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## SCHOPENHAUER'S DETERMINISM IN CALDERÓN'S *LA VIDA ES SUEÑO* AND *EL MÉDICO DE SU HONRA*

**SUMMARY:** The absence of free will is one of the common topics in Spanish Golden Age literature, mainly due to the influence of religion upon the philosophical ideas of that time. Thus, Thomas Aquinas' ideas have been traditionally followed as approach to some of these works. However, this essay presents a new line in the interpretation of two works by Calderón de la Barca, namely *La vida es sueño* and *El médico de su honra*. Schopenhauer's proposal, which can be paraphrased as 'there is a reason or cause for everything', will be used as working theory and examined throughout some excerpts of these works, under three main foci: 1) causality as a dominating force; and 2) the influence free will has on the characters' actions; 3) justification and motivation as causes. The analysis of the excerpts will show the characters' explicit awareness of causes, as well as chain reactions and their interaction with the will and motivation.

**KEYWORDS:** Schopenhauer, determinism, causality, free will, Calderón de la Barca

### ***Introduction***

The topics of agency, free will and predestination have been largely discussed in philosophy since antiquity. One of its main issues during many centuries has been the role of God within it, and the compatibility between free will and predestination based on God's omniscience. This can be seen in Spanish Golden Age theatre, where the influence of Thomas Aquinas' ideas in this respect is apparent. Nevertheless, a different approach will be taken in this paper for the analysis of two works of this period, namely Calderón's *La vida es sueño* (henceforth *VS*) and *El médico de su honra* (*MH*)<sup>1</sup>. Although the dominance of determinism over free will remains, it will be suggested that these works fit or can be read under Schopenhauer's explanation of determinism.

Although the relationship between Schopenhauer and these works might be trivial at first sight, it should be noted that Schopenhauer spoke Spanish and Calderón was one of his favourite authors (Iriarte 1960; Hämel 1926). In fact, he quoted some of Calderón's lines throughout his works (for example, precisely *VS* is quoted in *The World as Will and Representation*), using them to support his thoughts (Cartwright, 2005). Regarding his ideas, some similarities can be found with Plato and Thomas Aquinas, who have a clearer and broadly acknowledged influence on the plays (Sturm, 1974; Cascardi, 1993: 18; Fiore, 1975: 7-10). More precisely, Schopenhauer's theory of determinism can be related to Plato's idealism<sup>2</sup> (the well-known distinction between the ideal and the real worlds needs no further explanation) and Aquinas's thought of how everything shares a part of the eternal law<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The editions chosen for this article are Calderón (1995) and Calderón (1989), respectively. All the lines quoted refer to the lines in these volumes.

<sup>2</sup> This is the distinction between will and representations or realizations of that will, which establishes two levels in the world. One is that of the will, the thing-in-itself as Kant called it, which can be identified, to some extent, with Plato's ideal world. The other one is where the realizations of the will are manifested in time and space (or

Schopenhauer's assertion of determinism is explained in his principle of sufficient reason in his essay *On the Freedom of the Will* (1839). According to Singh (2010: 22), this principle can be simply stated as "nothing is without a reason for its being." Two aspects can be perceived in the realisations of free will: they are caused by a realisation, and they will cause another one in turn<sup>4</sup>. As a result, no realisation is autonomous. However, the will is not subjected to this principle. As Schopenhauer (2010: 598) says:

the will as world-creator, as thing in itself, is certainly free from the principle of sufficient reason and with it all necessity, and thus absolutely independent, free and even omnipotent. Of course this is true only of the will in itself, not of its appearances, the individuals who are already inalterably determined by the will itself as its appearances in time.

The central point in this principle is that though people may think they are free to choose because they choose what they want, this, their 'desire', is dictated by their will. Therefore, all their choices in life are determined by their will, so they are not really free, but the opposite, as they cannot act in a different way than they do. This does not mean that individuals cannot change, but that the change is also determined by the will, and therefore it is not a choice.

The principle of causality, more specifically, defends that anything that happens is the effect of a cause. This relation is one of necessity, that is, anything that changes, happens or 'becomes' happens necessary. Consequently, when any act or judgment is grounded, it is justified rather than explained. Regarding human beings, when causality passes through cognition, it becomes motivation. In this respect, Schopenhauer (2007: 171) claims that "the action of motives (motivation) is causality seen from within". Thus, motivation is not different from causality, but simply a form of it (Schopenhauer 1999: 41).

Following this theory, the elements which will be examined for in *La vida es sueño* and *El médico de su honra* can be summarised in three points: 1) causality as a dominating force; 2) the influence the will has on the characters' actions; 3) the justification and motivation of the acts as cause. These three elements are intrinsically linked, therefore difficulties can present themselves when trying to separate one from the others.

### ***Cause awareness***

To begin with, the characters in both plays seem to be aware of how 'causes' play a significant role in the series of events and in performing actions. For example, after a passage about reality and dreams which somehow evokes *LV*, Don Enrique alludes to the 'acazos' and 'sucesos' ("Y así no quiero saber / qué acazos ni qué sucesos / aquí mi ida guiaron, / ni aquí

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Plato's real world). Schopenhauer also confers greater importance to the former, because for him these manifestations do not exist beyond themselves, while the will has 'real' existence.

<sup>3</sup> In his own words, "it is evident that all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, in so far as, namely, from its being imprinted on them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends" (Aquinas, 1947: 1823).

<sup>4</sup> It may be worthy of mention here the importance A.A. Parker (1959: 51) gives to causality in the plot of the plays, especially in the case of Calderón: "The workings of causality are developed much more fully by Calderon than by any of his predecessors, and it constitutes a cardinal principle in the structure of his drama." Nevertheless, Parker links it mainly to the elucidation of the moral purpose.

la tuya trujeron”, 191-4) or unexpected events, that have made them meet, though in this case he is not interested in knowing how they have been brought together.<sup>5</sup> More significantly is what Don Enrique says to the king in one particular instance: “No te incites / tanto contra mí, ignorando / la causa que a esto me obligue” (2230-2). He feels obligated to act in a specific way as a consequence of a cause; in other words, he clearly states that causes not only justify acts, but they also compel them.

In *VS*, Segismundo understands and somehow accepts the cause for his imprisonment in his first speech: “Bastante causa ha tenido / vuestra justicia y rigor; / pues el delito mayor / del hombre es haber nacido” (109-112). Although he does not know it yet, his very existence and the circumstances surrounding his birth are the actual cause of his imprisonment. They were not only enough cause for the abstract “cielos” he addresses his speech to, but also for this father, who is the concrete person who sent him to prison. When Basilio explains to some characters what led him to imprison and hide his own son, he says “determiné de encerrar / la fiera que había nacido” (734-5). Significantly, he uses the verb *determinar*, which simultaneously evokes the meaning of deciding (decisions not relying on free will, as explained by Schopenhauer), and causality (and, consequently, unavoidability).<sup>6</sup> Basilio will state more clearly in the third act that “... son diligencias vanas / del hombre cuantas dispone / contra mayor fuerza y causa!” (3105-7). Again, this demonstrates the essentiality of cause in the imposition of destiny.

The importance of causes is also perceived by Soldier 1, who, as he himself claims, “fui causa / del alboroto del reino” (3293-4), and then he asks for a compensation for such an important role he has played. Nevertheless, Segismundo sends him to prison, though this is due to political reasons, so in any case he acknowledges the importance of the soldier, unfortunately for him.

### ***The relation between will and causes: chain reactions***

Human beings are not simply determined by causes, they also experience inner wills, impulses and cravings that lead them to act in the way they do. For instance, Leonor, when explaining to the king how she has been offended, says: “¿Con qué razones, gran señor, herida / la voz, diré que, a tanto amor postrada, / aunque el desdén me publicó ofendida / la voluntad me confesó obligada?” (633-6). Leonor states that her will confessed (i.e. made her aware of) how much she was obligated to someone’s tokens of love. Thus, her will directly told her that she had to return (as we will know later) Don Gutierre’s affections.

Sometimes, free will may be perceived as a tragic flaw, like in the case of Don Gutierre and his jealousy. What is more, Gutierre’s jealousy can be seen as his motivation. In one of his most famous speeches, he says “disimularé, si puedo, / esta desdicha, esta pena, / este rigor, este agravio, / este dolor, esta ofensa, / este asombro, este delirio, / este cuidado, esta afrenta, / estos celos...” (1691-7). Don Gutierre mixes two domains in his enumeration of nouns. On the one hand he refers to acts (“desdicha”, “agravio”, “ofensa”, “afrenta”), mostly synonyms, which reflect something that occurs outside the individual, or comes from

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<sup>5</sup> However, the usual behavior in the play is asking about causes and reasons (e.g. 365-6, 876-7, 889, etc.). Don Enrique probably refuses to know any reason as a way to reinforce his happiness for meeting Doña Mencía.

<sup>6</sup> According to the RAE, “4. tr. Tomar resolución” and “5. tr. Hacer tomar una resolución.”

the outside; on the other hand, he lists feelings (“pena”, “rigor”, “dolor”, “asombro”, “delirio”, “cuidado”), which take place in the self; and finally, he concludes with “celos”, also a feeling. The relationship between the two seems evident: the acts in the first group cause the feelings in the second one, and the ultimate outcome may be said to be jealousy, although he does not want to admit it<sup>7</sup>. This jealousy will cause Doña Mencía’s death in turn, as Don Gutierre will feel the necessity to kill her, and his plan succeeds<sup>8</sup>. Thus, a chain of causality is drawn: acts make him feel something, these feelings make him act in a specific way, and these acts make someone else to feel something.<sup>9</sup>

Don Arias will also work on chain reactions and necessity conditions. For instance, when talking to Leonor about their past affair, he says

quitarme, Leonor hermosa,  
la culpa es querer negar  
a mis deseos lugar;  
pues si mi pena amorosa  
os signifíco, ella diga  
en cifra sucinta y breve  
que es vuestro amor quien me mueve,  
mi deseo quien me obliga  
a deciros que, pues fui  
causa de penas tan tristes,  
si esposo por mí perdisteis,  
tengáis esposo por mí. (1745-56)

In these few lines, several causality relations are established and Don Arias links several concepts in them: feelings and will (“culpa”, “deseos”), obligation (“obligue”) and cause (“causa”). In an attempt to clarify the way they relate to each other, they can be summarized in the following way. 1) Don Arias’ “deseos” cause his feeling of guilty (1745-7). Therefore, due to the intrinsic cause-effect relationship in a predetermined series of events which are not subject to free will (and consequently, to variation), should one be removed, the other disappears, even if the one you remove comes after the other. 2) Leonor’s love for Don Arias causes him to be moved (1751), that is, a feeling causes another feeling. 3) His will obligates him to say something (1752-3), in other words, **free** will is said to dictate individual’s actions again. 4) He (or what can be understood as his acts) causes pain (1753-4), like in the previous case about Don Gutierre. 5) Don Arias’ role in Leonor’s losing a potential husband causes his involvement in getting a new one (1755-6), so actions cause other actions. This shows that cause-effect chains are not restricted to a specific element, but that they can become really complex and involve actions, free will, causality and motivation.

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<sup>7</sup> The reader should notice here how causality, going through cognition, ends up in motivation.

<sup>8</sup> His plan succeeds in the sense that Doña Mencía actually dies, though some literature has been written regarding the positive or negative consequences her death has for him.

<sup>9</sup> Apart from the obvious pain that Doña Mencía feels when she is dying, as we know from Ludovico (“entre repetidos ayes / escuché: ‘Inocente muero;...’” 2687-8), she expresses her feelings in her last direct speech, when she reads the message his husband has left her, telling his intention: “Mucha es mi turbación, mi pena es mucha” (2501-2).

It is also noteworthy how “deseo” or “vuestro amor” are, in this case, justification and motivation (as well as cause, of course) for what he wants to do, that is, to marry her.

In *VS*, Clotaldo faces a new situation. He owes his life to Astolfo, but at the same time he wants to avenge his daughter’s honour. Whereas, at the beginning, he was in Rosaura’s side, he seems to doubt:

Darle pensé muerte, cuando  
Segismundo pretendió  
dármela a mí, y él llegó,  
su peligro atropellando,  
a hacer en defensa mía  
muestras de su voluntad  
que fueron temeridad,  
pasando de valentía.  
Pues, ¿cómo yo agora, advierte,  
teniendo alma agradecida,  
a quien me ha dado la vida  
le tengo que dar la muerte? (2536-47)

In this case, Astolfo’s making explicit of his will changes Clotaldo’s mind (or, more precisely, ‘soul’, which might be further interpreted as ‘will’). It is interesting how not only the individual’s will but also others’ may have an influence on people’s acts.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the analyses of some passages from the plays *La vida es sueño* and *El médico de su honra* have shown that the characters seem to be aware of, experience, develop and even theorise about causality and its importance as dominating force in events, actions and life in general. However, not only causality, but also **free** will may, and actually does, make the characters act in the way they do. Moreover, causes are essential for the establishment of a destiny. These causes work on a chain basis, creating chain effects, but these can involve not only causes, but also will and motivations, becoming really complex elements. Finally, the analysis has also shown how motivation and justification can be equated to cause. From this perspective, agency and free will are, consequently, submitted to causality.

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### **EL DETERMINISMO DE SCHOPENHAUER EN LA VIDA ES SUEÑO Y EL MÉDICO DE SU HONRA DE CALDERÓN**

RESUMEN: La ausencia de libre albedrío es uno de los temas habituales de la literatura del Siglo de Oro español, principalmente como consecuencia de la influencia de la religión en las ideas filosóficas del momento. Así pues, las ideas de Santo Tomás de Aquino, especialmente, han servido de referencia para la interpretación de algunas de las obras de esa época. Sin embargo, este ensayo presenta una nueva línea de interpretación en dos obras de Calderón de la Barca —La vida es sueño y El médico de su honra—, basada en las ideas del filósofo Arthur Schopenhauer respecto a la existencia de una razón o causa para todo. Esta teoría se explorará en las obras bajo tres focos: 1) la causalidad como fuerza dominante; 2) la influencia del libre albedrío sobre las acciones de los personajes; y 3) la justificación y la motivación vistas como causas. El análisis de un conjunto de extractos mostrará la consciencia explícita de los personajes sobre la causalidad, además de una serie de reacciones en cadena y su interacción con la voluntad y la motivación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Schopenhauer, determinismo, causalidad, libre albedrío, Calderón de la Barca