logically contradictory conceptual oppositions, such as uno/multiple, universal/particular, whole/part, eternal/temporal, rest/movement, presented by the philosopher in the terms “will” and “representation”. Concretely, it is about understanding the difficult interaction between the micro and macrocosm of nature, as well as the relationship between the interiority of self-consciousness and the exterior and empirical one, in the individual. With recourse to the sphere, it becomes possible to understand, finally, the philosophical thesis that articulates, in terms of irreducible perspectives of the same world, the “metaphysical identity of the will” with the “plurality of its appearances”.

Keywords: Sphere; Cosmology; Unity; Universality; Schopenhauer

RESUMO

O propósito desta fala é o de apresentar a imagem filosófica da esfera, utilizada por Schopenhauer, como recurso hermenêutico privilegiado para a compreensão de sua metafísica e de sua cosmologia. Com esta imagem, é possível articular uma série de oposições conceituais logicamente contraditórias, tais como uno/múltiplo, universal/particular, todo/parte, eterno/temporal, repouso/movimento, apresentadas pelo filósofo nos termos “vontade” e “representação”. Concretamente, trata-se de compreender a difícil interação entre o micro e o macrocosmo da natureza, bem como a relação entre a interioridade da consciência de si e a consciência empírica exterior, no indivíduo. Com recurso à esfera, torna-se possível compreender, finalmente, a tese filosófica que articula, em termos de perspectivas irreduzíveis de um mesmo mundo, a “identidade metafísica da vontade” com a “pluralidade de suas aparências”.

Palavras-chave: Esfera; Cosmologia; Unidade; Universalidade; Schopenhauer

The purpose of this paper is to present the image of the sphere as a philosophical hermeneutical resource for understanding the relationship between unity, universality, and cosmology in Schopenhauer's thought.

What I am calling "hermeneutic philosophical resource" could be understood in the key of what Nietzsche called "thought by images" (*Bilderdenken*) in the notes of the period of *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1872-3). The image would be at the service of thought as an intuitive metaphor (*Anschauungsmetaphor*), that is, in a pre-conceptual and more original realm of linguistic understanding, averse to the determinative and logical sense of language.

We know that one of Schopenhauer's outstanding characteristics is the use of images, metaphors, analogies, and poetic resources, in general, to clarify his world-intuition. His whole endeavor aims to rescue, from a critical and empirical apparatus, the origin intuitions of language, as a way of finding the essential ballast of appearance beyond its possibility of abstract formulation. Reality, as we experience it, does not appear to us as it is in itself, says Schopenhauer, but only as a making effect in the world, that is, as a product of our knowledge subjected to the forms of the principle of reason.

All forms of knowledge, from the crudest touch to the most abstract logical thinking, are formulated from this principle in its four configurations (*Gestaltung*): reason of becoming, knowing, being, and acting. The principle of the reason of knowing allows for the abstract universalization of concepts, which, by the way, make feasible the philosophy of *The World as Will and Representation*. However, to apprehend reality in itself, independently of the principle of reason, it is necessary to walk in the opposite direction of abstraction, since, in the order of the factors, abstraction is the least real of the knowledges.

The obvious question to be made is: how does Schopenhauer intend to make clear to us his world philosophical intuition by turning into a problem the very condition that makes the philosophical discourse possible, the principle of reason? One might say

that Schopenhauer's entire philosophical effort aims at leading us to the possibility of walking on a tenuous tightrope of language across the abyss of its meaning.

Although they point to opposite directions, both registers of language in Schopenhauer's philosophy are not incompatible, but complement each other. By dealing with the concept in § 9 of his main work, Schopenhauer must set up the abstract genesis of language to then, in § 11, verify its limit. Only thus can the philosopher consciously affirm that the will, before corresponding to a logical instance of language, expresses the last limit mark of positive knowledge, which leads us to a negative understanding of language, whose paradigm is the feeling (*Gefühl*). The will therefore names, before a determined concept, the most intimate experience of the body and, therefore, a pure blind impulse aimless, unconscious and groundless (*blinder Drang, ohne Ziel, bewußtlos, Grundlos*).

Of all the resources Schopenhauer placed at the disposal of his philosophy, one of them draws attention for its eloquence: the philosophical image of the sphere. The origins of this image go back at least to the philosophers of Greek antiquity: Parmenides, Empedocles, Plato, and Plotinus. In Parmenides' poem (fragment 8, lines 34-49), the "well-rounded sphere" is a metaphor for the being "whole and changeless" of "completed" limit and "equally matched" center, who "must not be any larger or any smaller here or there", the being is "all inviolably" and "For equal to itself from every direction, it lies uniformly within limits". The sphere is transformed into the God Sphere (*Sphairos*) in Empedocles' *On Nature* (fragments 27-29), a God "rounded" and "exultant in surrounding solitude," "on all sides like unto itself". Then Plato, in the *Timaeus* (33a-34b, 63ab), reworks Empedocles' cosmology in terms of an engendering of the four elements "in a continuous proportion," creating the world body "at unity with itself," a "perfect and one, leaving no remnants out" and "free from old age and disease." The world body is described, then, in all-containing form, the sphere, "round as from a lathe and every way equidistant from the center."

But it is Plotinus' formulation that catches our attention, of whose similarity with Schopenhauer's description he himself can attest.¹ The image is mentioned in *Enneads* several times, among which the following passage stands out:

There is another kind of being, opposed to this one [things divided and liable to dispersion], which in no way admits division, is without parts and cannot be divided into parts: it does not admit any extension, even in our thought about it; it has no need of place, and is not in any other being either part-wise or whole-wise; it rides, so to speak, on all beings at once, not so as to make them its basis, but because the other things cannot exist without it and do not want to; it is real being always in the same state, common to all that come after it like the centre in the circle, to which all the lines which extend to the circumference are attached but none the less let it remain in itself, and have from it their origin and their being, and participate in the point, and their principle is what is without parts; in proceeding from it they attached themselves to that central point. (PLOTINO, 1966, IV, 1 [2] 1, 17-29).

The philosophical image of the sphere resonates in Schopenhauer's philosophy in different nuances, ranging from methodological observations to considerations about cosmology and through observations about consciousness, temporality, and death.

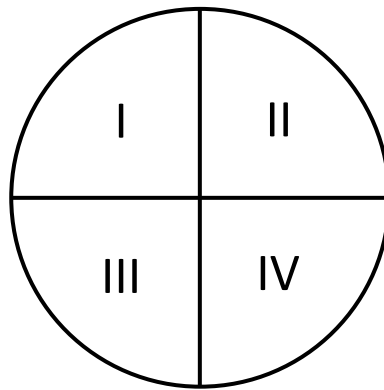
Right in the preface of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer claims an organic understanding of his thought, expressed in the form of a four-part book, corresponding to the theory of knowledge (Book I), philosophy or metaphysics of nature (Book II), aesthetics or metaphysics of the beauty (Book III), and ethics or metaphysics of ethics (Book IV). Despite the linear presentation required by the contingent form of a book, which is sequentially flipped, Schopenhauer asks the reader to understand his book as an organic system of a single thought, which however extensive it may be, holds the most perfect unity. It is like the Thebes of the hundred

¹ In a note from 1830 (Cogitata I, 51), Schopenhauer says: "these depths of philosophy, these outermost limits of our thinking and research can only be expressed in the image and similitude, which here is the sphere (...) This consideration has similarity with that of Plotinus, which was not known to me when I wrote the present.". In the original: Allerdings können diese Tiefen der Philosophie, diese äußersten Grenzen unsers Denkens und Forschens nur noch im Bild und Gleichniß ausgedrückt werden, welches hier die Kugel ist (...) Diese Betrachtung hat Aehnlichkeit mit der des Plotin die mir nicht bekannt war, als ich Gegenwärtiges schrieb). Following this note, he reproduces a part of the same passage from the *Enneads* that we quote below.

gates, in which "one can enter from all sides and through each gate arrive at the direct path to the centre" (E, 434).

The circular presentation of the Schopenhauerian system allows us to articulate the different domains or perspectives of philosophy as unfoldings of one and the same thesis: the will as a thing-in-itself, which functions as a support on the circle's central axis:

Figure 1



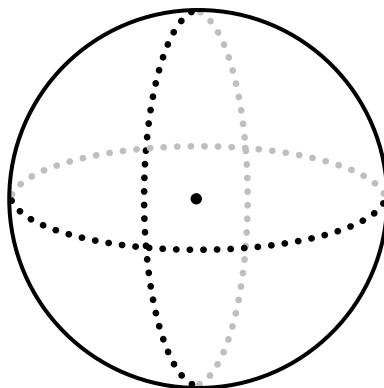
Source: SILVA, L. C. (2021)

This distinctive roundness gains greater theoretical expression in the cosmological difference between nature's "husk" and "kernel" that marks the difference between physics and metaphysics inquiries. The naturalist "nature's meddlers" stops at the surface of appearance (*Erscheinung*) and, exploring all galaxies or the tiniest microscopic particles, "never attains cubical contents however far its extension is carried." Through the interiority of self-consciousness (*Selbstbewußtseyn*), metaphysics finds in the internal movements of the will that is manifested in the individual body the way to the recognition of a common ground of experience.

The spherical image makes us understand, above all, the ancient conceptual paradox of the relationship between unity and multiplicity, whose solution did not escape the eyes of the first Greek philosophers, as we have seen. The expression of this problem in Schopenhauer's thought occurs in the relationship between the unity

(*Einheit*) of will and the apparent multiplicity (*Vielheit*) of its manifestations. With the sphere, not only unity (central point) and multiplicity (dotted surface) can be represented in a single image, but also, and mainly, it becomes possible to express the relation between both (fig. 3).

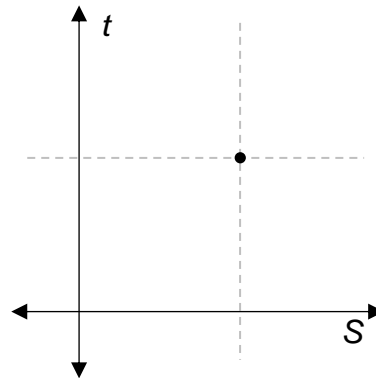
Figure 2



Source: SILVA, L. C. (2021)

The unity of the will is foreign to all plurality and, for this reason, it should not be understood as a part of it, that is, as numerical unit. The will “is One (*er ist Eines*) as that which lies outside time and space, outside the *principium individuationis*, that is to say, outside the possibility of plurality (*Vielheit*)” (W I, 134). From a transcendental point of view, this means to say that the difference between individuals is determined by the principle of reason of becoming, in applying the pure forms of time and space. In a Cartesian plane, for example, individuals are the different points intersected by the vertical (time) and horizontal (space) axes (fig. 4).

Figure 3



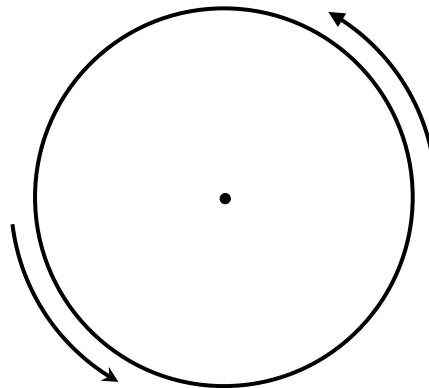
Source: SILVA, L. C. (2021)

Temporality, consequently, cannot be an attribute of reality independent of our intellect or brain, but a product of it, so that the apparent linearity of history and the illusion of its progress owe its reality to the subjective form of time. Concerning human history, Schopenhauer affirms that although its different individuals, with their deeds and idiosyncrasies, appear to unfold a diverse catalog of personalities, in essence the script and the masks are the same.

Just as a circle of one inch in diameter and one of forty million miles in diameter have absolutely the same geometrical properties, so the events and the history of a village and of a kingdom are essentially the same. (W I, 292)

Also death, the temporal end of the finite and individual body existence, is illusory and belongs only to the surface, because our inner nature is indestructible: “death is no obstacle to the kernel of life” (W II, 551). The individual’s temporal existence can be expressed in the revolutionary movement of the sphere that revolves around the immobile center. We can experience this by imagining ourselves on top of a disk in this movement: the closer we get to the edge, the faster we rotate, and if we move toward the center of the disk, the agitation is drastically reduced. The center point symbolizes absolute and hypothetical rest (fig. 5).

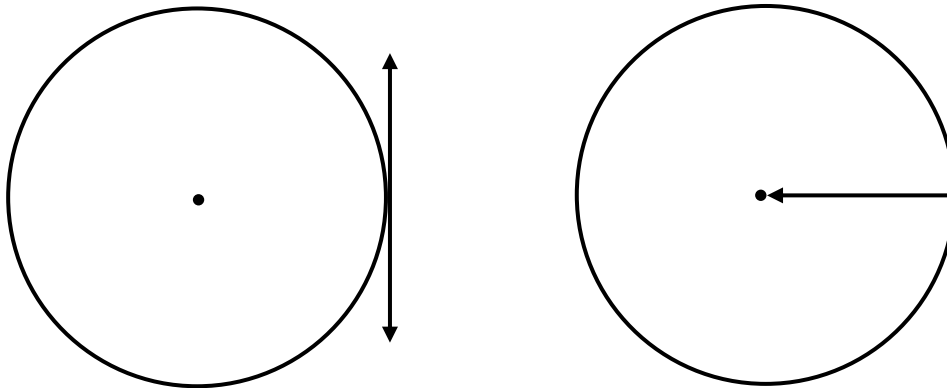
Figure 4



Source: SILVA, L. C. (2021)

From the Greek myth of Ixion, punished to perpetually spin on a burning wheel, Schopenhauer draws the existential condition of life, a perennial suffering caused by never-satisfied needs. As the philosopher notes, “for one wish that is fulfilled there remain at least ten that are denied” (W I, 231), making life an endless martyrdom for which the freedom promoted by aesthetic contemplation represents a momentary relief and rest from the wheel. In the Schopenhauerian conception of eternity, the Platonic metempsychosis (*meta*-beyond + *psyche*-soul), or individual immortality, would be analogue to the escape of a point of the circumference by the tangent (fig. 6). On the other hand, palingenesis (*palin*-repetition + *genesis*-generation), as Schopenhauer prefers to call the indestructibility not of the individual, but of the essence, can be represented by the return of the circumference to its center through the radius (fig. 7):

Figures 5 and 6



Source: SILVA, L. C. (2021)

Nature, in its countless manifestations that range from inorganic nature to the humankind, presents in its diversity the degrees of objectivity (*Objektivität*) of a same will: its degrees of visibility (*Sichtbarkeit*). If we imagine a hollow glass sphere being filled with beams of light radiating from its inner core to the surface, we see how the translucent sphere gradually becomes coated by the multicolored spectacle of the opaque textures that are projected onto the sphere's exterior. The clear spatial observation of our round planet Earth as we have nowadays is proof of this cosmology.

By taking up the image of the sphere, Schopenhauer presents us with the most eloquent, faithful, and finished description of his philosophy, made intelligible as no other moment in his exposition and summarized in the proper synthesis of an image:

As in the sphere the surface is produced by the radii ending and breaking off, so consciousness is possible only where the true inner being runs out into the phenomenon. Through the forms of the phenomenon separate individuality becomes possible, and on this individuality rests consciousness, which is on this account confined to phenomena. Therefore everything distinct and really intelligible in our consciousness always lies only towards on this surface of the sphere. But as soon as we withdraw entirely from this, consciousness forsakes us—in sleep, in death, and to a certain extent also in magnetic or magic activity; for all these lead through the centre. But just because distinct consciousness, as being conditioned by the surface of the sphere, is not directed towards the centre, it recognizes other individuals certainly as of the same kind, but not as identical, which, however, they are in themselves. Immortality of the individual could be compared to the flying off at a tangent of a point on the surface; but immortality, by virtue of the eternity of the true inner being of the whole phenomenon, is comparable to the return of that point on the radius to the

centre, whose mere extension is the surface. The will as thing-in-itself is entire and undivided in every being, just as the centre is an integral part of every radius; whereas the peripheral end of this radius is in the most rapid revolution with the surface that represents time and its content, the other end at the centre where eternity lies, remains in profoundest peace, because the centre is the point whose rising half is no different from the sinking half. (W II, Cap. 25, 371-2)

Famously known is the inscription on the Portico of the Platonic Academy, which read, "Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here." Schopenhauer follows Plato in the assumption that the study of geometry can serve as an exercise in abstraction preliminary to the exercise of metaphysics. For Plato, "the mind of the pupils became accustomed to dealing with incorporeal objects, after this mind had hitherto in practical life had to do only with corporeal things" (W II, p. 144). "It is specially necessary," says Schopenhauer, "to give up the prejudice that demonstrated truth has any advantage over truth known through perception or intuition" (W I, p. 87). The intuitive potential of geometric knowledge is attested by the fact that the intuition of geometric form does not come from the figure drawn on a paper, nor from the abstract concept thought, but from the pure knowledge of the *a priori* form of space.

CONCLUSION

The image of the sphere is an important philosophical resource for the comprehension of Schopenhauer's philosophy. With it, it is possible to conciliate classical oppositions in philosophy, such as unity/multiple, universal/particular, whole/part, eternal/temporal, rest/movement, summarized by Schopenhauer with the terms "will" and "representation". When presented together in a single image, these two perspectives of the world reveal to us the merit of a thought that grasps reality in all its contradictions, without shying away from the exercise of understanding them despite the discourse's own limitations. Hence, if philosophy cannot shed full light (*volles Licht*) on the problem of metaphysics, perhaps with a glimmer (*Schimmer*) it can, at least, show us the way.

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