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Better Consciousness

Schopenhauer’s Philosophy of Value

Edited by Alex Neill and Christopher Janaway
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Preface

The chapters collected in this volume address issues in Schopenhauer’s aesthetics (including the notion of disinterestedness, the nature of aesthetic experience, the value of art, natural beauty, and metonymic symbolism) and in his ethics (including his theory of compassion, selflessness, salvation, pessimism, optimism and death). From the tight focus of this collection there emerges, we believe, a strong case for the continuing significance of Schopenhauer’s thought on issues concerning value, and a variety of reasons to conclude that the philosopher who crystallized the pessimism of the nineteenth century has no less a claim on our attention today.

In part, this collection originated in a conference on ‘Schopenhauer and the Philosophy of Value’ that took place at the University of Southampton in July 2007. We acknowledge with gratitude the support given to the Southampton conference by the American Society for Aesthetics, the Analysis Committee, the British Academy, the British Society for Aesthetics, and the Mind Association. We would also like to thank the following for their contribution to the conference as commentators: Jenny Bunker, Christine Lopes, Aaron Ridley, Christopher Ryan, Severin Schroeder, Marco Segala, Gudrun von Tevenar, and Rachel Zuckert. Finally, we thank for his support Robert Stern, editor of the European Journal of Philosophy, in which some of the chapters collected here were first published.

Christopher Janaway
Alex Neill
Friedrich Nietzsche once commented that Schopenhauer showed ‘great knowledgedability about the human and all-too-human’ and had a ‘native sense of reality’, all of which was ‘not a little dimmed by the motley leopard-skin of his metaphysics (which one must first remove from him if one is to discover the real moralist genius beneath it).’1 Schopenhauer apparently thought of himself first and foremost as a system-building metaphysician, but his overall system has been found wanting in coherence by many commentators, and it has had few serious philosophical adherents. However, as Nietzsche implies, such an assessment may obscure the breadth, profundity, and originality of Schopenhauer’s insights in ethics and aesthetics, which were widely influential in the mid to late 19th century, but whose influence since then has largely vanished. The aim of the chapters in this volume is to explore Schopenhauer’s conceptions of value from a variety of philosophical perspectives, governed by the question whether they stand up better to scrutiny and deserve more prominence than contemporary ethics and aesthetics have tended to give them.

At the heart of Schopenhauer’s philosophy is a vision of human beings as essentially driven by will. To exist as a living being is to strive after ends, fundamentally those of staying alive and producing new life, secondarily the many diverse means towards those ends, and then, in the case of human beings, a vast array of other objects of desire or need corresponding to our widening cognitive and cultural repertoire. It is built into all such existence that we suffer. We have to pursue ends because we live, and not all ends can be satisfied. Striving towards some end is itself a species of suffering because it arises from a feeling that something is lacking; but attaining an end does not protect us from further feelings of want. What we achieve through the action of our will does not stop us from willing and therefore suffering some more. Even a person who regularly gets exactly what he or she wants is not safe from suffering: there lurks the spectre of boredom, in which we painfully feel the absence of any lack that motivates us to act. We have not chosen to live or to have the nature essential to all living things, that of endlessly willing and endlessly being exposed to suffering. Nor does our suffering have any ultimate redeeming point. Our existence and the existence of the world that is so ready to frustrate our willing are not designed to achieve any good, nor are we capable of making any progress towards perfection. In this fundamental part of Schopenhauer’s philosophy of value, which has to do with the will as essence of the self and of the world, we
ultimately find nothing but an absence of value. Anything is good only if it satisfies the will of some being, but there can be no ultimate satisfaction of the will as such, and so there is no absolute good. And if, instead of pursuing the round of effort, aspiration and failure to which life condemns us, we stand back and ask after the value of the whole show, we should by rights reach the extreme verdict that ‘nothing else can be stated as the aim of our existence except the knowledge that it would be better for us not to exist’ (The World as Will and Representation (hereafter WWR) II: 605).

Against the background of this merciless picture of human life Schopenhauer nevertheless finds rare and precious exceptions: states to which a higher value pertains. Early in his development as a philosopher, while working especially under the influence of his first readings of Plato, Kant and the Upanishads, Schopenhauer had coined the term ‘better consciousness’ to describe a state that transcends ordinary experience, allowing human beings to gain access to something timeless and universal, to leave behind their everyday concerns for the individual human being and all its attendant achievements and failings, to find peace from all striving, and enjoy face-to-face cognition of the truest and most permanent aspect of reality. Though he abandoned the term ‘better consciousness’ in his published works, the core of this vision remained with him throughout. Hence we find in his greatest work The World as Will and Representation a theory of aesthetic experience in which a consciousness temporarily devoid of all willing brings cognition of timeless Platonic Ideas, mirrored clearly by the mind in a rare state of rest and tranquillity. We find the claim that a more lasting release, indeed a ‘salvation’ from life, can be attained in even rarer cases when the will that makes up the essence of a human individual turns and negates itself, so that the subject loses all attachment to this particular human body and life and treats individuality itself as a kind of illusion, identifying him- or herself with the timelessly existing whole. We find also an ethical position which lauds as morally good only those relatively few actions in which the individual’s own ends are not pursued, but a felt identity with others leads one to desire their well-being and feel their pain in a manner that ordinary consciousness cannot account for: the morally good person intuitively glimpses the higher truth that all is one and that the goods and ills of his or her own individuated existence are of no ultimate consequence.

All the positive value that really counts in Schopenhauer’s outlook, therefore, arises when the will ceases from its normal role of pursuing the ends inherent in individual life. Either the will is activated in an unusual way so as not to impinge on or compete with the ends of other individuals, resulting in morally good action out of compassion, or the will disappears from consciousness for a brief spell while the mind enjoys a holiday contemplating something in which it is aesthetically engrossed, or the will stages a final rebellion against its own essential function and cancels out its own ability to act towards ends at all. We might say that for Schopenhauer value is ultimately snatched from the jaws of nihilism, yet only through our undergoing kinds of self-loss—affective, motivational and metaphysical—that are potentially as radical and unnerving as the condition from which they are supposed to save us.
Such are the doctrines that form the main body of Schopenhauer’s philosophy of value. But there is little hint of them as one begins to read *The World as Will and Representation*—this being the main reason for his advice to read the book twice, since ‘the beginning presupposes the end almost as much as the end the beginning’ (*WWR* I: xiii). Schopenhauer begins his book as if it were a continuation of Kant’s philosophy. He espouses transcendental idealism: empirical objects, those that we experience as outside of us in space and time, causally interacting in lawlike ways, constitute a world of appearance. We do not experience them *in themselves*, rather they are a species of the subject’s representations (*Vorstellungen*). The mind necessarily shapes the world as representation according to the subjective forms of space, time, and the connection of cause and effect. The contents of the world as they present themselves to our experience are objects *for a subject*, and do not exist independently of the way they thus appear. The mind receives sensations and actively imposes on them the forms that constitute an objective world.

Schopenhauer retains Kant’s terminology of *Anschauung* and *Begriff*, intuition and concept, though he adapts it substantially for his own purposes. Intuition is a matter of immediate representation, a simple perceptual awareness of objects in space and time that humans share with other animals. The understanding or intellect actively processes the data from the senses by applying the cause-effect relation to them, resulting in experience of an object rather than a mere sensation. Causality’s role in constituting objective experience is thus not at all, as it was for Kant, a matter of applying concepts. Concepts, by contrast, are abstract representations that are unique to human beings, connected with the capacity for language, and enabling us to engage in rational thought. Throughout his philosophy Schopenhauer makes much of this distinction between the intuitive and the abstract, between intellect, which humans share with other animals, and reason (*Vernunft*), the exclusively human capacity for abstraction. He chides philosophers, especially Kantians and German Idealists, for getting lost in abstractions that lure them away from concrete human experience. Especially relevant to his philosophy of value is his point that rationality, and the whole ability we have for conceptual representation, gives us no greater claim to ‘dignity’ or ‘moral worth’ than that possessed by any other sentient species. It is also important that for him abstract principles do not constitute the foundation of either ethics or aesthetics: ‘Virtue is as little taught as is genius; indeed, the concept is just as unfruitful for it as it is for art, and in the case of both can be used only as an instrument. We should therefore be just as foolish to expect that our moral systems and ethics would create virtuous, noble, and holy men, as that our aesthetics would produce poets, painters, and musicians’ (*WWR* I: 271).

If the First Book of *The World as Will and Representation* presents a modified version of Kantian epistemology, from the Second Book onwards we find Schopenhauer on a path that diverges greatly from Kant’s. For Schopenhauer the idealist account of the world as representation leaves the underlying true nature of the world as a ‘riddle’, and we are still driven to discover what this world is *in itself*. Schopenhauer proposes that the same world we have recognized as
representation for the subject is, in itself, a world as will (Wille). The world that appears to us as representation is in its essence, in its very being, will; and it is in relation to will that we shall discover the ethical significance of the world and of our existence within it. A unique inner consciousness of our own will when we act gives us the key to understanding our essence: it is that we are active and strive towards ends. But Schopenhauer very quickly widens the scope of the term ‘will’, to embrace not only conscious acts of will, but all emotions and affects, and non-conscious or ‘blind’ processes that can be described as end-directed. For example, he views the body and its many functions, including the brain and nervous system, as manifestations of an underlying will that blindly uses the body as an instrument towards its ends. The self-conscious subject of cognition that figured in Schopenhauer’s account of the world as representation is thus ultimately to be explained in metaphysical terms as the manifestation of an underlying striving force, which Schopenhauer often refers to as the ‘will to life’ (Wille zum Leben). Schopenhauer then extends the scope of ‘will’ even further, describing the whole of nature as consisting in essence of a blind striving that manifests itself in multiple instances within our experience. Willing continues perpetually and without final purpose: it is built into us and into the fabric of the world. Throughout nature one being dominates and destroys another, the will tearing itself apart, says Schopenhauer, because it is a hungry will and there is nothing for it to feed on but itself.

Schopenhauer’s distinction between the two aspects of the world, representation and will, maps on to a contrast between individuation and non-individuation. The world as it manifests itself to us in ordinary experience consists of a multiplicity of distinct things. This experience is necessarily in space and time, which together make up the principle of individuation (principium individuationis). But what exists in itself (the world as will) must be without space and time, hence without individuation. So the world as thing in itself is not divided up into distinct individual entities, and our own individuality is not metaphysically fundamental. The importance of this distinction for Schopenhauer’s philosophy of value can scarcely be over-estimated. His accounts of aesthetic experience, morality, and the value of life all hinge around the possibility of ceasing to separate oneself out from the whole, forgetting or detaching oneself from one’s existence as an individual human being and viewing things from a higher or more universal standpoint. This is the legacy of his youthful idea of the better consciousness. Although in a sense one never escapes the will, because it is the essence of everything, there are nonetheless possible states in which our consciousness becomes alienated from the will as it manifests itself in this particular living individual. Such forms of alienation are to be welcomed, for Schopenhauer, because they enhance our capacity to understand reality, free us from the misery of striving and suffering, and blunt the capacity for harm, for encroaching on the well-being of others, that dwells in each individual through whom the will flows unhindered.

In the Third Book of The World as Will and Representation Schopenhauer presents his account of aesthetic experience. Here the notion of a transformed
consciousness that removes us from the everyday concerns of the will is at its clearest, as is the Platonic ancestry of Schopenhauer’s thought. In aesthetic experience we perceive timeless Ideas, a series of grades at which the will manifests itself throughout nature. To avoid confusion with Kantian or Hegelian uses of ‘Idea’ Schopenhauer typically refers to his conception as ‘(Platonic) Ideas’. They are universals that are instantiated in nature, and in aesthetic experience we gain a privileged, objective cognition of them, while perceptually experiencing some particular object, be it an art work or a thing in nature. We see the universal in the particular object of intuitive perception rather than attaining knowledge of it through concepts or abstract reasoning. So this kind of experience has a higher cognitive value than that of ordinary everyday consciousness, which is taken up with particular objects and their spatial, temporal and causal inter-connections. Indeed, for Schopenhauer, aesthetic cognition reveals to us timeless realities common to all objects, and in that sense is more objective even than that of science, which only makes inferences about the universal forces of nature, and does not intuit them directly. Aesthetic experience has another great value for Schopenhauer in that while it lasts, our will is in abeyance. We do not seek to understand the object we perceive in relation to what it can do for us, whether we desire or need it, what associations it has with other objects or with our emotions: ‘we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither of things, but simply and solely the what’ (WWR I: 178). Thus we experience the exceptional state of a will-less consciousness. Nothing troubles us, because no felt lack or need moves us at all. We are free of the will for some blissful moments, attaining a peace without which, Schopenhauer tells us, true well-being would be impossible.

In the history of the philosophy of art, art has been assigned widely differing values. Schopenhauer’s account is interesting partly because it appears, at least at first sight, to unite two different conceptions of the value of art, one cognitive, the other to do with a disinterested aesthetic attitude. Often with an ‘aesthetic attitude’ type of theory art is said to attain its value by virtue of its affording an experience of a kind that can in principle be had in response to any kind of object. It looks as if Schopenhauer has some such view in mind when he talks of experiencing things in nature, such as landscapes, trees and rocks, as examples of the pure, will-less consciousness which art is also capable of giving us. At the same time Schopenhauer wants a superior form of cognition or knowledge, that of universal Ideas, to be characteristic of all aesthetic experience. He seems confident that whenever we enter the aesthetic state of will-less, timeless consciousness we shall encounter universal Ideas, and that whenever we are in contact with universal Ideas we shall be in a state of will-less consciousness. However, when he comes to reflect on the many specific art forms, with which he shows considerable familiarity, he admits that in some cases their value has more to do with will-less tranquillity and less to do with cognition of any very important universals, and at the other end of the spectrum more to do with the latter and less with tranquillity. A challenging case at this end of the spectrum is tragedy, whose portrayal of a frightening universal aspect of humanity has its value in making us shudder before the truth of what is, or could well be, our own
life. It is at least not obvious how the value of tragedy will also be found in its offering the bliss of will-less, painless contemplation.

The artistic genius for Schopenhauer is someone who commands a technique for articulating his experiential grasp of the universal in such a way as to transmit it to the rest of humanity, and has the ability to remain in the state of will-less objectivity for an abnormal length of time, to experience the world continuously with a unique intensity of perception. Yet even the artist must return to the life of willing and is not permanently inured to it. There awaits a further transition to a state of resignation in which the will is quietened altogether:

That pure, true, and profound knowledge of the inner nature of the world... does not deliver him from life for ever, but only for a few moments. For him it is not the way out of life, but only an occasional consolation in it, until his power, enhanced by this contemplation, finally becomes tired of the spectacle, and seizes the serious side of things. The St. Cecilia of Raphael can be regarded as the symbol of this transition. (WWR I: 267)

The Fourth Book of The World as Will and Representation accordingly delivers Schopenhauer’s account of this ‘serious side of things’. It concerns ethics, both in the ‘narrower’ sense of moral goodness and badness, right and wrong, justice, obligation, freedom and so on, and in the wider sense of considering what (if anything) is of value in human life as such. Schopenhauer also dealt with the ‘narrower’ issues of ethics in two independent pieces of writing entitled ‘Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will’ and ‘On the Basis of Morality’, which he published together under the title The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics. In these essays, submitted anonymously to two competitions, Schopenhauer addresses the issues of free will and the grounding of morality directly, rather than embedding them first in his own metaphysics of representation and will. Much of their content is also present in The World as Will and Representation, but it is often presented more clearly and more thoroughly in the essays.

Schopenhauer aims to describe what kinds of action and person qualify as morally good. He thinks that there is decisive evidence for this in ordinary experience: we feel a certain inner satisfaction when we have acted in certain ways, and the unpleasant sting of conscience when we have acted in the opposite way. Certain of our actions towards others tend to be especially applauded by third parties, and there seems to be a great deal of consensus about which persons and actions are the very worst, the furthest away from what is morally good. The single criterion of moral goodness for Schopenhauer is that one’s action spring from compassion. Compassion (German Mitleid) is an irreducible incentive present in the character of human beings: it disposes their individual will towards the well-being of others: towards helping them and preserving them from harm. Two kinds of virtuous action arise from this fundamental incentive, those of justice and human loving kindness (Menschenliebe). They correspond to different levels of intervention by the incentive of compassion, which either restrains the individual from harming another or brings it about that they
positively seek the other’s benefit. The justice that is a moral virtue for Schopenhauer is quite distinct from the kind of justice which consists in acting out of respect for law, and which holds sway in a stable State or other human community. There, he maintains, it is fear of punishment and hope of reward that provide the motivation to be just—but such hopes and fears show that the incentive at work is not compassion, but egoism. He regards the State as an institution that arises from collective egoism, and not, strictly speaking, as a matter of morality.

Schopenhauer admits that the existence of compassion is somewhat mysterious. We are in our essence, and not by choice, beings that will their own well-being, which means, in ethical terms, that we are all egoistic. Even animals are egoistic, for Schopenhauer, meaning that they are constantly out to preserve and enhance themselves (though they cannot be called ‘self-interested’ because they lack the conscious conceptual mechanisms for forming interests as such). Compassion therefore seems to go against our nature as individuals, at least given the way Schopenhauer has set things up. Against the sceptical line that all would-be compassionate actions are ultimately egoistic, Schopenhauer appeals to the reader’s intuitions about particular examples: a case of self-sacrifice in battle or an incident in which a poor person returns valuable property when they could have escaped undetected. All that Schopenhauer needs from us here is the concession that, despite the egoistic nature of human beings, it sometimes occurs that someone’s action aims solely at the well-being of another. Without that concession, he says, ethics would become an empty subject.

However, action from compassion is a rare and fragile thing because it must compete with egoism, the incentive that is vastly more common, and also with a pure incentive towards harming others, namely malice. Each human character contains an element of each incentive, Schopenhauer claims, though the proportions are very different. Schopenhauer’s views on character play a central role in his ethics. He says, on a certain amount of anecdotal evidence, that character is unique in each individual human being, that it is inborn and unchangeable. This has the corollary that one cannot change someone’s basic moral character, the direction in which their individual will tends to carry them. What one can change is their knowledge, their understanding of the world and of the consequences of their actions. An egoist can be trained to harm fewer people in pursuit of his own interests, but only by supplying him with a richer and more considered set of interests to pursue. Schopenhauer sometimes refers to this figuratively as reforming the head but not the heart of the human being. The heart is his will, as opposed to the less essential and mutable intellect through which his cognition of the world is channelled.

Schopenhauer’s notion of character also features in his rejection of freedom to act. Given my inborn, unalterable character, and given the experience I have at any one time, my resulting action is necessary: I could not have acted otherwise. Schopenhauer frequently quotes the scholastic formula _operari sequitur esse_: acting follows from being. It is not in my power to change what I am, and what I do follows necessarily from what I am, given the occurrence of particular experiences, which Schopenhauer calls motives. A motive is a cognition that
moves someone to action. Self-consciousness gives us the impression of being free when we act, but Schopenhauer unmasks this as an illusion. We can often know that there are no obstacles to our doing something if we will it; but we are in the dark about what it is and is not possible for us to will. In order to know that, we would have to step outside of self-consciousness and understand what brought about our willing. But a motive, which sets our will in motion on a particular occasion, is a cause like any other in nature, and the individual character is on a par with the fixed dispositions to behave in certain ways that we find throughout the empirical world. So human action is subject to the rule that every event must be necessitated by its cause.

Why then do we have feelings of responsibility and guilt, and moreover ones that are not dissipated even by the conviction that our actions are determined? Schopenhauer’s answer uses two distinctions: that between our actions and our self (or our doing and our being) and that between the empirical realm and the transcendental. He makes use of Kant’s distinction between the empirical and intelligible character. The latter is what we can think of ourselves as being in ourselves, beyond what we are in the realm of appearance. There is no space, time or causality beyond that realm, so our intelligible character is uninfluenced by nature and can be regarded as freely initiating courses of events without being part of them. There is no absolute necessity of my actions occurring when and where they do. If someone else had been here in my stead, there might have been a different course of events; but given that I am present, the resulting actions are necessary. So if a morally bad action occurs, the fault lies in my being myself. Hence there must be a transcendental kind of responsibility and a transcendental kind of freedom: what I feel responsible for and guilty about is my character as it is in itself, which Schopenhauer rather remarkably describes as a free ‘act of will outside time’ (WWR I: 289). Schopenhauer runs into a metaphysical tangle here, for if the thing in itself is beyond individuation, how can there be an ‘in-itself’ that pertains uniquely to me? And how can there be any ‘acting’ outside of time, space and causality? A deeper thought lurks behind this discussion, however: that the will (i.e. the world as it is in itself) has freely manifested itself as me, and thereby burdened me with being an individual through whom will flows, with all the potential it has for harmful expression against other individual wills that appear as distinct from it. On this reading, any human being rightly feels guilt about his or her very being as an individual. For all the genuine atheism of his metaphysical system, Schopenhauer adopts the Christian notion of ‘the deep guilt of the human race by reason of its very existence, and of the heart’s intense longing for salvation therefrom’ (WWR II: 625).

Schopenhauer’s account of compassion as the source of all moral goodness also gains its ultimate underpinning from his metaphysics. If compassion is a feeling of someone else’s pain that motivates me to alleviate it in as immediate a manner as my own suffering would, I must be experiencing less of a distinction between myself and the other than an agent who acts according to the normal egoistic incentive. I identify with the other person, as we commonly say. But Schopenhauer grounds this attitude of identification towards others in a
metaphysical identity. Morally good and morally bad human beings relate differently towards the very fact of individuality. The bad character regards the basic metaphysical divide as lying between ‘I’ and everything else which ‘not-I’. The good character regards all others as ‘I once more’. And it is the latter who has the superior insight into reality. However unreflective and inchoate their insight may be, compassionate human beings sense the allegedly deeper truth that the separateness of individuals is an illusion.

Earlier we saw Schopenhauer adopt the religious notion of salvation. Of this he says that it can be attained only by ‘the denial of one’s own self, hence by a complete reform of man’s nature’ (*WWR* II: 625). Schopenhauer also describes this as the will to life within me turning against itself, denying or negating itself. Towards the end of *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer says that a ‘knowledge of the whole’, and ‘comprehension of its inner nature . . . [as] a vain striving, an inward conflict, and a continual suffering’ (*WWR* I: 379) can quieten or sedate the will within an individual. Something very radical is to be imagined here, which he describes as ‘the abolition of the character’ (*WWR* I: 403), a process in which ‘the whole being is fundamentally changed and reversed’, and ‘a new person takes the place of the old’. He seems to have in mind that the will to life as it is manifest in me freely abolishes itself. The will to life is ‘the real self’, what I really am, like it or not, will it or not. It gives rise to my dispositions to respond to motives, which dispositions are again not subject to my own agency, or to what we normally call my own will. I cannot in any ordinary sense *will* what it is I will, or what my character is, or how it is that I am disposed to respond to motives, or how I am moved or affected by the world of appearance as it strikes me. The effect of attaining ‘knowledge of the whole’ is that the will to life as manifest in me is switched off; my essence changes; my character disappears; my natural dispositions to respond to motives are no more. My own real nature kills itself off in recoil at the content of that ‘knowledge of the whole’. So it is not so much that I try to stop being a being that tries for things. Rather the responding and trying part of me, which is my very essence, the will to life in me, gets disabled by knowledge. Because of such a dramatic shift in my real nature, at the level of conscious willing I become resigned before all suffering and desire, and attain a mystical state in which I do not distinguish myself as an individual from the whole. For Schopenhauer only a change of this nature can redeem our existence for us, and give it any ultimate point.

Nietzsche frequently returned to the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Schopenhauer, whom he still called his ‘great teacher’ even when opposing all his central doctrines. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche complains that some of his contemporaries are enchanted not by Schopenhauer’s virtues (‘his sense for hard facts, his good will to clarity and reason, . . . the strength of his intellectual conscience, . . . his cleanliness in matters of the church and of the Christian God’), but rather by

Schopenhauer’s mystical embarrassments and evasions in those places where the factual thinker let himself be seduced and corrupted by the
vain urge to be the unriddler of the world; the indemonstrable doctrine of One Will (‘all causes are merely occasional causes of the appearance of the will at this time and this place’; ‘the will to life is present wholly and undividedly in every being . . .’), the denial of the individual (‘all lions are at bottom one lion’; ‘the plurality of individuals is an illusion’ . . .); his ecstatic reveries on genius (‘in aesthetic intuition the individual is no longer individual but pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge’; ‘the subject, in being wholly taken up in the object it intuits, has become the object itself’); the nonsense about compassion and how, as the source of all morality, it enables one to make the break through the principium individuationis. . . . (The Gay Science, sect. 99)

If we react to Schopenhauer’s metaphysics in a similar way, we have various choices of approach. We might attempt to preserve Schopenhauerian accounts of aesthetic value, morality, moral psychology or the meaning of existence that can be made intelligible without the aid of the metaphysics. Another approach is to treat elements of the metaphysics as a kind of figurative expression for would-be fundamental truths about the values in life. Another is to start with the attitude that reading Schopenhauer is a source of philosophical understanding and at the very least of new philosophical questions—perhaps with answers quite other than his own—and follow him as far into his metaphysics as is necessary to comprehend and address those issues, keeping a sceptical eye open for outright embarrassments and evasions. Contributors to this volume are united in rejecting the further option of simply pulling apart Schopenhauer’s metaphysical system and moving on. As Nietzsche saw, too much would be lost by that course of action: too much that is challenging and worrying, and too much penetrating insight into the human condition.5

NOTES

1 Human, All too Human, II/1, sect. 33. For more on Schopenhauer’s influence on Nietzsche, see Janaway 1998 and Janaway 2007.


3 See On the Genealogy of Morality, Preface, sect. 5.

4 I thank Alex Neill for helpful comments on this chapter.

REFERENCES


2

Back to Truth: Knowledge and Pleasure in the Aesthetics of Schopenhauer

Paul Guyer

1. Introduction

Kant’s philosophy of fine art, the culminating level of his thought in the ‘Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment’, constituted a unique synthesis of the novel theory that the intrinsically pleasurable free play of our mental powers is the essence of aesthetic experience that was developed in mid-19th century Scotland and Germany with the theory that aesthetic experience is a distinctive form of the apprehension of truth that had been the core of aesthetic theory since the time of Aristotle. Kant brought these two strands of aesthetic theory together in his conception of ‘aesthetic ideas’ as the source of ‘spirit’ in fine art and of genius as the uniquely artistic capacity for the creation and communication of aesthetic ideas, for by means of this concept he postulated that in both the production and the reception of fine art the imagination freely plays with and around the intellectual content furnished by ideas of reason. In spite of Kant’s immense prestige, this synthesis, like so many others among the delicate balancing-acts that comprised Kant’s philosophy, was quickly sundered by Kant’s successors, and Kant’s combination of the aesthetics of play with the aesthetics of truth was rejected in favor of a purely cognitivist aesthetics. This is particularly evident in the next two great aesthetic theories to take the stage after Kant, those of Schelling and Schopenhauer—the former of which indeed deeply influenced the latter—and beyond them in the aesthetics of Hegel and his numerous followers. While both Schelling and Schopenhauer preserved much of the terminology and outward organization of Kant’s aesthetics, they transformed Kant’s central conception of aesthetic ideas as a form of free play with truth back into a more traditional conception of an apprehension of truth that is certainly different from other forms of cognition but does not really involve an element of free play at all. And they both rejected Kant’s idea that aesthetic experience is intrinsically pleasurable because it is a free play of our mental powers, replacing that theory with the view that for the most part aesthetic experience is pleasurable only because it releases us from the pain of some otherwise inescapable contradiction in the human condition—to borrow terms used by Edmund Burke a half-century earlier, they replace Kant’s conception of aesthetic response as a ‘positive pleasure’ with a conception of it as ‘the removal of pain’ or ‘delight’ as a merely
‘negative’ or ‘relative’ form of pleasure.\(^2\) This is somewhat of an overstatement, and we will see that Schopenhauer in particular recognizes that there is some pleasure in aesthetic response that goes beyond mere relief at the removal of pain, but he nevertheless maintains that all of the pleasure in aesthetic experience comes through cognition alone rather than from a free play of our cognitive powers. It is above all the element of play that disappears from their transmutation of Kant’s aesthetics back into a version of cognitivism, an element that was then not to reappear for another half-century, in the post-Schopenhauerian thought of the later Nietzsche, in spite of his own hostility to all things Kantian.

Nietzsche will return briefly at the end of this chapter, but its focus will be Schopenhauer. My main task will just be to show that in spite of the many outward trappings of Kant’s theory that Schopenhauer preserved, his aesthetic theory replaced Kant’s central idea of the positive pleasure of the free play of our mental powers with the idea of a predominantly negative form of pleasure afforded by aesthetic experience as a distinctive form of cognition.

2. Kant

I begin with a brief review of the central themes of Kant’s aesthetics that will be relevant to what follows. Kant begins from the challenge posed by mid-century aesthetic theory, for example by Hume’s essay ‘Of the Standard of Taste’ (1757): to explain how a judgment of taste can be made only on the basis of one’s feeling of pleasure in response to an object, independent of any determinate concept of or rule for that object, and yet can be universally valid, that is, valid for all qualified observers of the object responding to it under appropriate conditions.\(^3\) Kant begins his answer to this puzzle by accepting from Shaftesbury and Hutcheson that a judgment of taste must be disinterested, independent of any personal physiological, prudential, or moral interest in the existence of the object.\(^4\) But disinterestedness seems to be merely a necessary condition for universal validity: one’s pleasure in an object might be independent of any identifiable interest, and yet still be utterly accidental or idiosyncratic. To find a sufficient condition for the universal validity of the judgment of taste, Kant seeks its ground in a mental state that is disinterested and free from regulation by determinate concepts but nevertheless can be reasonably expected from all normal human beings who can themselves approach the object without an antecedent interest in or preconception of what the object ought to be. This state Kant claims to find in the free play of the imagination and understanding in response to an object, a state of the ‘animation [Belebung] of both faculties (the imagination and the understanding) to an activity that is indeterminate but yet, through the stimulus of the given representation, in unison [einhelliger]’ (\textit{CPJ}, §9, 5: 219).\(^5\) Such a state of mind is pleasurable because it seems to us like the satisfaction of our general goal in cognition—finding unity in our manifolds of representation—in a way that is contingent and surprising precisely because it is not dictated by any concept of rule that applies to the object (\textit{CPJ}, Introduction,
section VI, 5: 187–8). But it is also intersubjectively valid, that is, a response to the object that we can impute to others as what they too would experience under ideal or optimal conditions, because it involves nothing but cognitive powers which themselves must be imputed to others and assumed to work in the same way in them as they do in ourselves. This inference is what Kant calls the ‘deduction of judgments of taste’.

In the ‘Dialectic of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment,’ Kant restates the challenge of justifying the judgment of taste’s claim to universal validity in the form of an ‘antinomy’ between the ‘thesis’ that ‘The judgment of taste is not based on concepts, for otherwise it would be possible to dispute about it (decide by means of proofs)’ and the ‘antithesis’ that the ‘judgment of taste is based on concepts, for otherwise . . . it would not even be possible to argue about it (to lay claim to the necessary assent of others to this judgment)’ (CPJ, §56, 5: 338–9). However, instead of then simply reiterating his previous solution to this dilemma, that the judgment of taste is based on a free and therefore indeterminate play of cognitive powers that can be assumed to work the same way in everybody under ideal conditions, Kant here argues that ‘all contradiction vanishes if I say that [determining the ground of] the judgment of taste . . . may lie in the concept of that which can be regarded as the supersensible substratum of humanity’ (CPJ, §57, 5: 340), the noumenal basis of our phenomenal, psychological powers. This assertion relocates the explanation of the non-derivability of particular intersubjectively valid judgments of taste from determinate concepts of their objects from the psychological (empirical or otherwise) theory of the free play of the faculties to a metaphysical theory of a common but noumenal and therefore inaccessible ground of the phenomenal psychologies of all human beings. But although his introduction of the metaphysical conception of a noumenal basis for taste would be decisive for later aesthetic theories including Schopenhauer’s, this leap into metaphysics plays no role in Kant’s own account of fine art or of the significance of either natural or artistic beauty for us.

Thus, Kant uses his idea of the free play of the cognitive faculties but not that of the supersensible ground of that state of mind in his theory of fine art and its source in genius. Kant defines beautiful or fine art as ‘a kind of representation that is purposive in itself and, though without an end, nevertheless promotes the cultivation of the mental powers for sociable communication’ (CPJ, §44, 5: 305–6). Kant initially suggests that in order to appreciate beautiful art as such one may have to suppress one’s knowledge that it is the product of intentional human production (CPJ, §45, 5: 306). But as he continues he makes it clear that beautiful art produces a free play of our cognitive powers precisely because its form engages and unifies our imagination in a way that goes beyond whatever determinate concepts—concepts of its goal, its medium and techniques, its genre, and its content—that we do know apply to it. This is the lesson of Kant’s conception of genius as the source of art and of ‘aesthetic ideas’ as what the artistic genius produces. Beautiful art must be produced by genius because ‘The concept of beautiful art . . . does not allow the judgment concerning the beauty of its product to be derived from any sort of rule that has a concept for its
determining ground,’ and genius is precisely the ‘talent (natural gift)’ for ‘producing that for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition of skill for that which can be learned in accordance with some rule’ (CPJ, §46, 5: 307). Beautiful art, Kant also says, must contain ‘spirit,’ so genius must be responsible for the spirit in art. Kant then explicates spirit in terms of the concept of aesthetic ideas. Spirit, he says, is the ‘animating principle in the mind’ in the production and experience of beautiful art, and that ‘by which this principle animates the soul . . . into a play that is self-sustaining and even strengthens the powers to that end’ (CPJ, §49, 5: 313). What sets the mental powers into such a play, Kant then continues, is an aesthetic idea, ‘that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e. concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible.’ What Kant means by this is that a work of art on the one hand has intellectual content—Kant assumes without argument that fine art is paradigmatically representational or mimetic—but specifically rational content, a content of ideas that cannot be reduced to determinate concepts of the understanding, and on the other hand conveys this content through a wealth of materials of the imagination—intuitions—that cannot be derived from that content by any concept or rule but nevertheless illustrate it and convey it to us in a satisfyingly harmonious and therefore pleasurable way. What a successful work of fine or beautiful art does is set the form and the content of a work of art and the mental powers for the intuition of that form and the intellection of that content into a free and harmonious play. Genius is thus the capacity for the ‘exposition or the expression of aesthetic ideas,’ the ability to present rational ideas through particular artistic media and genres in imaginative ways that cannot be fully determined by any rules for the latter. Further, Kant stresses that genius consists not just in the artist’s capacity to create such ideas for herself but also in the capacity to find ways to communicate them to others: ‘thus genius really consists in the happy relation . . . of finding ideas for a given concept on the one hand and on the other hitting upon the expression for these, through which the subjective disposition of the mind that is thereby produced’ in the artist ‘can be communicated to others,’ namely the audience for art (CPJ, §49, 5: 317).

Schopenhauer draws on all of these ideas. But he turns Kant’s idea of the free play of our cognitive powers back into the more traditional idea that aesthetic experience is actual cognition, and also treats such cognition primarily as a source of the negative pleasure of relief from pain rather than as a source of positive pleasure presupposing no antecedent pain. Let us now see how he does that.

3. Schopenhauer

Schopenhauer exploits many of the central themes of Kant’s aesthetics, notably Kant’s concepts of disinterestedness, of genius, and of aesthetic ideas, but transforms Kant’s theory of the free play of our cognitive powers, even with aesthetic ideas, into a strictly cognitivist theory of the content of aesthetic
experience—a transformation signaled by his use of the expression ‘Platonic ideas’ instead of ‘aesthetic ideas’—and Kant’s theory of the positive pleasure of such free play into a theory of negative pleasure at our release from the incessant demands of our particular wills through the cognition of the general forms of the expression of the will in aesthetic experience. Schopenhauer does at least sometimes recognize a positive rather than merely negative pleasure in aesthetic cognition, however, and thus at least takes a step toward the restoration of Kant’s positive conception of the pleasure of aesthetic experience if not toward his conception of it as free play rather than cognition.

The general outlines of Schopenhauer’s philosophy are well known, and can be presented briefly here. According to Schopenhauer, the general structures of conscious human thought—above all, the organization of our experience into space, time, causal relations among events, and intentional relations between desires and actions—are structures imposed by our own minds on the effects of an otherwise unknown substratum of reality on our own underlying reality. In this position, which the twenty-five year old already defended in his doctoral dissertation On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (1813), Schopenhauer took himself to be the legitimate heir of Kant. Unlike Kant, however, in his magnum opus The World as Will and Representation (1818, revised 1844; Book I recapitulates this doctrine), Schopenhauer insisted that we could characterize the underlying reality that acts upon us and that acts within us as non-rational will. He based this assertion upon the claims that we have a double knowledge of ourselves, through the cognitive representation in which our own bodies are like everything else in the world and through voluntary action in which we have a unique relation to our own bodies, that we recognize the latter to be more fundamental than the former, even though the former contains all the structures we think of as rational, and that we can extend this view to all of reality beyond ourselves. Thus in the Book II of the World as Will and Representation he writes:

Whereas in the first book we were reluctantly forced to declare our own body to be mere representation of the knowing subject, like all other objects of this world of perception, it has now become clear to us that something in the consciousness of everyone distinguishes the representation of his own body from all others that are in other respects quite like it. This is that the body occurs in consciousness in quite another way, toto genere different, that is denoted by the word will. It is just this double knowledge of our own body which gives us information . . . about what it is, not as representation, but as something over and above this, and hence what it is in itself. (WWR, §19 103)

Then he continues that we can use this ‘double knowledge’ as the ‘key to the inner being of every phenomenon in nature’:

We shall judge all objects which are not in our own body . . . according to the analogy of this body. We shall therefore assume that as, on the one hand, they are representation, just like our body . . . so on the other hand,
if we set aside their existence as the subject’s representation, what still remains over must be, according to its inner nature, the same as what in ourselves we call will. If, therefore, the material world is to be something more than our mere representation, we must say that, besides being the representation, and hence in itself and of its inmost nature, it is what we find immediately in ourselves as will. (ibid.: 105)

Now it may seem natural to insist that once Schopenhauer has accepted Kant’s distinction between representation or things as they appear and those things as they are in themselves it is completely illegitimate of him to make any further claims about the real nature of the in itself. But in fact Kant himself was willing to make a claim about the determinate nature of the in itself, at least about the human self as it is in itself, namely that the otherwise indeterminate concept of our real self can be made determinate through the concept of a rational will governed by the moral law.14 Schopenhauer’s departure from Kant lies not in his willingness to make any claim about the noumenal, but in the fact that insists (following Schelling’s 1809 Essence of Human Freedom, which he had closely studied and annotated) that our own underlying reality and by extension that of the rest of nature is thoroughly non-rational will, and that rationality is only one more superficial feature of appearance like spatiality, temporality, and causality which does not characterize will at its deepest level.15 ‘Every person invariably has purposes and motives by which he guides his conduct; and he is always able to give an account of his particular actions. But if he were asked why he wills generally, or why in general he wills to exist, he would have no answer; indeed, the question would seem to him absurd. This would really be the expression of his consciousness that he himself is nothing but will’ (WWR, §29 163). For Schopenhauer, further, the non-rational nature of the will means that it never leads to a feeling of pleasure in the realization of our potential for rationality, what Kant called ‘contentment’ or ‘moral feeling’,16 but only to an endless striving which has no stable, unconditionally valuable goal and which therefore can never be completely satisfied. ‘Absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the will in itself, which is an endless striving. . . . human endeavours and desires . . . buoy us up with the vain hope that their fulfillment is always the final goal of willing. But as soon as they are attained, they no longer look the same, and so are soon forgotten . . . and are really, although not admittedly, always laid aside as vanished illusions’ (ibid.: 164). The nature of the will that is the underlying reality of both ourselves and everything else in nature means that we are apparently condemned to a painful cycle of frustration in which even the realization of our desires turns out to be nothing but the source of another unfulfilled desire, a cycle that would be ended by nothing but death. The will and rationality which for Schelling in The Essence of Human Freedom must be able to come apart in order to mark our difference from God must come apart for Schopenhauer, perhaps because for him there is no God to guarantee even the possibility of the reunion of these two contrary principles.
The first step of Schopenhauer’s aesthetics, however, is to transform Kant’s account of disinterestedness as a characteristic of aesthetic experience that allows us to make intersubjectively valid judgments of taste into the negative pleasure of at least a temporary respite from this cycle of frustration that is afforded by the experience of beauty. Schopenhauer’s thought (presented in Book III) is that ordinarily we set ourselves on the possession of particular objects that we expect to fulfill desires, but that it is possible so to immerse ourselves in the perception of an object that we can actually forget our inevitably unsatisfying desire to possess or consume it, at least for a while. In such a state we,

\[\ldots\] devote the whole power of our mind to perception \ldots and let our whole consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether it be a landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag, a building, or anything else. We lose ourselves entirely in this object \ldots; we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object \ldots Thus at the same time, the person who is involved in this perception is no longer an individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; he is pure will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge. (WWR, §34 178–9)

This state of relief from the pain of particularized desire, a strictly negative form of pleasure, is achieved by perception, which is a form of cognition itself rather than a play with cognitive powers, although Schopenhauer’s initial suggestion that it is achieved through the perception of particulars qua particulars is misleading; it is achieved through the cognition of the general form of the kind of expression of the underlying reality of will that the particular object is: ‘If, therefore, the object has to such an extent passed out of all relation to something outside it, and the subject has passed out of all relation to the will, what is thus known is no longer the individual thing as such, but the Idea, the eternal form, the immediate objectivity of the will at this grade’ (ibid.: 179). The disinterested pleasure of Kant’s free play of our cognitive powers with aesthetic ideas is transformed into relief at the liberation of the will from its unsatisfiable obsession with particulars through the cognition of the general forms or Platonic ideas of the expression of the will itself in aesthetic experience.17

The cognitive rather than play-character of Schopenhauer’s theory of ideas is immediately apparent in his theory of art, including his theory of genius as the source of art, his comments about the reception of art, and his classification of the arts as types of representations of the ideas—until he reaches music, which represents the will itself rather than any of its other objectifications. Following his initial introduction of the theory of ideas as the objects of timeless, painless, will-less contemplation, Schopenhauer illustrates the contrast between the ‘different grades at which’ the ‘objectivity’ of the ‘will as thing-in-itself’ appears, ‘i.e., the Ideas themselves, from the mere phenomenon of the Ideas in the form of the principle of sufficient reason, the restricted method of knowledge of individuals’ (WWR, §35 181), with examples drawn from nature: the shape of particular
clouds at particular moments is mere phenomenon, but the very fact that ‘as elastic vapour they are pressed together, driven off, spread out, and torn apart by the force of the wind’ shows that ‘this is their nature, this is the essence of the forces that are objectified in them, this is the Idea’ (ibid.: 182). (We have to take the identification of physical forces of the sort that are mentioned as the phenomenal expression or objectification of a thing-in-itself that is will as a leap of metaphysical faith: there can be no further evidence for it than the experience of will in our own cases that Schopenhauer earlier mentioned.) But in the ensuing sections, Schopenhauer makes it clear that the primary way in which we encounter Ideas and enjoy the benefits of contemplating them is through art, and here he makes clear the cognitive character of art and of our response to it:

What kind of knowledge is it that considers what continues to exist outside and independently of all relations ... the true content of phenomena ... known with equal truth for all time, in a word, the Ideas that are the immediate and adequate objectivity of the thing-in-itself, of the will? It is art, the work of genius. It repeats the eternal ideas apprehended through pure contemplation, the essential and abiding element in all the phenomena of the world. According to the material in which it repeats, it is sculpture, painting, poetry, or music. Its only source is knowledge of the Ideas; its sole aim is communication of this knowledge. (WWR, §36 184–5)

While natural things might occasionally suggest their own Ideas and dispose us toward contemplation, art actively and therefore presumably more reliably and frequently ‘plucks the object of its contemplation from the stream of the world’s course, and holds it isolated before it’. 18

Schopenhauer accordingly describes genius, the ability to create art, in strictly cognitive terms. Genius consists in the exceptional capacity for the recognition of timeless Ideas through the particularities of phenomena and in the exceptional capacity for the communication of such cognition. First, the heightened capacity for cognition: ‘Only through the pure contemplation ... which becomes absorbed entirely in the object, are the Ideas comprehended; and the nature of genius consists precisely in the preeminent ability for such contemplation. ... the gift of genius is nothing but the most complete objectivity, i.e., the objective tendency of the mind ... Accordingly, genius is the capacity to remain in a state of pure perception, to lose oneself in perception’. And ‘For genius to appear in an individual, it is as if a measure of the power of knowledge must have fallen to his lot far exceeding that required for the service of an individual will’ (ibid.: 185). Second, the exceptional capacity for the communication of such cognition: while all people must have the capacity to contemplate the Ideas and through that contemplation to obtain relief from the demands of their will to some degree, otherwise the effect of art would be entirely lost on them, they have the capacity to recognize or discover ideas to a ‘lesser and different degree’ than the genius; and the genius in turn excels the rest of mankind not merely in the capacity to have such ideas but also in the capacity to
retain them and convey them through a ‘voluntary and intentional work, such repetition being the work of art. Through this he communicates to others the Idea he has grasped’. The gift of the genius is the twofold gift of cognition and communication, although the latter can to some extent be acquired: ‘that he knows the essential in things which lies outside all relations, is the gift of genius and is inborn; but that he able to lend us this gift, to let us see with his eyes, is acquired, and is the technical side of art’ (WWR, §37 194–5). The key point is not so much whether one aspect of genius is more innate than the other, however, but that it has these two aspects. In this regard, the structure of Schopenhauer’s analysis of genius replicates that of Kant’s, with the key difference that the element of play is missing from the experience of both the genius and the audience. For Kant, genius consisted in the ability to create a free play of the imagination with an idea and then to communicate that to the audience in a way which would allow the audience not just to apprehend the content of the artist’s idea but also to enjoy a free play of their mental powers in some way analogous to but not fully determined by the free play of the artist—without that, the experience would not be an aesthetic experience for Kant. For Schopenhauer, however, although the genius must be active in plucking an idea out of the phenomena, he does not play with the idea, but simply contemplates it, and facilitates the contemplation of it in his audience, by means of which they are both, to some degree or other, transformed into will-less and therefore painless pure subjects of knowledge.

Throughout this cognitivist account, Schopenhauer’s theme remains that aesthetic experience offers the negative pleasure of relief, although only momentary, from the incessant frustration of the will. But there is a hint in Schopenhauer that aesthetic pleasure may have a positive side, a sheer pleasure in knowing that does not presuppose any antecedent frustration from which knowledge offers an escape. In §38, Schopenhauer says that there are ‘two inseparable constituent parts’ in the ‘aesthetic method of consideration’, namely ‘knowledge of the object not as individual thing, but as Platonic Idea . . .; and the self-consciousness of the knower, not as individual, but as pure, will-less subject of knowledge’, and he then adds that the pleasure produced by contemplation of an aesthetic object arises sometimes more from one of these sources than the other (WWR, §39 195–6). Here he is alluding to this theory that in the case of beauty the Idea presents itself to us (or at least the genius) as if it were immediately in the object, whereas in the case of the sublime we are more conscious of a struggle to isolate the Idea out of the experience of the object. In the case of beauty, ‘that purely objective frame of mind is facilitated and favoured from without by accommodating objects’ (197), whereas in the case of the sublime ‘that state of pure knowing is obtained first of all by a conscious and violent tearing away from the relations of the same object to the will . . . by a free exaltation, accompanied by consciousness, beyond the will and the knowledge related to it’ (WWR, §39 202). But in the opening paragraph of his discussion of the sublime, Schopenhauer does describe the ‘subjective part of aesthetic pleasure’ as ‘that pleasure in so far as it is delight in the mere knowledge of perception as such’ (200). Whether he intended it thus or not, this remark suggests that we might take
pleasure in the contemplation of Ideas even if we did not need to be relieved from frustration by that contemplation. So here Schopenhauer hints at a return to the purely positive account of aesthetic pleasure characteristic of Kant (and most other 18th century writers), and to prepare the way for a return to this emphasis in subsequent aesthetics. But even Schopenhauer’s suggestion of a positive pleasure in aesthetic experience remains firmly linked to his interpretation of this experience as an exceptional form of cognition rather than a free play with our cognitive powers that is not aimed at actual cognition.19

Schopenhauer’s theory of art as the genius’s vehicle for the repetition and presentation of the Platonic Ideas leads him to a classification of the arts. Schopenhauer’s classification begins with architecture as the medium which, insofar as it is considered ‘merely as a fine art and apart from its provision for useful purposes’, brings to ‘clearer perceptiveness some of those Ideas that are the lowest grades of the will’s objectivity’, such Ideas as ‘gravity, cohesion, rigidity, hardness’, and so on, ‘those first, simplest, and dullest visibilities of the will’ (WWR, §43 214). Schopenhauer then mentions both horticulture and landscape and still-life painting as arts which present the Ideas of the objectification of the will in vegetable life, a form of its objectification that is more advanced than the mechanical forces presented by architecture but is still far from its objectification in human character and action (WWR, §44: 218–19). From these arts, Schopenhauer advances to historical painting and sculpture, which present the outward forms of isolated manifestations of the will in human actions (§§45–49), and then to poetry, which reveals ‘that Idea which is the highest grade of the will’s objectivity, namely the presentation of man in the connected series of his efforts and actions’ (WWR, §51 244). His discussion of poetry culminates with his own version of the conventional wisdom that tragedy is the ‘summit of poetic art’: for Schopenhauer this is so because tragedy presents more effectively than any other art-form ‘The unspeakable pain, the wretchedness and misery of mankind, the triumph of wickedness, the scornful mastery of chance, and the irretrievable fall of the just and the innocent’ (ibid.: 253). Then Schopenhauer turns to music, which is for him the highest rather than the lowest of the arts, because it ‘is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but [is] a copy of the will itself, the objectivity of which are the Ideas. For this reason the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, because it ‘is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but music of the essence’ (WWR, §52 257). Music is thus on a par with the other manifestations of the will rather than with the other arts as copies of the manifestations of the will; music is the art that crosses the Platonic barrier between art and other ordinary things by being a copy of reality itself rather than a copy of a copy of reality itself. From this point of view, Schopenhauer then interprets the different aspects of music as ‘copies’ of different aspects of the will itself rather than of its objectifications: the deepest tones of harmony are a manifestation of inorganic forces; in ‘the whole of the ripienos … between the bass and the leading voice singing the melody’ he recognizes ‘the whole gradation of the Ideas in which the will objectifies itself’, and finally in melody he
recognizes ‘the highest grade of the will’s objectification, the intellectual life and
endeavour of man’ (258–9).

Schopenhauer’s accounts of both tragedy and music seem to present a paradox:
the contemplation of beauty, especially artistic beauty, is supposed to present us
with timeless ideas the contemplation of which will release us from the frustration
of our timebound wills; but tragedy presents us with such affecting representa-
tions of human suffering, and music supposedly presents the will and all of its
indifference to our own concerns to us with even greater directness, that it is
difficult to see how we can take pleasure in these arts, except perhaps to the
limited extent that Schopenhauer recognizes a positive pleasure in cognition as
such—a form of pleasure, however, which he hardly emphasizes and does not
seem adequate to account for the profundity of our pleasure in these arts.
Schopenhauer recognizes the threat of this paradox and confronts it directly in his
discussion of music. He writes that music ‘never expresses the phenomenon, but
only the inner nature, the in-itself, of every phenomenon, the will itself’.

Therefore music does not express this or that particular gaiety and
definite pleasure, this or that affliction, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety,
merriment, or peace of mind the other, joy, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety,
merriment, peace of mind themselves, to a certain extent in the abstract,
their essential nature, without any accessories, and so also without the
motives for them. (WWR, §52 260)

Schopenhauer’s thought is that contemplation of the universal ideas always
turns our attention away from the frustrating particularities of our personal
situations, even when those universal ideas are themselves the ideas of pain,
suffering, and so on. ‘It is just this universality’, which Schopenhauer ascribes
uniquely to music, although one would think that it could be achieved by tragedy
as well, ‘that gives it that high value as the panacea of all our sorrows’ (262).
Music ‘reproduces all the emotions of our innermost being, but entirely without
reality and remote from its pain’ (164).

Schopenhauer’s solution to what threatens to be the greatest paradox for art—
his version of the traditional paradox of tragedy perhaps—depends entirely on
his theory of the redemptive power of the contemplation of universals, and thus
confirms the thoroughly cognitivist character of his aesthetic theory. He has
transformed Kant’s idea of the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgment into the
idea of a literal release from painful self-interest through cognition, Kant’s
conception of the aesthetic ideas as that with which the mind plays in art into that
which the mind knows in art, and Kant’s conception of the genius as the one who
can both more freely play with ideas than others yet communicate a sense of that
free play to others into the conception of one who more readily knows than
others and can communicate that knowledge and its ensuing benefit to others.
Schopenhauer has disrupted Kant’s delicate synthesis of the ancient idea of
aesthetic experience as a form of knowledge and the novel idea of aesthetic
experience as the free play of our mental powers and turned it back into the
traditional theory of aesthetic experience as a heightened form of cognition alone, although his account of the cognition in aesthetic experience naturally reflects the innovations in his account of cognition itself. Whether this reversion to the fundamental idea of traditional aesthetics was a good thing or not, I will venture to judge, but it was certainly influential: the strictly cognitivist approach to aesthetics would be continued by Hegel, who first lectured on aesthetics the year after *The World as Will and Representation* was first published, and would continue to dominate aesthetic theory at least until the time of Nietzsche, and in some quarters well beyond (consider, for example, Lukács and Adorno). That story is beyond the scope of this chapter, but here I will conclude with a comment on a famous remark of Nietzsche’s about the aesthetics of both Kant and Schopenhauer.

4. **Nietzsche**

In the third essay of his late work *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), entitled ‘What do Ascetic Ideals Mean?’, Nietzsche claimed that Kant looked at art and beauty from the point of view of the spectator rather than the artist, and that ‘Schopenhauer made use of the Kantian version of the aesthetic problem,—although he definitely did not view it with Kantian eyes’. Nietzsche writes:

> Kant intended to pay art a tribute when he singled out from the qualities of beauty those which constitute the glory of knowledge: impersonality and universality. Whether or not this was essentially a mistake is not what I am dealing with here; all I want to underline is that Kant, like all philosophers, just considered art and beauty from the position of ‘spectator’, instead of viewing the aesthetic problem through the experiences of the artist (the creator), and thus inadvertently introduced the ‘spectator’ himself into the concept ‘beautiful’. I just wish this ‘spectator’ had been sufficiently known to the philosophers of beauty!—I mean as a great personal fact and experience, as a fund of strong personal experiences, desires, suprises and pleasures in the field of beauty!'

Nietzsche continues to explain that Schopenhauer specifically adopted from Kant the idea that aesthetic experience is ‘without interest’ and thus impersonal, an idea that Nietzsche regards as the epitomy of the ‘spectator’ approach to art, and fails to realize precisely how personal his conception of the experience of beauty is: Schopenhauer’s conception of beauty is based on ‘the strongest, most personal interest possible: that of the tortured person who frees himself from his torture’, specifically from the sexual torture of a twenty-six year old man, that is, presumably, a sexually unsatisfied twenty-six year old man. According to Nietzsche, Schopenhauer’s aesthetics is one giant feat of sublimation.

I do not want to dispute Nietzsche’s diagnosis of the psychological sources of Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory: perhaps he is entirely right about that, perhaps sexual sublimation is the psychological source of the sixty-six-year-old Kant’s aesthetic theory (though that seems a little less likely). What I do want to suggest
is that Nietzsche’s claim that both Kant and Schopenhauer offer aesthetic theories of the spectator rather than of the artist is not entirely right. Although Kant’s initial analysis of the judgment of taste might well focus on the experience and the epistemological position of the spectator and the critic, his theory of fine art is couched in the form of a theory of creative genius rather than that of a theory of the spectator’s response. And this is not just a façon de parler: his emphasis is on the free play of the artist’s imagination with his ideas and his materials, and he suggests, almost just in passing, that the artist must communicate his own experience in creating to the spectator, who must then to some extent recreate for himself an experience like the artist’s, but not exactly the artist’s experience—for then his experience would not be one of free play. In other words, it seems fair to say that Kant bases his conception of the spectator’s experience of beauty on his conception of the artist’s experience of it, rather than the converse.

Schopenhauer takes over the Kantian figure of the genius, whom he sees as especially gifted at separating the wheat of Platonic Ideas from the chaff of ordinary, individuated experience that encases them, and then at communicating that grasp of ideas to the audience of less cognitively gifted persons, who are capable of recognizing the Platonic Ideas and being transported into the state of pure will-less, subject-less being once they are led to these ideas but who could not quite get there on their own. So again it would not seem fair to suggest that Schopenhauer does not privilege the role of the creative artist in his aesthetic theory. What would be fair to suggest, however, is precisely what I have argued in this chapter, namely that Schopenhauer does have a primarily cognitive and contemplative conception of artistic creation itself: it is primarily a matter of grasping an idea that is out there to be grasped rather than inventing something new by means of imagination. So perhaps we should conclude that while Nietzsche’s claim that Kant conceives of the experience of art and beauty from the point of the spectator misses how much Kant’s conception of the experience of the spectator is itself based on the experience of the artist, it would not be wrong to think that Schopenhauer’s cognitivist conception of artistic genius is in fact a spectatorial account of aesthetic experience. Nietzsche’s remark, while wrong about Kant, thus confirms my interpretation of Schopenhauer.

NOTES

1 The present chapter is drawn from a longer piece that discusses Schelling’s philosophy of art as well as Schopenhauer’s.
4 See Guyer 1993a: 50–61.
5 References are to Kant 2000; the Academy edition pagination used here is indicated in the margins of this edition.
6 For my most recent approach to the free play of the faculties, see Guyer 2006. See also Stolzenberg 2000; Rush 2001; and Zuckert 2007.
7 For discussion, see Guyer 1997: chs. 7–9, and Allison 2001: 160–92.
8 For criticism, see Guyer 1997: 294–311; for defense, see Allison 2001: 236–69.
9 On the succession of Kant’s theory by the ‘speculative theory of art,’ see Schaeffer 2000.
13 Translations from Schopenhauer 1958. All citations will be from Volume I, the original portion of the work published in 1818 (dated 1819), so the reference to the volume will be omitted from the parenthetical references.
15 For further discussion, see Guyer 1999.
17 See Janaway 1996.
18 For discussion of Schopenhauer’s theory of the Platonic Ideas in art and his classification of the arts on the basis of that theory, see Foster 1999.
19 I have developed the argument of this paragraph more fully in Guyer 1996.
21 For discussion of Nietzsche on Schopenhauer’s aesthetics, see Soll 1998: 107–11.
25 I have developed this contrast between Kant’s and Schopenhauer’s conceptions of genius in a larger historical context in Guyer 2003.

REFERENCES

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Schopenhauer accorded great significance to aesthetic experience—a fact that may at least partly explain the appeal his work has had for artists: Wagner, Mahler, Hardy, Conrad, Mann, Proust, Yeats (and the list could go on) all at least claimed to have been influenced by it. As I shall argue in what follows, however, certain fundamental elements of Schopenhauer’s own ‘metaphysics of nature’ make it hard to see how aesthetic experience, as he conceives it, is so much as possible in the terms of his system. Given Schopenhauer’s claims about the interdependence of the various aspects of his metaphysical system—‘Metaphysics of nature, metaphysics of morals, and metaphysics of the beautiful mutually presuppose one another’, he says, ‘and only when they are connected do they complete the explanation of the true nature of things and of existence generally’ (BM: 41)—and the centrality to his ‘metaphysics of the beautiful’ of his account of aesthetic experience, this represents a potentially devastating problem for Schopenhauer. My purpose here is to show how the problem arises, and to suggest how it might be resolved.

Schopenhauer introduces his aesthetic theory, in the opening section of Book III of The World as Will and Representation, by rehearsing a number of themes that he has introduced in the first two Books. The obverse, so to speak, of the phenomenal world is Will: ‘the innermost essence, the kernel, of every particular thing and also of the whole’ (WWR I: 110). Will is manifest or objectified in the phenomenal world, at various grades, or in varying degrees of clarity: its ‘passage into visibility, its objectification, has gradations as endless as those between the feeblest twilight and the brightest sunlight, the loudest tone and the softest echo’ (WWR I: 128). And the patterns of Will’s objectification in phenomena are the (as Schopenhauer insists, Platonic) Ideas: ‘the eternal forms of things’ (WWR I: 129). In short, individual phenomena are all objectifications (at one grade or another) of Will; the Ideas are the universal forms which particular kinds of individual phenomena instantiate.

Aesthetic experience, as Schopenhauer understands it, is essentially experience in which a subject apprehends, or has intuitive knowledge of, the Ideas; this is his version of the thought, familiar in the history of aesthetic theory, that aesthetic experience involves transcendence of the particular and access to the universal. However, as he reiterates in his introduction to his aesthetic theory, ‘the universal form of the representation as it comes to the knowledge of the individual as such’ is the principle of sufficient reason; the knowledge of an
individual ‘as such’, in other words, is structured by, and hence limited to what can be grasped in terms of, spatial, temporal and causal relations. And he reminds us further that the Ideas do not ‘enter into’ the principle of sufficient reason (‘neither plurality nor change belongs to’ them); which is to say that the Ideas do not exist in space and time, and cannot be grasped in terms of spatial, temporal or causal relations. It follows that the Ideas cannot be objects of knowledge—by which he means intuitive knowledge—for human beings qua individual knowing subjects. As he puts it:

... as this principle [of sufficient reason] is the form under which all knowledge of the subject comes, in so far as the subject knows as an individual, the Ideas will also lie quite outside the sphere of its knowledge as such. Therefore, if the Ideas are to become object of knowledge, this can happen only by abolishing individuality in the knowing subject. (WWR I: 169)

Intuitive knowledge of the Ideas, in short, will be available only to a knowing subject who is not, or does not ‘know as’, an individual. And as intuitive knowledge of the Ideas is precisely what is given in aesthetic experience, it follows that the possibility of aesthetic experience depends ‘abolishing individuality’ in the subject.

Understanding Schopenhauer’s conception of aesthetic experience (and indeed his aesthetic theory as a whole) thus depends on getting clear about just what he takes the abolition of individuality to involve. To begin with, we should note that he understands individuality in terms of the embodiment of a knowing subject: as he puts it at first, ‘the subject of knowing ... appears as an individual only through his identity with his body’ (WWR I: 100). A few pages later, he refines this claim, stating that ‘The knowing subject is an individual precisely by reason of this special relation to the one body which, considered apart from this, is for him only a representation among all his representations’ (WWR I: 103, my emphasis). The ‘special relation’ between knowing subject and body that Schopenhauer refers to here is not that of identity, but rather concerns the way in which an individual knowing subject is conscious of his body; it is an epistemological, rather than a logical, relation. To summarise very briefly, his thesis is that we have ‘double knowledge of our own body’. On the one hand, an individual’s body appears as ‘mere representation of the knowing subject, like all the other objects of this world of perception’. However, it also ‘occurs in consciousness in quite another way, toto genere different’: the individual is conscious of his body as an expression or manifestation of his will. ‘My body’, as he puts it, ‘is the objectivity of my will’ (ibid.). And it is ‘by reason of’ my consciousness of my body as the objectification of my will that I am conscious of myself as—indeed, that I am—an individual.

Schopenhauer’s argument on this matter is fraught with difficulties. But for my purposes here, what is important is the conclusion that he wants to establish, which is that an individual comprises a knowing subject and a willing subject, or,
more prosaically, an intellect and a will.\textsuperscript{3} For it is the nature of the relationship between intellect and will, as Schopenhauer understands it, that restricts the individual ‘as such’ to knowledge structured by the forms of the principle of sufficient reason, and that makes knowledge of the Ideas—and hence aesthetic experience—unattainable for the subject who ‘knows as an individual’. In contrast to the familiar philosophical thought that ‘the true and real inner nature or kernel of man’ is his ‘knowing consciousness’—the thought, that is, that man is essentially a rational animal, or a soul, or \textit{res cogitans}—Schopenhauer holds that at the core of individuality is the individual will, which ‘is related to consciousness, in other words to knowledge, [to intellect,] as substance to accident, as something illuminated to light, as the string to the sounding board’ (\textit{WWR} II: 199). Intellect, he maintains, ‘turns out to be what is secondary, subordinate, and conditioned’ (\textit{WWR} II: 198): it is both dependent on and subservient to the individual will. And that will has, so to speak, limited interests: what it ‘aims at and attains in man is essentially the same as . . . what its goal is in the animal, nourishment and propagation’ (\textit{WWR} II: 279–80). The individual will, in short, is concerned with other things only insofar as they have anything to do with its own maintenance and survival, which is to say, with things as they stand in relation to it. Thus an intellect working in subordination or subservience to an individual will—which is just what it is for a knowing subject ‘to know as an individual’—‘really knows mere relations of things, primarily their relations to the will itself, to which it belongs, . . . but also, with a view to the completeness of this knowledge, the relations of things to one another’ (\textit{WWR} II: 363). Again,

\begin{quote}
As it is the principle of sufficient reason that places . . . objects in . . . relation to the body and so to the will, the sole endeavour of knowledge, serving this will, will be to get to know concerning objects just those relations that are laid down by the principle of sufficient reason, and thus to follow their many different connexions in space, time and causality. For only through these is the object interesting to the individual, in other words, has it a relation to the will. (\textit{WWR} I: 177)
\end{quote}

Schopenhauer’s thought, then, is that the individual knowing subject is restricted to knowledge governed by the forms of the principle of sufficient reason inasmuch as in such a subject intellect is subordinate to and ‘conditioned’ by an individual will that is concerned only with things constituted under the forms of that principle.

We are now in a position to see what Schopenhauer is getting at in his talk of the abolition of individuality as a precondition of intuitive knowledge of the Ideas and thus of aesthetic experience. His argument, in effect, is this: in order to have intuitive knowledge of the Ideas, which do not ‘enter into’ the principle of sufficient reason, intellect must be capable of cognition that is not conditioned by the forms of that principle; intellect functioning in subordination to an individual will is restricted to cognition that is so conditioned; only for a subject in whom
intellect is not functioning in subordination to an individual will, therefore, will knowledge of the Ideas be available. What the abolition of individuality must amount to, then—what intuitive knowledge of the Ideas, and hence aesthetic experience, depends on—is the functioning of intellect unconstrained by the demands of an individual will: the emancipation, so to speak, of intellect from its subordination to the individual will.

An essential characteristic of aesthetic experience, as Schopenhauer conceives it, is thus its ‘will-lessness’—this is his distinctive take on the familiar thought that aesthetic experience is defined in terms of its ‘disinterestedness’. Whether or not the conception of aesthetic experience as fundamentally ‘will-less’ is remotely plausible is an issue that has been taken up by a number of commentators. Less often considered—or indeed, even noticed—is that it is questionable whether this idea, whatever its plausibility, is one to which Schopenhauer is really entitled. This latter question becomes unignorable, however, when we look more closely at the theoretical underpinnings of his conception of intellect as essentially ‘conditioned’ by, or ‘subordinate’ to, will. For in light of these, it is far from clear how Schopenhauer can consistently regard the functioning of intellect unconstrained by the demands of an individual will—and hence aesthetic experience, as he conceives it—as so much as possible.

The thought that underlies Schopenhauer’s conception of the relation between an individual will and intellect is that the former, like everything else in the world of representation, is a manifestation or objectification of Will, the ‘innermost essence’ of the world. He argues that the higher the grade of objectification, or Idea, that an individual will represents or instantiates (that is to say, the more ‘complete’ or adequate an expression of the nature of Will it is), the more various will be that will’s needs, and the more complex the conditions required for its maintenance and flourishing. And Schopenhauer’s hypothesis is that intellect evolved, as it were, in order to meet those needs and help satisfy those conditions. He writes:

> Just as a species of animals appears equipped with hoofs, claws, hands, wings, horns or teeth according to the aims of its will, so is it furnished with a more or less developed brain, whose function is the intelligence requisite for its continued existence. Thus the more complicated the organization becomes in the ascending series of animals, the more manifold do its needs become … Accordingly we see the organ of intelligence, the cerebral system, together with the organs of sense, keep pace with an increase of wants and needs, and with the complication of the organism. (WWR II: 205)

Intellect, Schopenhauer holds, is ‘the brain’s product, or rather its activity’, serving ‘the purpose of self-preservation [of the organism] by regulating its relations with the external world’ (WWR II: 200, 201). And inasmuch as the physical organism is the objectification of the individual will—‘My body is the objectivity of my will’ (ibid.)—intellect serves the purpose of preservation of that
will. In short, intellect is ‘a mere tool in the service of the will’, a tool ‘which is more or less complete and complicated according to the requirements of this service’ (WWR II: 205), and ‘completely the servant of the will’ (WWR I: 176).

It turns out, then, that Schopenhauer has a quasi-evolutionary account of the relation between intellect and individual will. The former is bound, and subordinate, to the latter in virtue of the fact that it has developed to fulfil a particular function: that of meeting the will’s survival needs. And it is precisely because ‘it came into being for this service’, Schopenhauer suggests, that ‘with the animals, this subjection of knowledge to the will can never be eliminated’ (WWR I: 177). But then how is emancipation of the intellect from its service to the will supposed to be possible in human beings? If, as Schopenhauer holds, the intellect in human beings, just as in non-human animals, is ‘by its nature . . . completely the servant of the will’, what room is there for the idea that in human beings intellect can function independently of the demands of the will? That is to say, what conceptual room is there for the idea of ‘abolishing’ individuality, for the idea that human beings have the capacity to know other than as individuals, to have knowledge that is not governed by the principle of sufficient reason? In short, what conceptual space has Schopenhauer left for the possibility of aesthetic experience?

David Hamlyn has argued that Schopenhauer can have no good answer to these questions. As Hamlyn has it, ‘There is an obvious problem about how it is possible for someone to free himself or to allow his intellect freedom from the dominance of the will so as to contemplate the Idea without being subject to the usual constraints of the principle of sufficient reason. . . It is impossible to see why the will should make it possible for anything of the kind to happen’. Hamlyn’s point (by implication, at any rate) is that Schopenhauer’s conception of aesthetic experience is simply inconsistent with his metaphysics of intellect and will, and hence that Schopenhauer’s ‘metaphysics of the beautiful’, in which his account of aesthetic experience plays a fundamental role, so far from being an integral part of his metaphysical system as a whole, is actually inconsistent with it. The aesthetic theory then starts to look suspiciously ad hoc, something that Schopenhauer is just helping himself to, as it were, perhaps as an excuse to expound his preconceived, and passionately held, ideas about the merits and demerits of various artists and movements within the arts.

Avoiding this conclusion—and the principle of charity in interpretation, if nothing else, demands that we must at least attempt to do so—depends on finding in Schopenhauer’s work a theoretically consistent and coherent answer, or at the least the resources out of which to construct such an answer on his behalf, to the question of how it is possible for the intellect in a human knowing subject to break free from its subordination to the individual will, and hence have knowledge unconstrained by the forms of the principle of sufficient reason. Schopenhauer himself, however, offers little help to anyone attempting to do so, for his treatment of the matter is—given its importance—to say the least surprisingly sketchy. His most explicit treatment of it is in his discussion of the nature of genius, which he conceives as the capacity for sustained aesthetic
contemplation—that is, for sustained apprehension of the Ideas. ‘For genius to appear in an individual’, he writes, ‘it is as if a measure of the power of knowledge must have fallen to his lot far exceeding that required by the service of an individual will; and this superfluity of knowledge having become free, now becomes the subject purified of will, the clear mirror of the inner nature of the world’ (WWR I: 186). Again, the genius is a man ‘whose power of knowledge is, through its excess, withdrawn for a part of his time from the service of his will . . .’ (WWR I: 188, my emphasis).

As they stand, however, these remarks hardly constitute an adequate account of how the emancipation of intellect—its ‘withdrawal’ from the service of the will—is possible. For they simply push the question back, leaving us in need of an account of how ‘superfluity’ or ‘excess’ of intellect is itself so much as possible in the Schopenhauerian scheme. And it is far from obvious how that account is going to proceed, for part and parcel of Schopenhauer’s quasi-evolutionary story about the development of the intellect, according to which ‘Nature has produced [the intellect] for the service of an individual will’, is his endorsement of the lex parsimoniae: ‘Nature does nothing in vain, and creates nothing superfluous’. As he writes,

\[\ldots\text{the brain is more and more perfectly produced in the ascending series of animal organizations. But this enhancement of brain-development, and hence of the intellect and of the clearness of the representation, at each of these ever higher stages, is brought about by the ever-increasing and more complicated need of these phenomena of the [W]ill. This need must always first give rise to it, for without need or want nature (in other words, the [W]ill objectifying itself therein) produces nothing, \ldots in consequence of her lex parsimoniae: Natura nihil agit frustra et nihil facit supervacaneum.} (WWR II: 279)\]

But if the development of intellect is driven, and driven parsimoniously, by the needs of particular kinds of phenomena of Will—that is, by the needs of particular kinds of individual will—what room is there for the possibility of, as he puts it at one point, ‘the knowing faculty having received a considerably more powerful development than is required by the service of the will’ (WWR II: 377)? And that is to say, what room is there for the possibility of any individual having the capacity for apprehension of the Ideas, and hence for aesthetic experience?

Some of Schopenhauer’s remarks about genius suggest an answer: genius, he holds, is not only extremely rare, but ‘something unnatural’, a ‘monstra’ (deformity), an aberration. And given that the essence of genius is superfluity of intellect, this suggests that the latter is to be understood as a ‘glitch’ in nature’s scheme—that nature, even if scrupulously parsimonious, is not perfectly efficient. Now at first glance this looks promising: the idea that superfluity of intellect may come about as an aberration from the norm is surely theoretically coherent and consistent with the quasi-evolutionary account that Schopenhauer gives of the development of intellect and its relation to the will, and with the lex
parsimoniae. Note the implication, however: if intellect’s functioning without regard to the needs of the individual will—and so the apprehension of the Ideas and aesthetic experience—depends on superfluity of intellect, and if the latter occurs only as an aberration, it follows that only an individual in whom such an aberration has occurred—only a genius, in effect—can be a subject of aesthetic experience.

If this were Schopenhauer’s view, it would at the very least indicate that his conception of aesthetic experience is utterly unlike anyone else’s before or since, if not serve as a reductio of that conception. But it is not his view. The business of art, as he sees it, is precisely to make experience of the Ideas possible for those who lack genius: genuine works of art, in his view, represent the experience of the genius in such a way that the ordinary person can perceive in, or through, such works the Ideas that the genius, with his heightened capacity for ‘objective’ perception, apprehends in his experience of nature. Thus he accepts that ‘We must assume as existing in all men that power of recognising in things their Ideas, of divesting themselves for a moment of their personality, unless indeed there are some who are not capable of any aesthetic pleasure at all’ (WWR I: 194–5). And given that assumption, superfluity or excess of intellect, on which this ‘power’ is supposed to depend, clearly cannot be explained as an aberration from the norm—indeed, it suggests that it is the absence of superfluous intellect, if anything, that would constitute an aberration. If the assumption is to be justified, what Schopenhauer owes us is rather an account—one that is consistent with his commitment to the lex parsimoniae and his view that the emergence of intellect is determined by the needs of a particular kind of individual will—of how a degree of intellect that exceeds that required for the service of the will is possible as a quite general, if not universal, phenomenon in human beings.

The fact of the matter is, however, that Schopenhauer offers no such thing. Everything that he says concerning the possibilities of excess or superfluous intellect, of intellect’s functioning without regard to the demands of the individual will, of the capacity for apprehension of the Ideas, makes appeal (explicitly or implicitly) to the notion of genius, and suggests that the actualisation of these possibilities constitutes ‘an exception’, ‘something unnatural’, a rarity, an aberration. And this leaves the thought that the capacity for apprehension of the Ideas is the norm in human beings not merely unsupported, but apparently doubly inconsistent: inconsistent both with his account of the nature of intellect and its relation to will, and with the suggestion that the capacity for apprehension of the Ideas represents a ‘glitch’ in nature’s scheme. As Schopenhauer leaves it, in short, his aesthetic theory seems to be founded on confusion. On the one hand, his philosophy of art (and indeed any claim he might have to be giving an account of aesthetic experience as it has traditionally been conceived) depends on the idea that the ‘power of recognising in things their Ideas’ is one that ‘we must assume as existing in all men’. On the other hand, his account of the nature of intellect and its relation to the individual will apparently pushes him to the claim that this ‘power’ can occur ‘only by way of exception, in genius’ (WWR II: 292).
Before concluding that Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory and philosophy of art are indeed inconsistent with his metaphysics of intellect and will, however, we must consider whether there is anything further to be said—anything more than Schopenhauer himself says—on his behalf. And one possibility is suggested by reflection on his claim that the intellect in human beings, as in other animals, ‘is designed for comprehending those ends on the attainment of which depend individual life and its propagation’ (WWR II: 284). For it seems quite clear that the human intellect is capable of any number of things that could not plausibly be thought of as necessitated by the will’s needs for ‘nourishment and propagation’: think of calculus, for example (the slave boy in Plato’s *Meno* comes to mind) or music-making. Perhaps the capacity to communicate verbally can be explained in terms of the will’s survival needs, but the capacity to sing, or for that matter to play a musical instrument? Furthermore, at least some of these capacities are very common—that is to say, not plausibly accountable as ‘unnatural’, or as rare aberrations from the norm. The thought, then, is this: if there is an explanation of the occurrence of such capacities that is consistent with Schopenhauer’s account of the nature of intellect and its relationship to the individual will, then perhaps that explanation can also be deployed to deliver a coherent (in Schopenhauerian terms) account of how the capacity for apprehension of the Ideas is possible, not just as an aberration, in the genius, but in ‘all men’.

And such an explanation does seem to be available. A piece of computer software, in order to do the job it is designed for, may have to be made sophisticated enough to be capable of doing much more than that job; and (to adapt Schopenhauer’s own metaphor of the intellect as servant of the will) effectively training a person to be an efficient slave may in effect involve giving him the capacity to rebel against his enslavement. We may think of these latter capacities—unintended, and indeed potentially disruptive—as by-products of the design or training in question, or, in the terms of modern evolution theory, as what Stephen Jay Gould has referred to as ‘non-adaptive side consequences’. And although Schopenhauer could have had no truck with the idea of adaptive evolution in species—the Ideas, after all, are ‘the eternal forms of things’, and not subject to change—there is no reason why he could not have understood capacities of the sort mentioned in the previous paragraph as ‘structural by-products’: the capacity for song, for example, which is not in itself necessitated by the survival needs of the individual will as it appears in human beings, as a by-product of the emergence of the physiology of the larynx, vocal cords, etc., which is determined by (what is at least arguably) the survival need of the individual human will for the capacity for verbal communication.

Could the capacity for apprehension of the Ideas, and hence for aesthetic experience, plausibly be understood in the same way? That is, could that capacity be understood in Schopenhauerian terms not as a ‘glitch’, or rare aberration in nature’s scheme, but rather as a by-product of the emergence of those capacities of intellect that are determined by the needs of the individual will in human beings quite generally? Schopenhauer suggests, after all, that the latter capacities are considerable: ‘reason as the faculty for forming abstract concepts’,
‘thoughtfulness, surveying the future and the past, and, as a consequence thereof, deliberation, care, ability for premeditated action independently of the present, and finally the distinct consciousness of the decisions of one’s own will …’ (WWR I: 151). Later he suggests that these capacities depend on the fact that in human beings there is a high degree of ‘separation’ between the part of the nervous system the function of which is ‘to take up the motives from the external world’ (roughly, the cerebrum), and the part whose function is ‘to transmit the motives to the muscles in which the will directly manifests itself’ (roughly, the cerebellum). ‘On the degree of this separation’, Schopenhauer writes, ‘ultimately depend the difference and gradation of the intellectual abilities between the various species of animals, as well as between individual human beings’ (WWR II: 290–291). His thesis is that the capacity for the apprehension of Ideas depends on this separation being great enough to allow the two parts of the nervous system—and hence, in effect, intellect and will—to become, if only temporarily, functionally independent; and he suggests that this degree of separation occurs only as an ‘exception’, in the genius.10 But could he not equally well have held that the degree of separation between the parts of the nervous system at which it becomes possible for intellect to become independent of will is just the degree necessary to make possible rational deliberation, thoughtfulness, self-consciousness, and so on? That is, could he not just as well have held that the intellect’s capacity to function unconstrained by the demands of the individual will (for apprehension of the Ideas, for aesthetic experience) is a by-product of the physiological conditions required to make reason, thoughtfulness and self-consciousness possible, and hence not an ‘exception’ or ‘something unnatural’, but rather the norm in human beings?

Schopenhauer could have taken this line of thought, I suggest; it is perfectly consistent with the essential elements of his account of intellect and will, and in particular with his thesis that the capabilities of the intellect are determined, in accordance with the *lex parsimoniae*, by the needs of the individual will.11 The worry about the by-product hypothesis, however, is that it looks suspiciously ad hoc. This may at least in part explain why Schopenhauer did not in fact adopt it; in any case, it certainly gives us reason to hesitate before offering it as a friendly amendment, so to speak, to the line of thought that he does take. What *reason*, after all, does Schopenhauer give us to suppose that the capacity for apprehension of the Ideas is a by-product of the emergence of rationality, self-consciousness, and so on—that an intellect with the latter capacities must *thereby* have the capacity for apprehension of the Ideas? The hypothesis may be consistent with what Schopenhauer says, but is there anything in what he says that serves to underwrite it?

In the end, I suggest, the best that can be said in answer to this question is that the by-product hypothesis is justified as an inference to the best explanation: if we take as a given Schopenhauer’s thesis that the capabilities of the intellect are determined in accordance with the *lex parsimoniae* by the needs of the individual will, and that those needs do not include the capacity for intuitive knowledge of Ideas, the by-product hypothesis offers the best explanation of why it is that we
do all (or almost all) have that capacity. But this, I suggest, is not the case. As I shall argue in what follows, a better explanation of the occurrence of this capacity—one more deeply rooted in Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of will than either the by-product hypothesis or Schopenhauer’s own suggestion that it represents ‘something unnatural’—is in fact available.

Recall that Schopenhauer conceives of the individual will as an objectification at a particular grade—and in the case of the individual will as it appears in human beings, at the highest grade—of the Will. He is adamant that we cannot intelligibly ask after the Will’s ultimate purpose in objectifying itself as it does, for that question presupposes that we can ascribe motives to the Will, and ‘the principle of sufficient reason, of which the law of motivation is also a form, extends only to the phenomenon, not to the thing-in-itself. Everywhere a ground can be given only of phenomena as such, only of individual things, never of the Will itself’ (WWR I: 163). But this does not mean that nothing can be said concerning what the Will is about in objectifying itself at different grades: in doing so it is ‘striving’, Schopenhauer says, for ‘higher and higher objectification’: ‘The one [W]ill, that objectifies itself in all Ideas, strives for the highest possible objectification . . .’ (WWR I: 145). Schopenhauer’s point is that although it makes no sense to ask why the Will is striving for this, we can infer that it is doing so from our observation of the phenomenal world, and in particular from our observation of the conflict and struggle between the phenomena of different Ideas, something that he suggests is only ‘intelligible’ in light of the Will’s striving for ‘higher and higher objectification’.

What makes one grade of the Will’s objectification—one Idea—‘higher’ than another? Schopenhauer’s suggestion is that in a higher grade, the character of the Will is more adequately expressed, more ‘visible’ (WWR I: 128), than it is in a lower grade of objectification. The inference that the Will strives for ever higher objectification, then, is in effect the inference that the Will strives for forms of objectification that increasingly adequately express or reveal or make visible its character. And this provokes the question: express or reveal or make that character visible to whom, or to what? This is not to ask after the Will’s motives: the question is not ‘to whom or what is the Will striving to make itself visible?’, but rather ‘to whom or what is it that the Will becomes visible, is more or less adequately expressed?’ The answer is suggested by the epigraph to The World as Will and Representation: ‘That nature might in the end fathom itself?’. If everything in the phenomenal world is an objectification of Will—if Will is all that there really is, as Schopenhauer holds—then his view has to be that the Will strives to become increasingly visible to itself.

Recognising this, I suggest, is the key to understanding how Schopenhauer’s conception of aesthetic experience does in fact cohere with the fundamentals of his metaphysical scheme. But to make this plausible, I need first to defuse an objection that is bound to arise at this point: surely, it will be said, what I have just said about Schopenhauer’s understanding of the nature of Will renders his metaphysics thoroughly (and as he would have seen it, horribly) Hegelian; and surely it is inconsistent with his obviously anti-Hegelian statement that ‘absence
of all aim, or all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the [W]ill in itself, which is an endless striving’ (WWR I: 164). But the objection is mistaken. The thesis that Schopenhauer is expressing in this statement is simply that the Will lacks a telos—as he says a few lines later, its striving can ‘never [be] fulfilled or satisfied’. And this is perfectly consistent with the claim that it is striving for visibility or adequate expression; for the latter claim does not entail that achieving full visibility or adequate expression is anything like the purpose of the Will, something that could satisfy or fulfil it, or bring its striving to an end.

However, the objection is likely to continue, surely what I have suggested about Schopenhauer’s understanding of the character of the Will is inconsistent with his many statements to the effect that the Will is ‘blind’? For the thought that the Will strives to make itself visible to itself, or to express itself adequately for itself, is tantamount to the suggestion that the Will is striving for self-knowledge; and Schopenhauer’s many remarks about the blindness of the Will’s strivings, it will be said, indicate his unequivocal commitment to the impossibility of any such thing. For example:

The will, considered purely in itself, is devoid of knowledge, and is only a blind, irresistible urge, as we see it appear in inorganic and vegetable nature and in their laws, and also in the vegetative part of our own life. (WWR I: 275)

Elsewhere, apparently similarly, he states that ‘The will, which constitutes our being-in-itself, is of a simple nature; it merely wills and does not know’ (WWR II: 499); and other very similar statements might easily be adduced. But if Schopenhauer understands the Will as incapable of knowledge, surely it is nonsensical to suppose that he understands it as striving for self-knowledge?

Again, however, the objection misses the mark. The two statements I have just quoted concerning the will’s blindness or lack of knowledge are in fact making quite distinct points, and neither is inconsistent with my claim that in Schopenhauer’s view the Will is striving to make itself increasingly visible to itself. In the passage from which the second statement is taken, Schopenhauer is contrasting will with intellect (in attempting to explain the fear of death in human beings), and it is clear that ‘the will’ here refers not to that which underlies the world of representation, but to the individual will: to that ‘which constitutes our being-in itself’, as he puts it—the ‘being-in itself’ of the individual creature. And his view that the individual will, considered in itself—that is, without intellect—is incapable of knowledge is perfectly consistent with the thought that the Will—that which is objectified in the phenomenal world as a whole—is striving for adequate expression of itself, for itself.

What of the statement that ‘the will, considered purely in itself, is devoid of knowledge, and is only a blind, irresistible urge’? Here Schopenhauer is
clearly referring to the Will—to that which ‘appear[s] in inorganic and vegetable nature and in their laws, and also in the vegetative part of our own life’. However, his point here is precisely that the Will ‘considered purely in itself’—which is to say, without regard to the world of representation—is blind. And as he goes on, ‘Through the addition of the world as representation, developed for its service, the [W]ill obtains knowledge of its own willing and what it wills . . .’ (WWR I: 275). More precisely, the Will obtains knowledge of itself—is revealed or made visible to itself—in its objectification in a form that requires for its survival and propagation intellect: as he says, ‘The [W]ill, which hitherto followed its tendency in the dark with extreme certainty and infallibility, has at this stage kindled a light for itself’ (WWR I: 150).

What I have argued to be Schopenhauer’s understanding of the Will as striving for visibility, for self-knowledge, then, is consistent with his various statements regarding the blindness of will (and Will). The worry may persist, however: how can the Will have knowledge of anything, given that it stands beyond the subject-object relationship, which the possibility of knowledge presupposes? But in this form, the worry is founded on confusion. The thought is not that the Will somehow functions as a conscious, cognitive, entity in the noumenal or at least pre-phenomenal realm. Rather, the Will is a conscious, cognitive entity just in virtue of its objectification in knowing subjects in the world of representation. To say that an individual knowing subject grasps something of the nature of the Will is just to say that the Will grasps something of its own nature, for the individual knowing subject is no more than a manifestation of the Will. The Will’s achievement of self-knowledge, that is, is nothing above and beyond the individual knowing subject’s achievement of knowledge of the Will: as Schopenhauer puts it at one point, ‘in man’ (and it is important that it is ‘in’ man, rather than ‘by means of’ or ‘through’ man) ‘the [W]ill can reach full self-consciousness, direct and exhaustive knowledge of its own inner nature, as reflected in the whole world’ (WWR I: 288).

When Schopenhauer states that this ‘can’ occur ‘in man’, what he means, of course, is that the Will becomes fully conscious of itself only in certain exceptional, ‘unnatural’, individuals—in geniuses. And his commitment to the idea that the conditions which make this possible are very far from the norm—the commitment that poses such a threat to the coherence of his aesthetic theory and philosophy of art with the rest of his metaphysical system—is based, as we have seen, on his claim that intellect is the ‘activity’ of the cerebral system and that the cerebral system, like other physiological features such as hands and claws and wings, emerges ‘according to the aims of’ one or another kind of individual will (WWR II: 205). Just as the only function of claws is to meet the needs of certain kinds of individual will, and appeal to those needs is sufficient explanation of the development of claws in various species, he suggests, the only function of intellect is to meet the needs of certain kinds of individual will, and appeal to those needs is sufficient explanation of the fact and extent of the development of intellect in different species. Intellectual
development beyond that which is required by the needs of a kind of individual will, and which hence cannot be explained in terms of those needs, must therefore represent an aberration, ‘something unnatural’, a glitch in nature’s scheme.

What Schopenhauer has somehow overlooked, or perhaps even failed to notice, however, is that his metaphysics of the Will implies a quite different story about the nature of intellect. His underlying metaphysical picture suggests that the emergence of physiological features such as claws and horns in a species is in fact not genuinely analogous to the emergence of the cerebral system at all; for while the former can be explained, in Schopenhauerian terms, simply in terms of the needs of a particular kind of individual will, the emergence of (the activity of) the cerebral system is as it were the point of the existence of the kind of individual will that requires it. If the Will, in its various patterns of objectification, is to be understood as striving for ever-greater visibility, for increasingly adequate expression, then it has to be understood as striving for objectification in forms that dictate the emergence of intellect, for without intellect the Will remains, as Schopenhauer says, blind. The power and capacities of the intellect, then, are to be understood as determined not simply by the character and needs of the individual will, but by the character of the Will. For the Will to attain any degree of visibility—in effect, consciousness—it has to be objectified in such a way as to bring about the emergence of intellect; and to attain ‘full self-consciousness’ it has to be objectified in such a way as to bring about the emergence of intellect capable not simply of serving the needs of an individual will, but of apprehending the Ideas, ‘in which the [W]ill-to-live has its most perfect objectivity’ (WWR I: 183).

Implicit in Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of Will, then, is a quite straightforward explanation of how it is that in human beings in general, rather than in odd exceptional cases, intellect has the capacity to break free of its service to the individual will, hence for knowledge unconstrained by the forms of the principle of sufficient reason, and hence for apprehension of the Ideas—namely, that such an intellect is precisely what is required for the Will to ‘fathom itself’. David Hamlyn suggests that ‘It is impossible to see why the will should make it possible’ for the intellect to break free of its dominance, and this is quite true insofar as the will in question is the individual will. But, as I have argued here, it is far from impossible to see why the Will, that which underlies the world of representation as a whole, and which strives in it for ‘the highest possible objectification’ and ‘visibility’, should have ‘allowed’—indeed guaranteed the actualisation of—this possibility. I confess to being at a loss as to why Schopenhauer did not appeal explicitly to this explanation of the possibility of the ‘abolition of individuality’, and hence of aesthetic experience. Unlike his own explanation, it renders his aesthetic theory and philosophy of art coherent with his metaphysics of will. And unlike the by-product hypothesis considered earlier, this explanation is deeply rooted in that metaphysical scheme. It is, I suggest, the explanation of the possibility of aesthetic experience to which Schopenhauer should have appealed.
NOTES

1 References to Schopenhauer’s works in what follows will be given in the text, using the abbreviations given in the list of works referred to, followed by page number.

2 An individual knowing subject may of course have propositional knowledge that there are Ideas of such-and-such and so-and-so, in Schopenhauer’s view—indeed, to impart that knowledge is part of the point of The World as Will and Representation.

3 It is true that Schopenhauer (far from unproblematically) holds that the knowing subject, or intellect, becomes conscious of its will through its experience of the body, but it is the will, that which is objectified in the body, rather than the body as such, that together with the intellect is supposed to constitute the individual.

4 See for example Young 2005: Chapter 5; and Diffey 1990.

5 In what follows, I use ‘Will’ to refer to that which underlies the word of representation, and ‘will’ to refer to the individual will.


7 Although what he says at one point, at least, might be read as suggesting otherwise: ‘To become a pure subject of knowing’, he says, ‘means to be quit of oneself; but since in most cases people cannot do this, they are, as a rule, incapable of that purely objective apprehension of things, which constitutes the gift of the artist’ (PP II: 416). A charitable reading of this will construe ‘in most cases people cannot do this’ as ‘most of the time people cannot do this’ rather than as ‘most people cannot do this’; and ‘they are, as a rule, incapable’ as ‘on most occasions, they are incapable’, rather than as ‘most of them are unable’.

8 And unless there is, Schopenhauer is clearly in very deep trouble indeed.

9 Gould writes, ‘Since organisms are complex and highly integrated entities, any adaptive change must automatically “throw off” a series of structural byproducts—like the mold marks on an old bottle or, in the case of an architectural spandrel itself, the triangular space “left over” between a rounded arch and the rectangular frame of wall and ceiling. Such byproducts may later be co-opted for useful purposes, but they didn’t arise as adaptations’ (Gould 1997: 48). I am grateful to Sandy Shapshay for pointing out to me the relevance of this essay; and indeed for detailed and penetrating comments on several versions of this paper.

10 This appears to be a revision of his earlier hypothesis that the capacity for apprehension of the Ideas depends on superfluity of intellect—or at any rate an elaboration of what superfluity consists in.

11 Had he adopted this line of thought, his account of genius would of course have turned out slightly differently: on this line, the genius constitutes an ‘exception’ not (as Schopenhauer in fact suggests) simply in virtue of having the capacity for apprehension of the Ideas, but rather in virtue of the degree to which he has this capacity (the degree to which the two parts of the nervous system are separate in him). But there is no reason why Schopenhauer could not have accepted the latter view.

12 Again, I use ‘will’ to refer to the individual will, and ‘Will’ to refer to that which underlies the word of representation in general.

13 ‘Ob nicht Natur zuletzt sich doch ergründe?’ (Goethe) Astonishingly, the epigraph is omitted in the Payne edition of the text.

14 As is confirmed by his statement, in the following sentence, that ‘art results from the actual presence and existence of this degree of knowledge’.
References to Schopenhauer


Other References

Schopenhauer on Aesthetic Understanding and the Values of Art

Bart Vandenabeele

Schopenhauer is renowned for his account of the pleasures of aesthetic contemplation. A lot and perhaps even most of Schopenhauer’s insightful account of the arts can be reduced to a kind of enlightened aesthetic attitude theory that relates all artistic achievements back to the value of the aesthetic experiences afforded. But Schopenhauer’s account of tragedy reveals some reticence about the ‘aesthetic experience’ approach that is usually attributed to him. Although Christopher Janaway (along with many other commentators) is right to emphasise the crucial importance of the pleasure of will-less tranquillity, Schopenhauer’s analysis of the significance of tragedy at least suggests that we cannot explain the value of all art in terms of the pleasurable experience afforded. We do not value a work of art merely because it offers us pleasure, nor do we repudiate it because it fails to do so.

Janaway rightly insists that ‘aesthetics is at the heart of philosophy for Schopenhauer’, but also ultimately reduces Schopenhauer’s theory of art to an account of aesthetic pleasure. However, unlike Paul Guyer, for example, he argues that ‘Schopenhauer’s philosophy, at a deeper level, is more Platonic than it is Kantian’. His main arguments are: first, that the theory of Platonic Ideas is no mere ad hoc insertion into a dominantly Kantian framework, but a carefully prepared and fundamental insight; and, second, that his account of aesthetic experience is ultimately preoccupied with timeless and painless contemplation—i.e. the younger Schopenhauer’s so-called ideal of the ‘better consciousness’: the timeless, painless subject—which is ‘indissolubly’ connected with the knowledge of (Platonic) Ideas.

I shall argue that some important (and often neglected) aspects of Schopenhauer’s insightful discussion of tragedy show that the thesis that the value of art is reducible to the aesthetic pleasure it affords is inadequate. Pace some of what Schopenhauer himself suggests, the value of the understanding offered by an artwork does not solely consist in the pleasure it may generate. Although Schopenhauer does not sufficiently develop this strand of thought, he nonetheless rightly suggests that a theory that conceives of artistic value as being fully exhausted by aesthetic value cannot but be mistaken.

Schopenhauer’s Platonism

Above all else, Plato’s theory of the universal Forms or Ideas was a continual source of fascination and inspiration for Schopenhauer. The young Schopenhauer
was particularly fascinated by the question of the distinction between a concept and an Idea. But he soon realised that a number of modifications to Plato’s theory of Ideas would be necessary in the development of his own metaphysics of the will. From 1815 onwards, he was concerned with the differences between concept and Idea, holding that a concept is more clearly and firmly outlined, but not so rich and vibrant as a Platonic Idea (MR I 295), and that the former is ‘unproductive for art’ (MR I 226). In the years that followed, he continued to wrestle with the notion of the (Platonic) Idea, but he never produced a fully consistent account of the distinction between Idea and concept, which means that we must be alert to the danger of producing too simple an interpretation of the significance of the Platonic Ideas in his philosophy. In fact, Schopenhauer’s repeated warning that he always uses the term ‘Idea’ in the Platonic sense and not in the sense of Kant’s ‘Ideas of reason’ is the only constant factor that can lead us. What precisely is meant by ‘in the Platonic sense’ is never completely clear. But in any case it is clear that the theory of the (Platonic) Ideas is no ad hoc addition to his metaphysics, but the result of a thorough weighing of the pros and cons, and an immense admiration for Plato’s philosophy.

However, this does not mean that the significance and the role of the Ideas in Schopenhauer’s philosophy of art are derived exclusively from Plato’s doctrine of Ideas. Kant’s theory of the aesthetic ideas in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* has also undoubtedly influenced Schopenhauer’s theory. An important difference remains, though, with Kant’s aesthetic ideas, for the latter are the product of the artist’s imagination, whereas the Ideas that artworks express are ‘the timeless paradigms of natural things and complete in themselves’ (WWR I 211). However, Schopenhauer’s romantic account of genius is often closer to Kant’s conception of the creative genius than is assumed, and there is definitely some tension in Schopenhauer’s account between the metaphysical status of the Ideas and the creative capacities of the artistic genius. Still, one important divergence cannot be overlooked: aesthetic imagination in Kant is productive: it invents intuitions and produces new configurations, whereas for Schopenhauer the artist’s imagination discovers eternal Ideas. Anyhow, in the light of Schopenhauer’s struggle with Plato’s theory of Ideas, it suffices to say that we can definitely dismiss the view that the Platonic Ideas are ad hoc extras and agree with Janaway that, despite Schopenhauer’s un-Platonic beliefs that the Ideas are perceptible by the senses, and that the blind will, rather than the Idea, is ontologically fundamental, Schopenhauer’s ‘aspiration is much closer to Plato’. Nevertheless, important differences with Plato’s theory of Ideas remain.

Schopenhauer surprisingly excludes many of the classic examples that Plato gives of the Ideas—especially in the middle dialogues, such as *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. Although Schopenhauer believes that the artist communicates his pure knowledge (or intuition) of Ideas and not of concepts—in this sense his view of the artist is extremely close to Plato’s divine creator in the *Timaeus*—he does not hold that beauty is itself an Idea. The beauty of a painting or a landscape consists in its capacity to give rise to the knowledge of an Idea, but is not itself an Idea. A beautiful flower is not beautiful because it
expresses the Idea of beauty, but because it expresses the Idea of the flower. Although Schopenhauer’s view of the beautiful is here again remarkably close to Plato’s in the *Timaeus*, he will nonetheless insist that there is no such thing as an Idea of the beautiful.

As already noted, Schopenhauer attaches great importance to the distinction between concept and Idea. He even claims that ‘we are entirely satisfied by the impression of a work of art only when it leaves behind something that, in spite of all our reflection on it, we cannot bring down to the distinctness of a concept’ (*WWR* II 409). The transition to a clearly defined concept is in Schopenhauer’s view obviously a sign of degradation. An aesthetic intuition does not in any way contribute to conceptual knowledge, but isolates the perceived object from its merely empirical and practical connections with other objects. This kind of perception is particularly the work of the imagination, and depends on liberation from the limitations of the principle of sufficient reason that dominates logical reasoning. Perceiving an Idea provides no abstract knowledge, since when a subject intuits the Idea, perceiving the particular object does not end: one perceives a Platonic Idea *in and through* a particular object—whether this is a natural object or a work of art does not really matter. Ideas can only appeal to someone who has elevated himself above all individual desiring and has become a pure subject of knowing. Schopenhauer’s deeper motives seem to be Platonic, because he insists on the strict separation of empirical and pure knowledge—although, again, Kant too recognises the possibility of a pure intuition, viz. of space and time.

Janaway is also right to emphasise the Platonic distinction of will-bound versus will-free modes of apprehending the world in Schopenhauer’s theory. Like Schopenhauer, Plato thinks that the body ‘fills us up with lusts and desires, with fears and fantasies of very kind, and with any amount of trash’, and pure knowledge of the eternal Forms is only possible, once one has purified the soul and freed oneself from ‘its contamination by the body’ (*Phaedo* 66 a-b). Schopenhauer also often deplores the connection of the mind with the body. Although Janaway is right that there is at least ‘one drastic divergence from Plato that we cannot ignore’, namely that in Schopenhauer’s account the Ideas are revealed by artworks in aesthetic experience, there are also more relevant similarities with Plato’s philosophy of art than Janaway (and Schopenhauer himself) allows. To begin with, although Plato attacks art, and especially mimetic poetry, in the notorious tenth book of his *Republic*, there are really striking parallels between Schopenhauer’s account of the artist as a pure subject of knowledge who intuits timeless Ideas and communicates these in and through works of art, and Plato’s divine creator in *Timaeus*, who is also a pure knower and also models his creations on eternal Ideas. Secondly, Plato’s notorious attack on poetry in *Republic* is contradicted many times in his other dialogues and, in this sense too, Schopenhauer’s reverence of the artist’s pure knowledge and the significance of the arts is really more Platonic than is often acknowledged. To give but a few examples: in the *Lysis*, Socrates says that the poets ‘are to us in a manner the fathers and authors of wisdom’ (213 e–214 a); in *Phaedrus*, Socrates refers to ‘a third form of possession or madness, of which the Muses are the
source. This seizes a gentle, pure soul and stimulates it to rapt passionate expression, especially in lyric poetry, glorifying the countless deeds of ancient times for the instruction of posterity (Phaedrus 245a); and in Plato’s Symposium, poets like Homer or Hesiod are called ‘the begetters of wisdom and the rest of virtue’ (209a–d).

More important than the mentioned striking similarities, however, is the divergence in their views on beauty. Janaway rightly claims that Schopenhauer borrows the idea of a timeless consciousness from Plato’s pure knowledge of the soul, and Schopenhauer’s account of aesthetic experience would not have been the same without the Platonic inspiration: both share the idea of tranquil, disembodied contemplation. For Plato, however, an experience of beauty is a kind of festive celebration of Being: it is to feel alive.14 Beauty ‘confers peace and completion on eros’.15 But Schopenhauer proffers us an altogether different account of the experience of beauty: the element of ‘tranquillity’ is definitely there, but Plato characterises beauty as conferring peace and satisfaction upon our desire, whereas Schopenhauer views the experience of beauty as will-less, i.e. without desire at all. Aesthetic experience is, according to Schopenhauer, an awareness of pure objectivity, and without this capacity for pure objectivity there would be no aesthetic experience, and hence no beauty.

Furthermore, whereas Plato believes that beauty is a motive for our desire and even ultimately satisfies it, Schopenhauer argues that the experience of beauty basically offers us salvation from the torments of desire: beauty consists in a way of considering things ‘without interest, without subjectivity, purely objectively; it is entirely given up to them in so far as they are merely representations and not motives’ (WWR I 196; italics added). Schopenhauer sees beauty as mainly offering alleviation of the misery that our existence as willing individuals inevitably engenders. Desire cannot ever be fully fulfilled, not even in the contemplation of beauty. Contemplating the Ideas in and through beautiful objects does not so much offer ultimate satisfaction for our restless desire as freedom from the thraldom of endless blind willing. Although Schopenhauer acknowledges that the ‘peace’ of aesthetic experience is not merely absence of pain, but also ‘revives’ and ‘comforts’, he nevertheless holds that the will can never be satisfied, not even through a pure experience of true beauty. That the aesthetic state of mind cheers and comforts is at least partly due to the achievement of a will-less and painless state of mind, through which our desire is momentarily stilled instead of definitively fulfilled. Moreover, the Ideas are nothing less than the objectifications of the primal will, which, by its nature, will always inevitably lack an object of satisfaction. There is no ultimate object that can satisfy the will: as William Desmond suggests, Schopenhauer’s will resembles Don Juan’s desire more than Plato’s eros: ‘desire hurrying from particular conquest to conquest, each taken as absolute in turn, only to breed disillusion at every turn, and forcing desire to set out in search again, forever’.16 The Platonic tranquillity of the soul, which finds in the experience of beauty its ultimate fulfilment, is very different from Schopenhauer’s will-less objectivity, which cannot ever be a kind of ultimate fulfilment, not only because, as he says, ‘for one wish that is fulfilled there remain
at least ten that are denied’, but mainly since it is a ‘capacity . . . to lose oneself in perception, to remove from the service of the will the knowledge which originally existed only for this service’, and ‘the ability to leave entirely out of sight our own interest, our willing, and our aims, and consequently to discard our own personality for a time, in order to remain pure knowing subject, the clear eye of the world’ (WWR I 185–186). Thus, despite Schopenhauer’s Platonic aspirations and his obsession with the ‘better consciousness’, which has much in common with Plato’s account of the pure timeless knowledge of the soul, there are crucial differences between Plato’s eros and Schopenhauer’s will. And because of their different conceptions of desire, Plato holds that the experience of beauty is the culmination of desire, whereas for Schopenhauer beauty offers a temporary relief from desire. In this sense, Plato’s account of aesthetic experience is, psychologically speaking, closer to the feeling of satisfaction after an excellent meal, whereas Schopenhauer’s is closer to the feeling of having conquered the desire to feel hungry at all.

Only in his evaluation of music does Schopenhauer come closer to Plato’s description of the experience of beauty, since enjoying music is really rejoicing in being part of being itself, and even celebrating being as such: here, the experience’s value is clearly no longer merely relief from suffering and pain, but positive rapture: music expresses the inner being of the world and, paradoxically, we enjoy this experience of being one with the will of the world, not just because we feel freed from desire, but because we are able to identify positively with the deepest core of the universe, i.e. the will. This idea of positive pleasure (or exaltation) does not only undermine the mainstream hypothesis that, for Schopenhauer, aesthetic pleasure is completely reducible to absence of pain, but also hints at a connection with Kant’s aesthetics in general, and especially his conception of the sublime.

The Feeling of the Sublime

Schopenhauer’s doctrine gives the lie to those who think that it restricts aesthetic experience to the pleasurable experience of the beautiful, for it also includes experiences that overwhelmingly move us instead of merely providing pleasure, such as the sublime (das Erhabene). The specificity of the feeling of the sublime consists in the conscious and brutal effort demanded of the subject to cast aside the ordinary connections of the will and to explicitly maintain (beharren) the exalted state of mind. The exaltation is a state of utter tension, which does not only have to be won with consciousness, but also has to be maintained, whereas, in the beautiful, the state of pure contemplation will be reached and maintained without any effort or struggle.

Yet the sublime feeling is a very complex matter that cannot be characterised merely in terms of the criterion active vs. passive. In § 39 of The World as Will and Representation, Schopenhauer rather dramatically provides an overview of a number of gradual transitions from the beautiful to the sublime that bring to light
several subtle and important distinctions and degrees of the sublime (WWR I 203–207). When, for instance in the depth of winter, the setting sun illuminates the masses of stone of a building without warming, then this can turn us into an aesthetic mood. Since this mood is accompanied by a weak recollection of the lack of warmth of the rays of sunlight and since these are not life enhancing, a certain transcending of the will and a slight challenge (leise Aufforderung) to persistence in pure knowledge are required. This is nothing more than the faintest trace (schwächeste Anhauch) of the sublime (WWR I 203). But when one finds oneself in a deserted area, with trees and plants in completely motionless air, without animals, without people, without moving water masses and utter silence, it will take much more effort to protect oneself against the threatening feeling of boredom and to disinterestedly contemplate the scene. Schopenhauer calls this an instance of the sublime in a low degree (Anstrich des Erhabenen), which becomes more intense when one imagines the same region without plants, with only bare rocks. In that case the will does not find anything to satisfy itself and really panics because of the total absence of the organic life that is indispensable for the subsistence of the individual. The desert becomes frightening, and our mood becomes ‘more tragic’.18 It clearly takes more effort to wrest oneself from the interests of the will, but if one succeeds in persisting in the state of pure contemplation, one distinctly becomes aware of the sublime.19

However, Schopenhauer often hesitates between an empirical and a transcendental approach: some crucial remarks point out that the sublime feeling differs not just gradually but radically and, as in Kant,20 qualitatively and not merely quantitatively from the feeling of the beautiful. One of the most important characteristics of the sublime is the fact that it is ‘accompanied by a constant recollection of the will, yet not of a single individual willing, such as fear or desire, but of human willing in general, in so far as it is expressed universally through its objectivity, the human body’ (WWR I 202). The word ‘constant’ (einer steten Erinnerung) is especially important here: the will remains permanently present in consciousness. This remains the case as long as the sublime feeling is there, i.e., as long as the state of violent tension is maintained. The sublime, which can occur in different degrees, is thus typically distinguished from the beautiful by the permanent and unremitting recollection of the human will, whose traces remain present in the mind as displeasure.

Schopenhauer never really explains the status of this recollection, but he does argue that it is not a recollection of individual willing, fear or desire. It is recollection of human willing in general (an das menschliche Wollen überhaupt), for ‘if a real single act of will were to enter consciousness through actual personal affliction and danger from the object, the individual will, thus actually affected, would at once gain the upper hand. The peace of contemplation would become impossible, the impression of the sublime would be lost’ (WWR I 202). If real personal anxiety occurred, we would not be contemplating disinterestedly the threatening or overwhelming scene, but trying to save ourselves. Any recollection of individual willing, any direct affection, would cause anxiety and fatally annihilate the feeling of the sublime. When the individual will is
provoked, one ends up in the charming (das Reizende) or the ‘negatively charming’—the disgusting—that are the contrary of the sublime and not really aesthetic at all (WWR I 207). In the charming, the mind is completely passive and occasions merely sensuous pleasure (Genuss) and not pure liking (Wohlgelitten) or joy (Freude). The attractive ‘draws the beholder down from pure contemplation’ and thus one ‘no longer remains pure subject of knowing, but becomes the needy and dependent subject of willing’ (WWR I 207). Contrary to the attractive, the sublime is a purely aesthetic feeling; but an aesthetic feeling that, unlike the beautiful, is still accompanied by a permanent recollection of the human will. What can this mean?

One of the crucial characteristics of a sublime response seems to be a sort of dissociation or de-realisation of our personal affects or the individual emotional response. In the sublime, it is possible to take disinterested pleasure in what is most cruel or life-threatening. Schopenhauer often connects the sublime with a transition or elevation from a passive individual controlled by the urges of the will to a pure detached subject that contemplates (Platonic) Ideas. Yet the sublime feeling is far more specific: it is not just a feeling that is accompanied by an elevation of the subject over the empirical will—such an elevation also takes place in the beautiful; it also occasions understanding of the double nature of our consciousness (Duplizität seines Bewusstseins). In this sense, pace Schopenhauer, there can be no easy transition from the beautiful to the sublime: the extremely beautiful is not necessarily a weak trace of the sublime. The beautiful is a serene and harmonious feeling, whereas the sublime is violent and paradoxical, and generates insight into the world and our complex human nature. When, through an extreme effort, it becomes possible to experience the overwhelming event or hostile object at the same time as pleasurable, the feeling of the sublime clearly occurs. Schopenhauer writes:

Simultaneously he feels himself as individual, as the feeble phenomenon of will, which the slightest touch of these forces can annihilate, helpless against powerful nature, dependent, abandoned to chance, a vanishing nothing in face of stupendous forces; and he also feels himself as the eternal, serene subject of knowing, who as the condition of every object is the supporter of this whole world . . . . This is the full impression of the sublime. Here it is caused by the sight of a power beyond all comparison superior to the individual, and threatening him with annihilation. (WWR II 204–205)

This passage reveals that the feeling of the sublime is an experience of contrast—not merely triumphantly subjecting the will, let alone merely ‘a contraction of the vastness of being into the content of the consciousness of the noumenal self’ and ‘a movement of cosmic egoism’, as Julian Young holds. The experience of contrast (‘simultaneously he feels himself . . . ’; italics added) testifies to an irremovable tension in the subject’s mind. It is not an individual, let alone an egoistic experience, but the experience of a pure subject that is aware of its own split nature. The irremovable tension between willing and knowing, which
characterizes the subject—this continuous oscillation between empirical desire and pure contemplation—can be experienced in different degrees, but can never be definitively put to rest. The sublime is the aesthetic feeling of elevation (Erhebung) above empirical individuality, but this violent exaltation will never be really felt as complete sublimity (Erhabenheit): the will cannot be tamed definitively: Velle non discitur.24 One may have this impression in the sublime, but it will always be an illusory impression: the sublime is an ambivalent feeling of pleasure and pain at the same time. Contrary to the beautiful, which can still promise complete and pure harmony and tranquillity, the sublime offers the fullest impression of the unbridgeable gap between willing and contemplating that characterizes human subjectivity. That we can actually enjoy this aesthetically is perhaps the real ‘miracle par excellence’.25 And that is exactly the question that Schopenhauer will attempt to answer in his examination of the experience and value of tragedy (Trauerspiel), to which we now turn.

The Values of Tragedy

‘Life is not the greatest good’, exclaims the chorus at the end of Friedrich Schiller’s Bride of Messina (WWR II 435). The question arises whether and how the depiction of the most terrible things in life, when they are sketched for us ‘in the most glaring light’ (ibid.), can still be beneficial to us. In other words, if a tragic experience is ultimately pleasurable—as Schopenhauer seems to hold—what is the nature of the pleasure that we experience in the contemplation of a tragedy? The older Schopenhauer does not hesitate: ‘our pleasure in the tragedy belongs not to the feeling of the beautiful, but to that of the sublime; it is, in fact, the highest degree of this feeling’ (WWR II 433). It seems quite evident that tragedy, technically speaking, cannot be called beautiful. But why does Schopenhauer stress so strongly that we ought to call tragedy sublime, and that the pleasure attained by the spectator is indeed the highest degree of the sublime? And, furthermore, why does Schopenhauer insist that tragedy is ultimately pleasurable?

The answer to the first question is clear, although—as we shall soon see—the connection with the sublime is not as straightforward as is usually claimed in the literature. Indeed, it is obvious to call the pleasure that we undergo in contemplation of a tragedy ‘sublime’ and to characterise it more specifically as ‘dynamically sublime’,26 since in tragedies we are actually confronted with ‘the wailing and lamentation of mankind, the dominion of chance and error, the fall of the righteous, the triumph of the wicked,’ and with the aspect of the world and life ‘which directly opposes our will’ (WWR II 433). In Schopenhauer’s view, adequately depicting the terrible side of life is the highest of all possible literary achievements (WWR I 252). But the connection of art (in this case, tragedy) with the sublime threatens to disturb the unity of Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory. The sublime demands a tremendous effort on the side of the subject to elevate itself above that which threatens or overwhelms it. The beautiful, on the contrary, facilitates a purely aesthetic, will-less intuition, and a beautiful object invites or
even compels us to admire it. For Schopenhauer, art is primarily beautiful or fine art. Schopenhauer thus argues that ‘the work of art is merely a means of facilitating that knowledge in which pleasure consists’ (WWR I 195), and it ‘really endeavours to show us life and things as they are in reality; but these cannot be grasped directly by everyone through the mist of objective and subjective contingencies. Art takes away this mist’ (WWR II 407). How can this general conception of art be unified with the sublime, which presupposes a hostile relation to the subject and hampers an easy transition to a pure will-less attitude? How can Schopenhauer insist both that tragedy be sublime and at the same time art? Stricto sensu, the sublime seems only to apply to nature. There seems to be an actual contradiction between the concepts of ‘art’ and the ‘sublime’ in Schopenhauer’s account. Art ought to facilitate aesthetic contemplation and insight into the Idea, whereas the sublime presupposes overcoming some form of resistance to the tranquil perception of an Idea.

It is worth noting that watching a tragedy may in fact facilitate the exaltation above the will. The events depicted may make it obvious that if the horrific world on stage is really our world, the world to which we as individuals belong, it will definitely be better to tear ourselves away from it; one could say that it is precisely the aesthetic nature of a tragedy that permits us to adopt a stance of pure contemplation without too much difficulty. However, contrary to his own explicit intentions, Schopenhauer does not seem to be mainly preoccupied with defending tragedy’s truly aesthetic nature at all: he emphasises the terrible side of life, the unjust suffering, man’s wretchedness, the human impotence in the face of fate—aspects that hamper an easy transition to tranquil contemplation—and he devotes very little time to the idea of a spectator sitting in a theatre and being confronted with a play. For, a tragedy (Trauerspiel) is at all times a play (Spiel), i.e. an illusion. By presenting the worst and most nauseating scenes, by bringing them to the stage, a context is created that permits the spectator to enjoy what is held before his or her eyes. As Nietzsche will insist, art is—at least partly—an Apollonian illusion: it creates a world of semblance. Anyone who jumps onto the stage during a performance of Romeo and Juliet and starts fighting with the Montagues, or who phones the Poison Control Hotline when Juliet is poisoned, has absolutely no sense of what art and drama is. Again, in Nietzschean terms, the arts create a world of semblance and a metaphysical supplement that stands next to reality in order to conquer it.

Yet in Schopenhauer’s view the opposite occurs in tragedy: the performance on stage is no semblance but instead offers the truth, and makes the spectator conscious that ‘life is a bad dream’ (WWR II 433). The question arises why Schopenhauer downplays the artistic illusion, which he knew quite well? Above all, why does he emphasise its sublime character, which he had exclusively situated in nature (in WWR I § 39)? Although Schopenhauer emphasises the ‘palliative’ character of aesthetic contemplation several times, this does not really seem to apply to the effects of tragedy. The aesthetic contemplation of a landscape or a flower can have a soothing effect on the spectator. But a tragedy does not offer any calming images of reality, but compels us to attend to features
of life we normally tend to shy away from. It makes us dwell on bloodshed, murder, and cruel violence. By foregrounding the evil aspects in particularly vivid and striking ways, it invites or even forces us to consider the disturbing aspects of humanity, which is ultimately wrong, vicious, unjust and ugly. A tragedy confronts the spectator with ‘the guilt of existence itself’ (WWR I 254) and with the bitterness and uselessness of life, and hence with the futility of all our individual striving. Thus, the spectator—so the willing individual and not the pure subject of knowledge—understands ‘that it is better to tear his heart away from life, to turn his willing away from it, not to love the world and life’, and ‘thus in the depth of his being the consciousness is then stirred that for a different kind of willing there must be a different kind of existence also’ (WWR II 435). Schopenhauer even writes that the best tragedies show us:

\[\text{... those powers that destroy happiness and life, and in such a way that the path to them is at any moment open even to us. We see the greatest suffering brought about by entanglements whose essence could be assumed even by our own fate, and by actions that perhaps even we might be capable of committing, and so we cannot complain of injustice. Then, shuddering, we feel ourselves already in the midst of hell [dann fühlen wir schaudernd uns schon mitten in der Hölle]. }\] (WWR I 255)

Tragedy not only depicts the renunciation of the will on stage, but also apparently makes us spectators shudder at the depicted horrors. The word ‘shuddering’ (schaudernd) is especially striking here. The force of a tragedy seems to be that it personally involves an individual human being; it necessitates a personal reaction. Without any personal involvement as a spectator, we would not be moved at all by what the characters on stage have to endure. So it is not the pure subject of knowledge, the purely aesthetic subject, which is explicitly addressed by a tragedy. Contrary to other forms of art, tragedies do not address pure aesthetic subjects, but concerned individuals that are able of empathizing with the characters and events on stage. Only then will the ‘true tendency’ of tragedies reveal itself: an invitation to turn away from the world and from willing altogether, an urge to forsake all our personal interests. And while the younger Schopenhauer still thought that this kind of detachment occurs principally in the characters of the play and not in the spectator, later (in 1844) he will realise that forsaking our personal interests and desires necessarily presupposes personal involvement of a willing individual. And even already in 1818 he writes the following about the effects of tragedy:

The motives that were previously so powerful now lose their force, and instead of them, the complete knowledge of the real nature of the world, acting as a quieter of the will, produces resignation, the giving up not merely of life, but of the whole will-to-live itself. Thus we see in tragedy the noblest men, after a long conflict and suffering, finally renounce for ever all the pleasures of life and the aims till then pursued so keenly, or cheerfully and willingly give up life itself. (WWR I 253)
We are surprisingly far removed from a purely aesthetic affair—at least in the sense Schopenhauer interprets the term ‘aesthetic.’ If Janaway is right, as I believe he is, that ‘what the sublime demands is that I recognize a situation as threatening or distressing—but without feeling personally threatened or distressed’, a tragedy cannot but miss its effect of inviting individual resignation if it were really aesthetically sublime. It is therefore of vital importance to note that in the second later volume of *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer changes the identification of the tragic and the sublime into an analogy. Again, he wants to explain the pleasure we take in tragedies, and tries to do so by insisting that we comprehend the depicted events as terrible for humanity *in general*, and not just for ourselves. But he also hesitates, he also suddenly claims that the pleasure we experience is now merely ‘analogous to the dynamically sublime’ (*WWR* II 433): why now merely analogous instead of identical? Why say first that it is the ‘highest degree’ of this feeling, and only some fifteen lines further claim that it is only ‘analogous’?

Schopenhauer clearly sympathises with Aristotle’s famous tenet that tragedy reveals universal truths about humanity. Tragedy is the supreme and most important form of poetry, because the Idea of humanity is the supreme level of the will’s objectification, and because it depicts ‘the antagonism of the will with itself [Widerstreit des Willens mit sich selbst]’ (*WWR* I 253). Yet Schopenhauer confuses the distinction between a universal and a particular truth with the distinction between a truth that is grasped by a will-less subject and truth grasped by a willing individual. A tragedy clearly expresses universal truths in and through particular events and individual characters on stage, but, *pace* Schopenhauer, this does not rule out that it may also demand a spectator’s personal involvement. And only because of this personal involvement can tragedy get the profound significance it really has. So, despite Schopenhauer’s insistence, what is ultimately at stake in tragedy cannot be captured *wholly* in terms of aesthetic experience, not even in terms of the complex feeling of the sublime. One gains understanding (not necessarily ‘knowledge’) from a tragedy, and this understanding is distinct from the aesthetic affect. The understanding one gains from the depicted scene may even lead to a change of one’s personal attitude toward life, and to complete resignation. Schopenhauer may be right that watching a tragedy is ultimately beneficial, but not because, as he thinks, it is ultimately a pleasurable experience. Schopenhauer is trying to justify his theory of the sublime and maintain the unity of his aesthetic theory by insisting on the idea that the value of art can be completely explained in terms of aesthetic experience, i.e. experiencing a sublime, hence complex and mixed, but ultimately pleasurable feeling. But watching a tragedy is *not* a purely aesthetic experience in this sense. The value of great tragedies such as *Othello* and *Wallenstein* is tightly intertwined with a profound concern for the rough and brutish aspects of human nature. Since what we understand about the world and human nature is undoubtedly horrifying, it cannot be justified aesthetically but only through moral resignation. Furthermore, it is hard to see how a metaphysical truth about the baseness and sufferings of mankind, which is horrible in its own right, may
yield pleasure—apart, of course, from the pleasure that any discovery of truth may arouse. Although we are fascinated by tragedies, their value cannot really be reduced to the aesthetic pleasure they afford, since—as Schopenhauer himself recognises—the horror ‘is brought terribly near to us’ and ‘shows us those powers that destroy happiness and life, and in such a way that the path to them is at any moment open even to us’ (WWR I 254–255; italics added). Schopenhauer has to allow that experiencing a tragedy really involves being confronted with horrifying truths that affect us directly as concerned individuals; truths that cannot be turned into pleasurable spectacles that can be contemplated by a detached pure subject of knowledge. On the contrary, the essence of the experience of a tragedy is not that it compels us to contemplate the world but instead makes us ‘turn away from the will-to-live itself’ (WWR II 433).

Thus, if Schopenhauer still wants to argue—as he does—that tragedies stimulate the feeling of the sublime, this feeling of the sublime is very different from the feeling occasioned by nonhuman nature, as exemplified by violent thunderstorms, deserts and the Grand Canyon.29 Schopenhauer does not seem aware of this radical semantic shift. If he had acknowledged this semantic shift in the concept of the sublime, it would have threatened the consistency of his theory of art. He would have been left with just two options: either acknowledging that tragedies are not genuine art forms (since they do not really offer aesthetic pleasure), but that would be absurd; or explicitly denying that tragedies yield pleasure, but this would have demolished the only truly unifying component of Schopenhauer’s theory, namely that of the ‘better consciousness’, i.e. the will-less and painless pure aesthetic subject. This seems to me to be one of the crucial tensions in Schopenhauer’s conception of art, and, as we shall see, perhaps this is one of the very reasons why he later suggested a broadening of his definition of art (see: WWR II 407). Schopenhauer should have recognised expressly that appreciating a work as good art does not coincide with actually liking it or being moved by it: someone may recognise that Matisse’s paintings are good, though they do nothing for him. But even those who find Matisse’s work unaffecting will not deny that he is a great artist; and many people consider opera to be good art, though it leaves them cold. For Schopenhauer, however, being aesthetically touched by a work and appreciating it as good art seem to coincide, and this gets him into trouble, for he persists in measuring the value of tragedy in terms of sublime pleasure.

Hence the question arises whether Schopenhauer should not really have admitted more explicitly that not all art can be valued solely in terms of the aesthetic experience afforded. Instead of insisting on the sublime experience that watching a tragedy would afford, he ought to have asked why people tend to be fascinated by tragedies. Experiencing aesthetic pleasure and being fascinated is not really the same: I can be fascinated by a horror movie or a road accident without necessarily experiencing pleasure, or at least without being aesthetically pleased. Schopenhauer cannot ask this question—the premises of his aesthetic theory do not allow it—because fascination necessarily implies personal involvement, and Schopenhauer holds that personal involvement ruins the
purity of an aesthetic experience. This causes two problems for Schopenhauer: personal involvement destroys the possibility of an aesthetic will-less experience, and personal engagement with tragedies in particular yields displeasure or even pain, because of our empathy and even sympathy with the, often unmerited, suffering of the characters on stage. By focussing one-sidedly on the aesthetic effects of art, Schopenhauer tends to underestimate that art works have other important merits, such as e.g. developing our capacities for discrimination and appreciation.

The value of tragedy does not reside in aesthetic contemplation or intuition, but in understanding that it may be better to give up willing altogether. This is obviously not a purely aesthetic merit: the value of a tragedy cannot be reduced to the value of the aesthetic experience it may afford. Its merit is in the understanding it offers and the moral attitude it may henceforth provoke in a fascinated spectator. Schopenhauer has misled many readers, and perhaps also himself, by concentrating on the question of how something tragic can still offer us pleasure. But the real value of tragedies is not ultimately in the pleasure they may yield, but in the specific philosophical understanding they proffer, which is valuable in its own right, and may lead to salvation through the denial of the will. All art—and hence definitely also the highest of all the poetic arts: tragedy—merely offers a certain consolation that makes us momentarily forget life’s horrid miseries (WWR I 372). At best, it awakens for a few moments the desire for ‘an existence of an entirely different kind, a different world’ (WWR II 433). The experience of utter horror at the sight of the terrible events moves us personally and prompts us to turn away from the will to life, instead of remaining in sheer contemplation of it. Thus at least part of our experience of a tragedy is not pleasurable at all, but this does not make it less valuable for it. On the contrary, tragedy is superior to other art forms, for it makes us understand the real (limited) value of our lives as human beings and the world we live in.

Schopenhauer’s account of the value of tragedy is, however, not limited to an analysis merely in terms of purely aesthetic merits. By emphasising tragedy’s philosophical and moral significance, he has shown a way to transcend the Kantian purely aesthetic perspective. Although he does not develop the view in detail, Schopenhauer none the less rightly, if only implicitly, rejects the view that all art is valuable because of the value of the aesthetic experience yielded; understanding that it may be better to turn ourselves away from this wretched world may be an important effect of watching a tragedy, but whether this kind of insight really provides pleasure is highly questionable. It may do so, of course, if we have the sense that we have discovered something important about ourselves or about the world, if we understand that the work has shaped and developed our thoughts in and through our experience of it. But claiming that experiencing tragedies is valuable merely because of the pleasure this insight or understanding arouses is—to say the least—highly implausible. As Matthew Kieran says, ‘art stretches, extends and revolutionises the ways we come to see the world. It is one of the most powerful means of cultivating our perceptual capacities’, and, I would add, of enabling us to develop our understanding of the world and ourselves.
To be sure, the aesthetic spectator remains a spectator, and will not become an ascetic or saint as soon as he or she leaves the theatre. So concentrating on whether the spectator will really ever lead the moral life of an ascetic or let alone the holy life of a saint, is really missing the point. The essential value of tragedies necessarily involves understanding that it is possible ‘to will something better’ (WWR II 574), no more no less. Evoking the spirit of resignation and arousing the abjuration of the will-to-live definitely remains the ‘characteristic tendency and effect of the tragedy’ or even its only ‘true tendency’ (WWR II 435), and this attunement or disposition (Gesinnung) is evoked ‘only temporarily’ in the spectator (ibid.). The idea that it would be better to turn oneself away from this life altogether arises ‘only in an obscure feeling’ (ibid.): the affective response to the tragedy engenders the understanding. Schopenhauer does not expect tragedy to provoke resignation directly. At most, it awakens some kind of insight that is ‘beyond’ and altogether different from aesthetic intuition, and demands to ‘will something better’ (WWR II 574). This probably explains why Schopenhauer contends that there is a danger in the admiration of tragic heroes: one could be tempted to remain in a state of sheer contemplation instead of pondering the possibility of changing the course of one’s own life. Contemplating works of art would then unfortunately become ‘an end in itself’, and this would lead to unwarranted aestheticism (WWR I 267).

The effect of a tragedy is hence merely ‘analogous to’ the aesthetically sublime, since it completely ‘changes our mood [uns so unstimm]’, i.e. it changes our aesthetic mood into a philosophical or moral mood; a selfless and disinterested mood that may enhance sympathy with other creatures; a way of understanding life that bears all the characteristics of the Christian hostile attitude towards life, this spirit of renunciation, the ‘giving up of willing’, which Nietzsche will so fiercely criticise in his later work.

Concluding Remarks

Whatever the value of this life-denying attitude that glorifies the ‘guilt’ and ‘original sin’ of human existence itself, Schopenhauer definitely believed it to be valuable in its own right, and praised the tragedies that best revealed its profound character (WWR I 254). There is no reason to suppose that only works of art that express moral views with which we agree may appeal to us. We can certainly appreciate a work of art that expresses views that are morally at odds with our own assumptions and convictions. We do not have to agree with the hostile attitude towards life that tragedy, in Schopenhauer’s view, communicates in order to gain insight from it and thus value a work that expresses it.

In this sense, and however unwillingly, Schopenhauer may have laid the foundations for moving beyond a conception of art that unjustly reduces its value to the value of the aesthetic experience offered by it. Nietzsche’s fierce attack on the Christian world view that Schopenhauer’s theory of art still supported may
have obfuscated one of the most valuable aspects of this theory for us today, namely that we value artworks not merely (and perhaps nor mainly) because they afford us pleasurable aesthetic experiences, but also because they offer us valuable ways of viewing life, developing our cognitive and imaginative capacities, and enriching and deepening our understanding of the world and ourselves.31

NOTES

1 Janaway 1996: 58: ‘the truly unifying notion in Schopenhauer’s aesthetics theory is that of tranquil, will-less contemplation’.


3 Guyer 2005a: 265–288. See e.g. p. 271: ‘[Kant] shares with Baumgarten the underlying impulse of aesthetic cognitivism, namely, the assumption that there is a powerful source of pleasure directly associated with the use of cognitive faculties and the achievement of cognitive goals . . . In other words, the key supposition of both these pillars of the cognitivist tradition in German aesthetics is that the unique uses of our cognitive capacities which are paradigmatic for aesthetic experience are intrinsically and positively pleasurable. . . . It is precisely this underlying assumption which Schopenhauer’s conception of aesthetic pleasure appears to deny. What I shall now argue, however, is that a similar assumption that there is a positive source of pleasure in cognition itself is not absent from Schopenhauer’s thought, and some of the puzzles of his aesthetic theory, including the puzzle earlier mentioned about the possibility of our pleasure in music, can be resolved by recognizing this positive aspect of his cognitivism.’


5 For an extended discussion of this matter, see Kieran 2005: 6–46.

6 In 1814 he argues that: ‘the Ideas are what remains of the world, when we do away with the principle of sufficient reason or ground in all its aspects. The Ideas are not the wills, but the way in which the wills become knowable, become knowledge, and through such knowledge salvation, i.e. abolition of the wills, is possible . . . Knowledge of the will is the world; the forms of the world are the Ideas . . . The artist expresses a priori what must appear, thus he presents the Ideas. Here, then, we certainly see the difference between science and art; the former shows us the How of the phenomenon, the latter the What. The former is concerned with the form of the phenomenon, the latter with the substance and essence. The former reveals the finiteness, the latter eternity’ (MR I 218–219).

7 For a key to abbreviations, see References.

8 See Janaway 1996: 41.

9 According to Plato in Timaeus 28 a-b, something is beautiful if it is modelled on an unchangeable Idea.

10 Schopenhauer was convinced that Plato himself would have allowed Ideas only of things in nature, and that according to the Platonists there are no Ideas of house and ring (WWR I 211). At the same time he refers to Alcinous as saying that Plato’s earliest followers denied that there exist Ideas of manufactured items such as shields or lyres, or of things opposed to nature like fever or cholera, or of individuals or of trifling things, or of relations. (ibid.)


12 See also Janaway 1996: 42.
Janaway 1996: 43: ‘There is one drastic divergence that we cannot ignore. Schopenhauer invokes “Platonic Ideas” as the entities revealed to the mind by art in aesthetic experience, thus setting himself indeed in head-on collision with Plato’.

In this sense, there is a striking similarity with Kant’s view of aesthetic judgement as based on the subject’s ‘feeling of life’. See his Critique of the Power of Judgment, § 1, 5: 204.

Desmond 2003: 150.

Desmond 2003: 151.

Thus it is no mere coincidence that Schopenhauer calls Kant’s analysis of the sublime: ‘by far the most excellent thing in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement … It is incomparably more successful than that of the beautiful, and gives not only, as that does, the general method of investigation, but also a part of the right way to it, so much that, although it does not provide the real solution to the problem, it nevertheless touches on it very closely’ (WWR I 532).

It is worth noting that Schopenhauer already uses the term ‘tragic’ here. But see below.

See WWR I 204: ‘The exaltation to pure knowledge comes about with a more decided emancipation from the interest of the will, and by our persisting in the state of pure knowledge, the feeling of the sublime distinctly appears’ (italics added).

See Guyer 2005b: 33–44. See also my reply to Guyer’s paper in the same volume: Vandenabeele 2005: 45–49.

See also Vandenabeele 2003: 93 ff. and Vandenabeele 2007.

See WWR I 204: ‘Then in the unmoved beholder of this scene the twofold nature of his consciousness reaches the highest distinctness. Simultaneously, he feels himself as individual … and he also feels himself as the eternal, serene subject of knowing’.

Young 2005: 140. Young even (unjustly) contends on the same page that Schopenhauer’s theory of the sublime ‘illustrates clearly the egoistic—or, more exactly, solipsistic—character of Schopenhauer’s thought’.

This is a phrase of Seneca’s (Epistulae, 81 14), one of Schopenhauer’s favourites.

For a more detailed analysis of Schopenhauer’s analysis of aesthetic experience, see Vandenabeele 2009 (forthcoming).

Schopenhauer follows Kant’s terminological distinction between the mathematically and the dynamically sublime.

It is worth noting that Schopenhauer’s later definition does not imply that art necessarily generates pleasure. But see below.

Janaway 1996: 56.


Kieran 2005: 147.

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Schopenhauer’s Works


Other Works

Poetic Intuition and the Bounds of Sense: Metaphor and Metonymy in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy

Sandra Shapshay

In his work from 1868, ‘On Schopenhauer,’ Nietzsche criticizes the philosopher for dressing up a ‘totally obscure, inconceivable X’ in ‘brightly coloured clothes, with predicates drawn from a world alien to it, the world of appearance’. Failing logical proof that the thing-in-itself is Will, Schopenhauer relies instead, according to Nietzsche, on a ‘poetic intuition’ to make this identification (Nietzsche 1998: 260). In part, Nietzsche is correct: Schopenhauer does rely on poetic intuition to draw the conclusion that the world is, ultimately, Will, and he uses such poetic intuitions throughout his main work in order to make sensible, as far as possible, the character of the thing-in-itself, which, by definition, cannot be a representation for a subject. But Schopenhauer is in good company in using a form of poetic insight for the purpose of giving some sensible representation to a concept that lies beyond the ‘bounds of sense.’ Indeed, it was pursued already in Kant’s works from the 1790s, and especially with his recognition of beauty as the symbol of the morally good.

In this chapter, I seek to show first how Schopenhauer adopts a means similar to Kant’s for making a merely thinkable concept sensible, albeit without being able to provide any direct intuition thereof, and second, how he also transforms the Kantian symbolic relationship (between beauty and the morally-good) into one that I will term ‘metonymic’. In a nutshell, the feeling of aesthetic willlessness and the objects of aesthetic perception give one sensible access through a part to the whole. A key theme throughout Schopenhauer’s main work is the attempt to gain knowledge of that which is supersensible or which touches on the mystical through experiences available to all human beings. In the access one has to one’s own acts of willing, one can gain knowledge (however incomplete) of the ‘in-itself’ of the world, and in aesthetic experience one gains a partial understanding of the mystical experience of ascetic willlessness as well as insight into the multifaceted, essential character of human existence through experience with particular works of art and music. Whereas Kant explains that profoundly felt structural analogies can give one some sensible confirmation of the good will, Schopenhauer employs the experience of felt contiguities between things that were hitherto thought to be distinct. This metonymic thinking, which has not been appreciated in Schopenhauer scholarship to date, is a primary
recurring motif in Schopenhauer’s philosophy, and the means by which he believes human beings may have indirect access to the world as it is in itself.

In this chapter, I will also suggest that Schopenhauer’s attention to figurative language and forms of poetic insight may have been influenced by his fascination with and study of the Baroque thinker, Baltasar Gracián, whose Agudeza y Arte de Ingenio [Wit and the Art of the Mind] offers a fine-grained taxonomy of literary tropes, the most important of which for Gracián provide deep metaphysical insights through novel connections among seemingly dissimilar things.

In the end, while Nietzsche is largely right in his charge that Schopenhauer relies on poetical insight rather than logical proof to dress up the thing-in-itself, Schopenhauer was still enough of a traditional philosopher to attempt to ground the truth of such poetic insights ultimately on rational persuasion: through argument, and in the overall coherence and explanatory power of the world view. So pace Nietzsche, Schopenhauer does believe that philosophical knowledge is advanced by way of poetic insight, but the truth of such knowledge is vouchsafed by way of other, rational foundations, and thus Schopenhauer forges a novel symbiosis between aesthetic perception and philosophical argumentation.

1. The Kantian Symbol

In order to explain how I see Schopenhauer as having transformed the Kantian symbolic relationship, I’d like first to discuss, in broad strokes, how I understand Kant’s important notion, relying heavily on the illuminating account given in Paul Guyer’s Kant and the Experience of Freedom (Guyer 1993). The experience of beauty is the principal means by which moral concepts can gain some foothold in reality, and thus has tremendous systemic importance for Kant’s philosophy. After all, concepts such as the good will and the highest good had better be made sensible in some way, if they are to count as more than merely thinkable concepts given Kant’s famous transcendental-idealistic strictures on knowledge: ‘neither concepts without an intuition in some way corresponding to them, nor intuition without concepts, can yield knowledge’; ‘[t]houghts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind’ (Kant 1965: 92-3, A50-51/B74-75).

In the Critique of the Power of Judgement Kant details another way in which concepts can be made sensible, at least indirectly, via the symbol. Guyer explains this as follows: ‘In the case of such a symbolic representation, what agrees with the concept is not the actual content of the intuition but “merely the form of reflection on it”’ (Guyer 1993: 40). Kant uses two examples for how the process of the symbolic representation works:

Thus a monarchical state is represented by a body with a soul if it is ruled in accordance with laws internal to the people, but by a mere machine (like a handmill) if it is ruled by a single absolute will, but in both cases it is represented only symbolically. For between a despotic state and a handmill there is, of course, no similarity, but there is one between the rule for reflecting on both and their causality. (Kant 2000: 226; Ak. 5:352)
To take the actual animate body or the handmill as themselves similar to constitutional or absolute monarchy respectively is to strain the concept of similarity. However, the rules which internally govern the former are indeed similar to the principles which govern the latter. How does one know this? If we are invited to reflect on the inner workings of the ensouled body or the handmill, in order to represent an abstract, non-tangible concept such as constitutional or absolute monarchy, upon the work of reflection and the use of one's imagination one will simply come to understand the similarity between them. Although the precise way in which such similarity is perceived is still an open question, language is replete with similes, analogies and metaphors, and human beings do succeed in conveying thoughts by these means all the time. In addition, this kind of symbolic representation is fairly straightforward as both the symbol and that which is symbolized are parts of the phenomenal world, the former being a sensible object and the latter an abstract concept derived by the understanding from sensible experiences.

In the case of a genuine experience of beauty, for Kant, the imagination starts with an attention to the particularity of the object of intuition, without a pre-determined concept supplied by the understanding, and then searches for a concept that would be adequate to that wealth of intuitions. The beautiful object presents 'aesthetic ideas,' 'the representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e. concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible' (Kant 2000: 192, Ak. 5: 314). In such experience, then, the power of judgment is not 'subjected to a heteronomy of the laws of experience; in regard to the objects of such a pure satisfaction it gives the law to itself just as reason does with regard to the faculty of desire . . .' (Kant 2000: 227; Ak. 5:353). Although the aesthetic object itself is not similar to the good will, the principles that govern the experience of the beautiful are felt (upon reflection) to be similar to the principles that govern the good will. The freedom of the imagination in pure aesthetic judgment, and the harmony of this aesthetic autonomy in nature, are felt, on the Kantian account, to be analogous both to our capacity for moral autonomy, as well as to the notion that the good will and nature may work together in tandem. In this way, Kant finds symbolic support for the reality of moral autonomy and for the highest good insofar as aesthetic harmony with nature promotes the feeling that we are indeed capable of autonomy and that nature is not hostile to our moral ends.

However, Kant does place strict limits on the use of such felt symbolic insight for the claims of knowledge. In the passage directly following the handmill example and immediately before the passage in which he argues that beauty is the symbol of the morally good, he writes:

If one may already call a mere kind of representation cognition (which is certainly permissible if it is a principle not of the theoretical determination of what an object is in itself, but of the practical determination of what the idea of it ought to be for us and for the purposive use of it), then all our cognition of
God is merely symbolic, and anyone who takes it, along with the properties of understanding, will, etc., which prove their objective reality only in beings within the world, as schematic, lapses into anthropomorphism . . . . (Kant 2000: 227; Ak. 5: 352–3, emphasis added)

I interpret this passage as claiming that the symbolic kind of representation constitutes a method for gaining only practical and not theoretical knowledge. A symbolic representation does not constitute a schema of a concept and thus does not furnish verification of the concept by sensible experience. So from the experience of aesthetic freedom one gains symbolic insight into moral freedom, and this licenses us to act as if we were autonomous in a world that will not frustrate our moral ends. Nevertheless, this does not license us to conclude that this is really the way the world is in itself. Kant's passage here is reminiscent of his discussion in the Prolegomena of the argument by design and Hume’s criticism thereof. Kant concurs with Hume that one may not legitimately draw an inference from the apparent intelligent design in nature to the assertion that there is a designer God, with the determinate attributes of intellect, will and causality. Yet, Kant allows for the purposiveness we see all around us in nature to tell us something about how creatures such as ourselves are naturally bound to experience the world: Our reason leads us ‘up to the contiguity of the filled space (of experience) with empty space (of which we can know nothing—the noumena)’ (Kant 2004: 105; Ak. 4:354). Kant uses the metaphor of the boundary between the known (what lies within the field of possible experience) and the noumenal (merely thinkable ideas which we are compelled to think in order to make sense of the idea of an appearance at all). Reason pushes up toward the boundary, but also pulls us back from it, and from this conflict, Kant writes, a person may conclude that creatures such as ourselves are compelled to see the world as if designed by a supreme being but this is actually to say ‘nothing more than: in the way that a watch, a ship, and a regiment are related to an artisan, a builder, and a commander, the sensible world . . . is related to the unknown—which I do not thereby cognize according to what it is in itself, but only according to what it is for me, that is, with respect to the world of which I am a part’ (Kant 2004: 108; Ak. 4: 357). In this way, one engages in legitimate ‘symbolic anthropomorphism’ while avoiding illegitimate ‘dogmatic anthropomorphism’.

2. The Schopenhauerian Metaphor?

Schopenhauer’s key break from his greatest teacher is to identify the thing-in-itself as Will. There is a notorious problem with this move, one which has puzzled Schopenhauer commentators for some time, namely, how can one truly predicate something of the Ding an sich given Schopenhauer’s explicit adherence to Kantian strictures on knowledge? There are three main ways to try to rescue Schopenhauer from this apparent self-contradiction. First, to deny that Schopenhauer is truly predicing something of the thing-in-itself, and to claim,
rather, that Schopenhauer is offering up a characterization of the essence or character of the phenomenal world, i.e. the thing-in-itself in appearance (Young 1987; Atwell 1995). This account, however, runs counter to many central passages in Schopenhauer’s main work, where he says quite explicitly that Will is the Kantian thing-in-itself, that which is toto genere different from phenomena, and not merely the essence of phenomena, but still in appearance. In a representative passage, for instance, Schopenhauer writes,

[phenomena means representation and nothing more. All representation, be it whatever kind it may, all object, is phenomenon. But only the will is thing-in-itself; as such it is not representation at all, but toto genere different therefrom. It is that of which all representation, all object, is the phenomenon, the visibility, the objectivity. (WWR I 110)]

The second possibility for rescuing Schopenhauer from self-contradiction is to claim that Schopenhauer gives up on a Kantian, verification-by-intuition criterion of knowledge. This is half right, for Schopenhauer does not hold that in order for us to have knowledge of a concept, that the concept must have a corresponding perception in space and time. There is a very special instance of knowledge—that of one’s own willing—that is immediate in the sense that it is not mediated by the forms of space or causality, but which is still known in ‘the form of time, as well as that of being known and of knowing in general’ (WWR II 197). Unlike Kant, Schopenhauer identifies a form of knowledge that is non-conceptual, which he refers to interchangeably as ‘intuitive knowledge’ (intuitive Erkenntniss), ‘knowledge of perception’ (anschauliche Erkenntniss) or ‘feeling’ (das Gefühl). Feeling is defined negatively in opposition to rational knowledge (Wissen) and consists in ‘something present in consciousness that is not a concept’ (WWR I 51). Examples of ‘das Gefühl’ include religious feeling, moral feeling, and aesthetic feeling (for colors, sounds, harmonies, dissonance) and so on. The word ‘feeling’ is especially apt for Schopenhauer for it is said of ‘all knowledge, of all truth, of which we are at first conscious only intuitively, but which we have not yet formulated into abstract concepts, that we feel it’ (WWR I 52). This kind of knowledge provides, according to Schopenhauer’s thought, a (partial) insight into the ‘in-itself’ of the self and world. However, even the most immediate bit of ‘feeling’ or ‘intuitive knowledge’, namely, inner experience of one’s own will, is still said to be shaped by our mental faculties. In inner perception, then, the thing-in-itself appears under the ‘lightest of veils’ but is still veiled; it does not afford us direct, sensible access to the thing-in-itself, but it does afford us a representation that is completely unique and thereby monumentally significant.

This second possible way of trying to save Schopenhauer from contradiction does not succeed, however, since he still adheres to the basic Kantian criterion for knowledge so long as one drops the requirement that the intuition in question must be spatial.

A third possibility is that we should take Schopenhauer’s identification of the will as thing-in-itself as metaphorical (White 1992; Neeley 1997; De Cian and
On this view, ‘the thing-in-itself is Will’ attempts to say something true about the thing-in-itself by way of the concept of our own human will, of which we have this most immediate (though still strictly speaking mediated) sensible intuition. I think this view is on the right track, but has several prima facie difficulties.

First, it may be objected that the metaphorical view does not save Schopenhauer from self-contradiction. That which is being predicated of the thing-in-itself, is itself of sensible origin, but how can Schopenhauer claim that such a metaphorical identification constitutes \textit{knowledge} of the thing-in-itself, and isn’t just, as Nietzsche charges, a mere dressing up of the thing-in-itself by means of a ‘poetic intuition’? Note how different the logic of metaphorical identification, as in ‘Juliet is the sun’, is from the logic of the ordinary ‘is’ identity predicate, as in ‘Water is H2O’. The latter declares something that is literally the case about the world, and the ‘is’ is symmetrical; whereas, the former is not be properly understood if taken literally, but rather, constitutes an invitation to imagine and play with the relevant similarities of Juliet and the sun, and to share, to some extent, the powerful feelings that would move the speaker to make such an identification. Further, the metaphorical ‘is’ is asymmetrical: ‘Juliet is the sun’ does not entail that ‘the sun is Juliet’. Given these features of metaphorical identification, why should ‘the thing-in-itself is will’, if taken metaphorically, count as a claim to knowledge rather than as a bit of poetry?

In order to see how such a statement could count as knowledge, for Schopenhauer or anyone else, I think it is helpful to see what Schopenhauer is doing as akin to what Kant had already tried in the third Critique, that is, to extend knowledge into the supersensible, via profoundly \textit{felt} connections (aesthetic and moral freedom in Kant), and in Schopenhauer between the feeling, from the inside, of one’s individual willing and the thing-in-itself.

What Schopenhauer is doing in calling the thing-in-itself, ‘Will’, is not metaphorical identification, but rather, \textit{metonymical} identification. A metonymy is generally defined as a figure of speech in which the name of one thing stands for another thing with which it is either closely associated, or with which it is actually contiguous. For example, in the sentence, ‘Captain Haddock is very fond of the bottle’, the word ‘bottle’ stands for alcoholic drinks with which ‘the bottle’ is generally contiguous; likewise, other common metonymies are ‘hands’ for workers, ‘souls’ for human beings, and ‘the crown’ for the monarchy. Literary scholars use ‘metonymy’ to refer not only to the figures of speech but also to ‘designate the process of association by which metonymies are produced and understood. This involves establishing relationships of contiguity between two things; whereas metaphor establishes relationships of similarity between them’ (Baldick 2004: 154).

As in metaphors, the process of interpreting a metonymy will often involve free-play and indeterminacy, and in this sense, metonymical thinking resembles Kant’s reflective judgments. For example, by referring to the ‘crown’ of England, one might understand that the whole for which it stands is the Queen, or the monarchy in general, or the power that the monarchy wields. In a poetic example
cited by Gracián (on whom more later) the Latin poet Annius Florus, writes, on Julius Caesar’s death, that ‘he who flooded the world with Roman blood, flooded the Senate with his own’. The ‘Roman blood’ is a tangible part of the human being that evokes the whole person, the spirit or animating quality of persons, or perhaps that which sustains the Roman empire.

Schopenhauer states that ‘if this thing-in-itself (we will retain the Kantian expression as a standing formula)—which as such is never object . . . is to be thought of objectively, then we must borrow its name and concept from an object, from something in some way objectively given, and therefore from one of its phenomena’ (WWR I 110). [Dieses Ding an sich (wir wollen den Kantischen Ausdruck als stehende Formel beibehalten), welches als solches nimmermehr Objekt ist, . . . mußte, wenn es dennoch objektiv gedacht werden sollte, Namen und Begriff von einem Objekt borgen, von etwas irgendwie objektiv Gegebenem, folglich von einer seiner Erscheinungen . . . (§22)]. The object that presents itself to us most immediately, as discussed earlier, is our own human will. Based on the epistemic importance of this inner perception, Schopenhauer uses the concept ‘will’ to stand for the thing-in-itself. What does Schopenhauer take himself to be doing exactly? And why should he think himself justified in naming and conceptualizing the thing-in-itself after the phenomenon of human willing? In a revealing passage Schopenhauer writes,

We have to observe, however, that here of course we use only a denominatio a potiori, by which the concept of will therefore receives a greater extension than it has hitherto had. Knowledge of the identical in different phenomena and of the different in similar phenomena is, as Plato so often remarks, the condition for philosophy. But hitherto the identity of the inner essence of any striving and operating force in nature with the will has not been recognized, and therefore the many kinds of phenomena that are only different species of the same genus were not regarded as such; they were considered as being heterogeneous. Consequently, no word could exist to describe the concept of this genus. I therefore name the genus after its most important species, the direct knowledge of which lies nearest to us, and leads to the indirect knowledge of all the others. But anyone who is incapable of carrying out the required extension of the concept will remain involved in a permanent misunderstanding. For by the word will, he will always understand only that species of it hitherto exclusively described by the term, that is to say, the will guided by knowledge . . . thus manifesting itself under the guidance of the faculty of reason. (WWR I 111)

The rhetorical device that Schopenhauer explicitly employs to call the thing-in-itself ‘Will’ is the denominatio a potiori, literally, ‘receiving its name from what is better, superior or greater.’ The Meyers Konversations-Lexikon, edition 1885–1892, glosses ‘a potiori’ as: ‘dem Hauptteil, der Mehrzahl nach, z. B. a p. fit denominatio, seinem Hauptteil nach erhält ein Ding seine Benennung’
(Bibliographisches Institut 1885–1892: 1, 695). According to dictionaries of Schopenhauer’s day, ‘denominatio a potiori’ meant something like ‘after or according to the main part or feature does a thing get its name’.14

What Schopenhauer offers us is metonymical rather than metaphorical insight into the thing-in-itself. He is trying to get us to widen the extension of the concept ‘will’ which we know from our own immediate experience (in time) beyond the bounds of possible sensation to the thing-in-itself, and invites his readers to do this on the strength of their special insight into their own wills. By metonymically identifying the thing-in-itself as Will, naming and conceptualizing it after its most important part or feature, Schopenhauer invites us to feel for ourselves the mysterious connection between our wills and the in-itself of the world in general.

Schopenhauer explicitly contrasts the kind of insight one gains by symbols and metonymies when he insists that no other name but ‘will’ is adequate to express this metaphysical insight:

I should be misunderstood by anyone who thought that ultimately it was all the same whether we expressed this essence-in-itself of all phenomena by the word will or by any other word. This would be the case if this thing-in-itself were something whose existence we merely inferred, and thus knew only indirectly and merely in the abstract. Then certainly we could call it what we liked; the name would stand merely as the symbol of an unknown quantity. But the world will, which, like a magic word, is to reveal to us the innermost essence of everything in nature, by no means expresses an unknown quantity, something reached by inferences and syllogisms, but something known absolutely and immediately, and that so well that we know and understand what will is better than anything else, be it what it may. (WWR I 111)15

By use of this metonymic device, the denominatio a potiori, naming the thing-in-itself ‘Will,’ he hopes that we will take away an insight that we could not have gotten in any other way than by feeling it, from the inside, so to speak. This is the same kind of sensible confirmation by way of a felt connection that Kant recognizes in beauty as the symbol of morality, except that the Schopenhauerian connection is not to be brought about by the felt recognition of structural similarities, but rather, by felt contiguity, i.e. that our immediate knowledge of our own will is the entrance point to knowledge of the world as it is in itself.

3. The Schopenhauerian Metonymy

In addition to the inner experience of one’s own willing, there are other somewhat unusual kinds of experiences that afford metonymical insight into the character of world as it is ‘in itself’, chief of which is aesthetic experience. Similar to Kant, there is an attempt in Schopenhauer’s thought to gain sensible confirmation of the reality and character of the ‘in-itself’ of the world by way
of the experience of beauty and the sublime, except that the symbolic relationship is interestingly changed. Consider the experience of music for Schopenhauer.  

Music does not express this or that particular and definite pleasure, this or that affliction, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, or peace of mind, but joy, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, peace of mind themselves, to a certain extent in the abstract, their essential nature, without accessories, and so also without the motives for them. (WWR I 261)

So in music, one does not feel particular instantiations of emotions, in some subject or another, under certain conditions or another, but rather, one resonates with and thus gains insight into the essence of these emotions—regardless of where, when, why, and in whom they occur. The experience of various feelings without accompanying intentional objects constitutes, for Schopenhauer, as close an insight into the nature of the world as will as one can achieve, for:

... to the man who gives himself up entirely to the impression of the symphony, it is as if he saw all the possible events of life and the world passing by within himself. Yet if he reflects, he cannot assert any likeness between that piece of music and the things that passed through his mind. For as we have said, music differs from all the other arts by the fact that it is not a copy of the phenomenon, or, more exactly, of the will’s adequate objectivity, but is directly a copy of the will itself, and therefore expresses the metaphysical to everything physical in the world, the thing-in-itself to every phenomenon. (WWR I 262)

By gaining an insight into the blind will, in this manner, through an experience of emotions, shorn of their particular contexts and relation to the individual’s will, one has a indirect sensible intuition of what by definition cannot be an object of direct sensible intuition. The relationship here between what is sensible and what is supersensible is not exactly analogical or symbolic, however. It is not that such symphonic music is felt upon reflection to be like or similar to the vicissitudes of blind willing, just as Juliet is felt to be like Romeo’s sun, to play the kind of role in his life that the sun plays for all living creatures. Rather, music is, according to Schopenhauer, the most direct expression of the will a human being can experience, seen through the lightest of veils—in time, but outside of space and distinct from particular motives, and without the distortions created by the subject’s own willing.

For Schopenhauer, the ‘fundamental character of the genius’ is ‘[a]lways to see the universal in the particular ... whereas the normal man recognizes in the particular only the particular as such; for only as such does it belong to reality, which alone has interest for him, has reference to his will. ... In accordance with this, the real object of genius is only the essential nature of things in general, the universal in them, the totality’ (WWR II 379). [Diesem entsprechend is auch nur das Wesen der Dinge überhaupt, das Allgemeine in ihnen, das Ganze, der
eigentliche Gegenstand des Genie . . . (§31)]. The key access to the supersensible through art, as seen above in the example from music, then, is metonymical: through art one may gain a perceptual access to the whole via its parts.

This metonymic relation abounds in Schopenhauer. The subjective side of aesthetic experience itself, the experience of being a will-less, objective knower, has a much more important role still: Indeed, it is metonymically related to the ultimate denial of the will. In a very revealing passage, Schopenhauer writes, ‘[w]hat makes this state [aesthetic experience] difficult and therefore rare is that in it the accident (the intellect), so to speak, subdues and eliminates the substance (the will), although only for a short time. Here also are to be found the analogy and even relationship of this with the denial of the will’ (WWR II 369, emphasis added).

[Was diesen Zustand erschwert und daher selten macht, ist, daß darin gleichsam das Accidenz (der Intellekt) die Substanz (den Willen) bemeistert und aufhebt, wenn gleich nur auf eine kurze Weile. Hier liegt auch die Analogie und sogar Verwandtschaft desselben mit der am Ende des folgenden Buches dargestellten Verneinung des Willens (§30).] Although Schopenhauer does not say ‘metonymical relationship between aesthetic experience and the denial of the will’, he first calls it an ‘analogy’ but then qualifies it, as ‘even relationship’ [sogar Verwandtschaft]. I think the concept he is moving toward, without fully enunciating it here, is metonymy, the mode of thinking in which the (sensible) part stands for the (supersensible) whole. Indeed, grades or partial expressions of the whole Will pervade the main work, and along with them come grades of subjective states which reflect levels of insight into the world as will.

It might be objected, however, that I’ve simply slapped another name onto what is essentially the Kantian, symbolic relationship after all. Why aren’t the relationships between the experience of music and the Will, the work of art and the Idea, and aesthetic will-lessness and the denial of the will truly symbolic, and analogical, as in Kant, rather than metonymic? I believe it is a mistake to elide the very interesting differences in these modes of aesthetic access to the in-itself of the phenomenal world: What is being presented sensibly in Schopenhauer’s thought is not merely a profoundly felt similarity in the rules governing the symbol and the supersensible that is symbolized; rather, what is presented in music, art and aesthetic experience itself is actual contiguity with the in-itself of the world. The work of art presents the universal; and aesthetic experience affords insight into that same type of will-lessness to its highest degree, in ascetic resignation. These sensible objects and experiences stand for the noumenal as a part stands for the whole. Whereas Kant’s connection between what is knowable and what lies beyond the bounds of sense is analogical and symbolic, Schopenhauer’s here is metonymic and thus picks up on what he sees as the true ‘contiguity’ [Berührung] of the two spheres alluded to in the Prolegomena.

Recapping then, the relationship that Schopenhauer identifies between the aesthetic experience and the supersensible is un-Kantian in two main ways: first, in the Schopenhauerian relationship, music makes the character of the Will sensible not by way of a felt similarity in the rules governing each domain (the aesthetic and the moral as in Kant). Rather, music just is an embodiment of the
Will in time and is hence phenomenal, but it is a very close objectification of the Will—an expression or partial glimpse at the character of the Will that can be felt by a subject when she resonates emotionally with great music.

Second, in Schopenhauer’s relationship there is no explicit sense in which the felt connection constitutes only practical rather than theoretical knowledge. Indeed, it seems that Schopenhauer takes the knowledge of intuition or feeling to be genuine theoretical knowledge, although he does believe that such knowledge of the world as Will may (and perhaps should) have profound effects on a person’s actions. So, what gives Schopenhauer the right to make a greater claim to knowledge from ‘feeling’ than Kant? Ultimately, Schopenhauer’s justification for departing from Kant’s strictures in this way is that Kant’s subject resembles a disembodied, rational entity, ‘a winged cherub without a body’ (WWR I 99). The view of the subject, as a one-dimensional rational schematizer, cannot explain why human beings care so much about the representations that dance before the mind’s eye. The Kantian subject may be able to account for our knowledge of the relations of representations but it cannot account for the true significance we attach to those representations (WWR I 98–9). For Kant, there is nothing theoretically that can be said which would constitute knowledge of the noumenal realm in meaningful terms, but neither is there any tremendous urgency that anything be said about it. For Schopenhauer, because we are embodied, because we are active participants in this world, and not just rational reflectors upon it, there is a sense that we must say something about the way the world is, in itself, of which we are a part: ‘It will be of special interest for us to obtain information about its real significance, that significance, otherwise merely felt, by virtue of which these pictures or images do not march past us strange and meaningless . . . but speak to us directly, are understood, and acquire an interest that engrosses our whole nature’ (WWR I 95).

4. Gracián’s Poetics and Schopenhauer as Poetic Metaphysician

In his transformation of the Kantian symbol, Schopenhauer pays careful attention to style, tropes, aesthetic perception and metaphysical insight, an attention he may have developed in part through his study of Baltasar Gracián. According to Arthur Hübscher’s list of books from Schopenhauer’s personal library, Schopenhauer owned a 1702 edition of Gracián’s complete works in Spanish, as well as multiple copies of individual works both in Spanish and in French translation (Schopenhauer 1968: Vol. 5, 492). It is well known that Schopenhauer translated from Spanish into German Gracián’s book of aphorisms, the Oráculo Manual—known in English as The Art of Worldly Wisdom.19 From Gracián’s allegorical novel on deceit and disillusionment, El Criticón, Schopenhauer also translated a lengthy passage (a portrait of a charlatan), which he used to satirize Hegel (BM 25–30).20 It is less well known that Schopenhauer referred to Gracián as ‘my favorite author’21 (mein Lieblingschriftsteller). It is even less well known who this Spanish thinker was, who had so favorably impressed the German philosopher!
Baltasar Gracián (1601–1658) was a 17th century Spanish Jesuit priest who taught philosophy and theology at various Spanish universities, and wrote primarily in a secular humanist tradition for a secular audience, for which he often found himself at odds with the church leaders, and had rights and privileges taken away from him. He published several books including the aforementioned book of aphorisms and *El Criticón*, as well as a treatise on poetics that was revolutionary for focusing not only on Classical authors of Antiquity, like Marcial and Lucan, but also on his contemporaries in what has come to be known as the Spanish Golden Age in the likes of Góngora, Quevedo and Cervantes. Like Schopenhauer, Gracián was interested in understanding why great thoughts were great. Indeed, Gracián’s treatise is an anatomy of poetic genius, a subject he approached with awe and respect. What I have termed Schopenhauer’s metonymical aesthetic has strong ties to the kind of poetic preferences that Gracián discusses in his *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* (*Wit and the Art of the Mind*). Indeed, Gracián provides a taxonomy of wits—ingenious concepts that discover similarities and continuities between various objects, often revealing deep facets of the world. For Gracián, a wit is ‘an act of the understanding that discovers [expresses] the correspondence between objects’ [un acto del entendimiento que expresa la correspondencia que se halla entre los objetos] (Gracián 1969: vol. 1, 55), and it is most laudable and ingenious when it brings together objects in an entirely new way, not ‘using found and relocated concepts’ [(no) usando de encontrados y partidos conceptos] (Gracián 1969: vol. 2, 243).

Some wits, for Gracián, are capable of revealing deep truths about the world, and in these the author’s perspicuity—that is, his powers of perception—is great: ‘The wit of perspicuity puts within reach the most difficult truths, describes the most hidden one . . . it is useful’ [la agudeza de perspicacia . . . tiende a dar alcance a las más presentes . . . es más útil] (Gracián 1969: vol 1, 58). This kind of wit is compared to the artful one which is more pleasurable but less useful. For T. E. May, a scholar of Spanish letters, the wit is an element of the understanding more than it is one of language, and thus it has to do with perception, with the poet’s ability to discover (‘descubrir’) the correspondences and present them such that the reader will also feel awe as he reads and discovers the wit (May 1986: 270–2). For another literary scholar, Alexander A. Parker, the witty *conceito* or conceit, is ‘a remarkable vehicle for deep poetical thought and feeling in close association’ (Parker 1982: xxv). What is perhaps of most importance to my study of Gracián’s possible influence on Schopenhauer, is that unlike the English ‘conceit’ or the Italian ‘concetto’ (terms of art also utilized in the 17th century), Gracián’s term is not exclusively metaphorical, that is, symbolic. As Parker explains, [unlike ‘conceits’ and ‘concetti’] ‘Gracián’s relationships do not have to be metaphorical but can be many types of intellectual contrasts, similarities, or identifications, such as the association of physical proximity with emotional unity’ (Parker 1982: xxx). That is, the witty concepts or *agudezas* so prized by Gracián, may be metonymies, and his two volume treatise is a vast repository of great writing containing many examples of metonymy including Florius’s wit on the spilled blood of the Romans and the spilled blood of Caesar.
Schopenhauer’s account of how one gains new knowledge is reminiscent of Gracián’s poetics, especially insofar as he stresses many times the role of perception or anschauliche Erkenntniss and, in a Gracianian way, discusses the role of the discoverer of the relationship who listens to things speaking: ‘to perceive, to allow the things themselves to speak to us, to apprehend and grasp new relations between them, and then to precipitate and deposit all this into concepts, in order to possess it with certainty; this is what gives us new knowledge’ (WWR II 72).

[Hingegen anschauen, die Dinge selbst zu uns reden lassen, neue Verhältnisse derselben affassen, dann aber dies Alles in Begriffe absetzen und niederlegen, um es sicher zu besitzen: das giebt neue Erkenntnisse (§7).] Also, his emphasis on the relationship between genius and wit is made explicit and his praise of a select few—true geniuses who have the gift to compare feelings and concepts—harks back to the opening lines of Gracián’s treatise where he discusses how only a ‘select few’ can move knowledge forward, while many can simply proceed. Writes Schopenhauer, ‘[b]ut whereas almost everyone is capable of comparing concepts with concepts, to compare concepts with perceptions is a gift of the select few. According to its degree of perfection, this gift is the condition of wit, power of judgment, sagacity, and genius’ (WWR II 72) [Allein, während Begriffe mit Begriffen zu vergleichen so ziemlich Jeder die Fähigkeit hat, ist Begriffe mit Anschauungen zu vergleichen eine Gabe der Auserwählten: sie bedingt, je nach dem Grade ihrer Vollkommenheit, Witz, Urtheilskraft, Scharfsinn, Genie (§7).]

While there is still more work to be done in identifying the philosophically salient elements of his works, Gracián’s discussion of the role of perception and genius as well as the importance he placed on metonymy all shed light on Schopenhauer’s thought, whether or not he had a direct influence on the philosopher or simply represented for him a kindred spirit.

5. Conclusion

One might wonder if my account of the Kantian-Schopenhauerian dialectic yields anything of interest for contemporary philosophy. I believe it does, for one of Schopenhauer’s lasting achievements, is that he, more than any other philosopher, models a symbiotic relationship between art and philosophy. For Schopenhauer, concepts, logic and rational argument are not fine-grained enough to reveal the true character of and what is most significant in human life—aesthetic and ethical value. However, one may gain non-conceptual insight into these realms through inner perception of one’s own will, and through aesthetic experience, especially with music. These two different modes of access to the world found a legacy in Wittgenstein in the distinction between what may be spoken of and what may only be shown; but in Wittgenstein these domains do not intersect.23

On the contrary, for Schopenhauer, philosophy and the arts complement each other when each is treated sensitively. He endeavors to use his poetic insights responsibly: Thus, insights gained aesthetically, must also be translated into
conceptual form—even if something is lost in translation—if they are to be communicated and held up for rational scrutiny. Although feeling [Gefühl] is epistemically privileged in his thought because less mediated, Schopenhauer provides logical argumentation for key facets of his metaphysics (for example, he gives several arguments in support of transcendental idealism and for the identification of the Will as thing-in-itself) and garners much evidence from the science of his day to show that his metaphysics constitutes the inference to the best explanation.

Many philosophers might complain, however: What point is there in thinking about a world that goes beyond our possible experience? Isn’t the only world worth talking about the world of representation through science and rational reflection? What Kant pulverized in the first Critique should remain in the dustbin of history.

I do not pretend, in the space of this essay, to give an adequate retort to this profound worry, a worry about doing the kind of poetic metaphysics in which Schopenhauer engages. I’ll just sketch out what might constitute one line of response: There are many phenomena about which people have deep feelings and intuitions, and which are not well explained by a thoroughgoing naturalistic and scientific point of view. Moral intuitions and aesthetic and religious feelings are chief among them. So long as these phenomena are not well explained, or explained away, by a naturalized world view, then there is an open door to philosophers to try and determine the source of these powerful feelings.

Perhaps, however, what can be said and what can be shown are indeed radically distinct, and so Schopenhauer’s enterprise should be left entirely to the artists, poets and composers, rather than the philosophers? Indeed, symbolic, metaphorical or metonymical insight cannot be proven true or false. How would one prove that ‘Juliet is the sun,’ that the beautiful is the symbol of morality, or that one glimpses the in-itself of the world as blind will through symphonic music? Schopenhauer gave a lot of thought to this worry, and his answer—an aesthetic/philosophical symbiosis—is quite interesting. He writes,

... all wisdom is certainly contained in the works of the pictorial or graphic arts, yet only virtualiter or implicite. Philosophy, on the other hand, endeavours to furnish the same wisdom actualiter and explicite; in this sense philosophy is related to these arts as wine is to grapes. What it promises to supply would be, so to speak, a clear gain already realized, a firm and abiding possession, whereas that which comes from the achievements and works of art is only one that is to be produced afresh ... (WWR II 407)

In this quote, which relates philosophy metonymically to the arts, Schopenhauer sees that the latter offer deep perceptual insights into the nature of the world, but that it is philosophy’s role to make these aesthetic insights explicit, to distill them into concepts. In this way, the wisdom in art may be communicated and held up to rational scrutiny so that they might constitute a ‘firm and abiding
possession’. Never before in the history of Western philosophy had the arts been incorporated so seriously into the philosophical enterprise, as opening up a way of seeing the world, and for offering up a path for thinking about the nature and significance of human existence. Although contemporary philosophy often eschews ‘meaning of life’ questions, perhaps it should try to advance in these matters again by way of a Schopenhauerian symbiosis between what can only be shown and what can be said.  

NOTES

1 There have been other studies on the importance of Gracián on Schopenhauer, for example, Iriarte 1960. But these studies generally focus on the Gracián’s aphoristic style which Schopenhauer adopted in his *Parerga and Paralipomena* as well as their kindred, jaded spirits. To my knowledge, I am the first to suggest that Gracián’s poetics may have played a role in the development of Schopenhauer’s aesthetics and in his attention to literary devices in general for the purposes of metaphysics.

2 As is usual, references in the form ‘Ak’ are to the Akademie edition of Kant’s collected works, given by volume and page number: see Kant (1902-).

3 One curious aspect of his aesthetic theory is why Kant did not also claim that the feeling of the sublime constitutes a symbol of the morally-good. In the following passage Kant seems to suggest that in the sublime we have a symbolic representation of autonomy vanquishing inclinations which generally run counter to duty: ‘... the intellectual, intrinsically purposive (moral) good, judged aesthetically, must not be represented so much as beautiful but rather as sublime, so that it arouses more the feeling of respect (which scorns charm) than that of love and intimate affection, since human nature does not agree with that good of its own accord, but only through the dominion that reason exercises over sensibility’ (Kant 2000: 153–3; Ak.5: 271). It seems to me that the same kind of symbolic relationship is operative in the experience of the sublime as well, where a feeling of aesthetic freedom despite a hostile nature provides a deeply felt connection to moral autonomy in a hostile world. However, Kant holds that in the feeling of the sublime, the imagination strains to use nature as a *schema* (rather than as a symbol) to make the ideas of reason sensible (Kant 2000: 148; Ak. 5:265). Perhaps the reason why Kant does not call the sublime a symbol of morality along with the beautiful, is because he sees the feeling of the sublime as having come about from the direction of reason, and thus the imagination is less free here than in the beautiful; this would explain how the experience of freedom in the sublime because less free, is thereby less apt to be a symbol of moral autonomy.

4 For a fuller discussion of the history of the attempts to save Schopenhauer from this contradiction see De Cian and Segala 2002, and Neeley 1997, I am indebted to Marco Segala for bringing these papers to my attention.

5 I cannot in the space of this chapter do justice to this controversy, on which many prominent scholars have written, for example, Janaway 1989 and Janaway 1999. But what I hope to do is to sketch out an alternative to this means of saving Schopenhauer’s identification of the thing-in-itself from the charge of self-contradiction, an alternative that harmonizes with what Schopenhauer says throughout the main work.

6 ‘Erscheinung heißt Vorstellung, und weiter nichts: alle Vorstellung, welcher Art sie auch sei, alles Objekt, ist Erscheinung. Ding an sich aber ist allein der Wille: als solcher ist er durchaus nicht Vorstellung, sondern toto genere von ihr verschieden: er ist es, womon
alle Vorstellung, alles Objekt, die Erscheinung, die Sichtbarkeit, die Objektität ist’ (I, §21). All references to Schopenhauer’s main work are to the Payne translation listed in the bibliography. English quotations will be followed, where the language is especially important, by the German original from the Hübscher edition (Schopenhauer 1972).

7 ‘Kant’s principal result may be summarized in its essence as follows: “All concepts which do not have as their basis a perception in space and time (sensuous perception), or in other words, have not been drawn from such a perception, are absolutely empty, that is to say, they give us no knowledge. But as perception can furnish only *phenomena*, not things-in-themselves, we too have absolutely no knowledge of things-in-themselves”. I admit this of everything, but not of the knowledge everyone has of his own *willing*. This is neither a perception (for all perception is spatial), nor is it empty; on the contrary, it is more real than any other knowledge. . . . it is the one thing known to us *immediately*, and not given to us merely in the representation, as all else is. Here, therefore, lies the datum alone capable of becoming the key to everything else, or, as I have said, the only narrow gateway to truth’ (WWR II 196).

8 How one understands Kantian things-in-themselves, either on a ‘two-worlds’ view (Guyer 1987) or on a ‘two-aspects’ view (Allison 1983 and Prauss 1989), makes a great difference in the intelligibility of my discussion here. If one adheres to a two-aspects view, then one can only meaningfully talk about things-in-themselves in negative terms, i.e. as how ordinary phenomenal objects might be considered if those same objects were not experienced in time and space and via the categories of human experience. It is only on a two-worlds view of Kant’s things-in-themselves, where there is another set of entities, things-in-themselves, which appear to us as phenomenal objects, which makes sense of the possibility of saying something positive about the nature of things-in-themselves. I believe that Schopenhauer held *avant la lettre*, a two-worlds view of Kant’s things-in-themselves, although Schopenhauer believed that because the principles of individuation are space and time, and these are forms of human intuition, one should not ascribe plurality to the noumenal realm, for there must only be a non-plural ‘thing’ in itself. One piece of evidence for Schopenhauer holding the two-worlds view of Kant is that Schopenhauer is an avowed metaphysical monist, ultimately all is Will, and this position is not warranted from within a two-aspects view.

9 I rely here largely on Ted Cohen’s illuminating discussions of metaphor (Cohen 1997 and Cohen 1999).

10 I do not wish to suggest that poetry is not a vehicle for knowledge, nor that there is no metaphorical meaning. On the contrary, I think a case can be made for both of these claims, but they are controversial, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter and my abilities to argue for either at this time.

11 The latter of these types forms an important subcategory of metonymy: *synecdoche*.

12 ‘Aquel [Julius Caesar] dice, que anegó todo el mundo con la romana sangre, inundó con la suya todo el Senado. Vese la correspondencia entre el mundo, lleno de sangre ajena, y el Senado de la suya propia, sangre con sangre . . . Sic ille, qui terrarium Orben civili sanguine implerat: tandem ipse sanguine suo curiam implevi.’ (quoted in Gracián 1969: vol. 1, 59).

13 ‘Man hat jedoch wohl zu bemerken, daß wir hier allerdings nur eine *denominatio a potiori* gebrauchen, durch welche eben deshalb der Begriff Wille eine größere Ausdehnung erhält, als er bisher hatte. Erkenntnis des Identischen in verschiedenen Erscheinungen und des Verschiedenen in ähnlichen ist eben, wie Plato so oft bemerkt, Bedingung zur Philosophie. Man hatte aber bis jetzt die Identität des Wesens jeder irgend strebenden und wirkenden Kraft in der Natur mit dem Willen nicht erkannt, und daher die mannigfaltigen
Erscheinungen, welche nur verschiedene Species des selben Genus sind, nich dafür angesehen, sondern als heterogen betrachtet: deswegen konnte auch kein Wort zur Bezeichnung des Begriffs dieses Genus vorhanden seyn. Ich benenne daher das Genus nach der vorzüglichsten Species, deren uns näher liegende, unmittelbare Erkenntni aller andern führt. Daher aber würde in einem immerwährenden Mißverständniss befangen bleiben, wer nicht fähig wäre, die hier geforderte Erweiterung des Begriffs zu vollziehen, sondern bei dem Worte Wille immer nur noch die bisher allein damit bezeichnete eine Species, den vom Erkennen geleiteten und ausschließlich nach Motiven, ja wohl gar nur nach abstrakten Motiven, also unter Leitung der Vernunft sich äußernnden Willen verstehen wollte, welcher, wie gesagt, nur die deutlichste Erscheinung des Willens ist’ (I. § 22).

14 I am indebted to Professor David McCarty for help in tracking down the 19th century meaning of *denominatio a potiori* and for finding examples of how the term has been used in Aquinas, Heidegger and other philosophers.

15 ‘Auf die Entgegengesetzte Weise würde mich aber der mißverstehn, der etwas meinte, es sei zuletzt einerlei, ob man jenes Wesen an sich aller Erscheinung durch das Wort Wille, oder durch irgend ein anderes bezeichnete. Dies würde der Fall sein, wenn jenes Ding an sich etwas wäre, auf dessen Existenz wir bloß schlossen und es so allein mittelbar und bloß in abstracto erkannten: dann könnte man es allerdings nennen wie man wollte: der Name stände als bloßes Zeichen einer unbekannten Größe da. Nun aber bezeichnet das Wort Wille, welches uns, wie ein Zauberwort, das innerste Wesen jedes Dinges in der Natur aufschließen soll, keineswegs eine unbekannte Größe, ein durch Schlüsse erreichtes Etwas; sondern ein durchaus unmittelbar Erkanntes und so sehr Bekannten, daß wir, was Wille sei, viel besser wissen und verstehen, als sonst irgend etwas, was immer es auch sei’ (I. § 22).

16 By ‘music’ here Schopenhauer has in mind symphonic, non-programmatic music.

17 How such will-less, aesthetic experience is even possible within the Schopenhauerian system (a question recently explored by Alex Neill [Neill 2008]) is a live and fascinating question, but one which I cannot pursue in the space of this chapter.

18 Compare this with what Schopenhauer says of the (true) poet: ‘[t]he narrative as well as the dramatic poet takes from life that which is quite particular and individual, and describes it accurately in its individuality [nimmt aus dem Leben das ganz Einzelne heraus und schildert es genau in seiner Individualität]; but in this way he reveals the whole of human existence, since, though he appears to be concerned with the particular, he is actually concerned with that which is everywhere and at all times [offenbart aber hierdurch das ganze menschliche Daseyn; indem er zwar scheinbar es mit dem Einzelnen, in Wahrheit aber mit Dem, was überall und zu allen Zeiten ist, zu thun hat]’ (WWR II: 427; §37).

19 Schopenhauer’s translation is entitled *Baltasar Gracians Hand-Orakel und Kunst der Weltklugheit* and was published posthumously by Brockhaus in 1862. It is not known when Schopenhauer first read Gracián, or when he acquired these books in his personal library. In the first edition of the *World as Will and Representation* (1818/1969) there are no explicit references to Gracían. He had certainly read Gracían by the time he published the *WWR* with a second volume (1844) for this contains several references to Gracían. J. Iriarte (Iriarte 1960) suggests that Schopenhauer read Gracían on his Italian journeys around 1825, but offers no source for this information.

20 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for reminding me of Schopenhauer’s use of this extended Gracian passage in the preface to his *Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*.

21 ‘Mein Lieblingschriftsteller ist aber dieser philosophische Gracian’ (Schopenhauer 1893:171), cited by Coster, 1913: 691, and quoted in L. B. Walton’s introduction to Gracían
1953. Furthermore, Schopenhauer writes: ‘Taking the book as a guide, especially for those who intend to enter public life, I have never chanced to meet with anything which seemed to me even distantly to approach it . . . . It would possibly be rather difficult to disprove the thesis that the Spanish nation has produced the best maxims of practical wisdom, the best proverb, the best epitaph, and the best motto in the world. If I had to sustain it, I would point, with reference to the first head, to the Oraculo manual’ (Gracián 1953: viii).

To my knowledge, there is no published translation of the Agudeza into English. I’ve relied here on translations done specifically for this chapter by Steven Wagschal, professor of Spanish literature, Indiana University.

For a detailed account of the influence of Schopenhauer on Wittgenstein’s thought see Magee 1993: Appendix 3.

I would like to thank Steven Wagschal, Wolfgang Mann, Lydia Goehr, and Arthur Danto for helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter. The ideas here were further developed in discussions with Jenny Bunker (for whose astute and helpful commentary I’d like to give special thanks), Christopher Janaway, Alex Neill, Bernard Reginster, Paul Guyer, Julian Young, David Cartwright, Matthias Kofler, Robert Wicks, Marco Segala, Rachel Zuckert, and many others in attendance at the conference, ‘Schopenhauer and the Philosophy of Value’ (University of Southampton, July 2007). Thanks also to an anonymous reviewer for EJP for helpful criticisms of my interpretation of Kant.

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In the essay ‘Reference to Ethics’, appended to the book *On the Will in Nature*, Arthur Schopenhauer voices his views on the lack of response to his main work *World as Will and Presentation*. This was the first time Schopenhauer had given a public account of his position on his then 17-year-old philosophical treatise. Being of the opinion that his theory of the metaphysics of will had been proven by the latest discoveries within the field of natural science, he goes on to say ‘the most important thing, indeed the only essential thing with respect to the whole of existence . . . lies in the morality of human action’. It is therefore the object of every philosophy to show ‘that the physical order of things is dependent on the moral one’.¹ This would only be possible if, in its very essence, metaphysics itself was understood as ethical:

Only *that* metaphysics is the actual and immediate support of ethics which is itself already ethical in origin, is constructed out of the material of ethics: will. For this reason I could have entitled my metaphysics ‘ethics’ with much better reason than Spinoza, with whom this seems almost like irony . . ., for only through the use of sophisms was he able to attach morality to a system from which it would never with consistency proceed.²

Schopenhauer’s view expressed here on the connection between ethics and metaphysics is by no means immediately evident for those further acquainted with Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of will. In the context of his metaphysics of will, will is conceived as something entirely different to what is typical in ethical theory, which concerns a conscious, free and responsible will. Through an ‘extension of the concept of will’,³ on which the concept of metaphysics is based, all affections of the body—sensations, passions, drives, even the arbitrary processes of a vegetative system—are all brought under the concept of will. If therefore the essence of the world is will in that broader sense, and taking into account that Schopenhauer emphasizes that human action is fundamentally
determined by the Principle of Sufficient Ground, the question is posed as to how a metaphysics of this sort can lead to a theory of ethics.

There are interpretations, like those of Rudolf Malter, which demonstrate that Schopenhauer’s philosophy, seen as a whole, is ethical owing to the notion of redemption determining it. But if redemption lies in the denial of the metaphysical will, this does not explain why metaphysics is itself originally ethical.

John E. Atwell’s analysis of Schopenhauer’s philosophy is based on a different premise. He discusses Schopenhauer’s metaphysics under the basic assumption that ‘world understanding proceeds from self understanding or that the character of the world parallels in many ways the character of the human individual’. Independent of this treatise I have in a different sense laid down an interpretation of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, which culminates in a primarily ethical thesis that ‘the experience of character is . . . at once the experience of the world’. Giovanni Gurisatti recently also stated that ‘in Schopenhauer, as there is no characterology without metaphysics, there is no metaphysics without characterology’. Despite the differences in interpretation, all of these authors agree that ethical meaning in Schopenhauer’s philosophy is not to be found in overcoming the world that is metaphysically interpreted as will, but in the interpretation itself.

At first sight however, the doctrine of character does not appear to be that significant for Schopenhauer’s ethical metaphysics. The most comprehensive and specific representation of character is given in the fourth book of Schopenhauer’s main work, which does not constitute a large part of the discussions on ethics. However, certain aspects of this theory were then implemented more broadly in the Prize Essays and emphasized to a greater degree. But it must be taken into account that Schopenhauer, as he himself expressed, could not support the theory on ethics in these Prize Essays by basing it on metaphysics. After all, the meaning of ethics in the World as Will and Presentation—as opposed to the Prize Essays—leads to a ‘nullification (Aufhebung) of character’.

In the following, it will be demonstrated on the basis of Schopenhauer’s early writings, posthumously published, and the first edition of Schopenhauer’s dissertation, that the emergence of his primarily ethical metaphysics is closely entwined with the doctrine of character. Following on from here it will be shown that, in fact, the final execution of his philosophical system has, at its centre, the doctrine of character, although this central meaning of character was not made explicit by Schopenhauer himself. Thus, the aforementioned hypothesis concerning the unity of character, metaphysics and ethics can be confirmed and specified both by an analysis of the development of Schopenhauer’s ideas in his writings and a systematic analysis of the ideas themselves.

1. Preparations for a Primarily Ethical Metaphysics

Pivotal to the discussion of character is Schopenhauer’s use of the two Kantian terms ‘intelligible character’ and ‘empirical character’. Character is defined for the first time in the chapter concerning the Principle of the Sufficient Ground of
Action in his dissertation of 1813. The Principle of Sufficient Ground of Action stands in close relation to the later developed metaphysics of will. This holds true not only because this principle relates to willing, but also because Schopenhauer already discusses the ‘miracle kat’exochen’ in relation to it; the determination of which Schopenhauer later explains to be the entire content of his main work.\(^{12}\) In the second edition of his treatise on the Principle of Sufficient Ground he points out that the manner in which the law of motivation relates to the law of causality parallels the way in which will relates to presentation. He states ‘This insight is the cornerstone of the whole of my metaphysics’.\(^ {13}\) This also corresponds with the fact that the Principle of the Ground of Action systematically follows the Principle of the Ground of Becoming, whose objects constitute the world as presentation.\(^ {14}\)

Nowhere else in the Fourfold Root are the changes in the second edition so fundamental and comprehensive as in the chapter on action. It is particularly noticeable that the doctrine of character plays a central role in the first edition, whilst in the second there is only a short reference remaining in chapter 8 of the general comments and results.\(^ {15}\) In order to lend sufficient credit to this development, which Schopenhauer later ignores when referring to his dissertation as a preparatory thesis to the *World as Will and Presentation*, it is important first of all to expound the principal theme of the dissertation.\(^ {16}\)

For the purpose of defining the manner in which grounds are discussed in science, Schopenhauer points out in his dissertation that there are four different modes of the Principle of Sufficient Ground in accordance with the difference between the objects of science. As such they must, despite their differences, be able to show the general fundamental form of the Principle of Sufficient Ground, which Schopenhauer sees in the fact ‘that all presentations to us stand related to one another in a lawful, and with respect to its form, a priori determinable connection’.\(^ {17}\) In regard to the Principle of Sufficient Ground of Action several complications arise; firstly, there is only one object, i.e. the subject of willing. The relation sought can thus only pertain towards objects of another class.\(^ {18}\) Secondly, the concept of an a priori definable law seems not to apply to acts of willing.

The first question is resolved through the acceptance of a causality of willing in action.\(^ {19}\) The causality of willing is dependent on the resolution and expresses itself in the action. By contrast, desires define willing that does not become causal. Desires taken as fantasies are presentations,\(^ {20}\) in the same way as actions of the body are. Nevertheless, there is no law governing a relationship between the two, since not only do human reactions to particular given motives differ, but also the agent of the willing can only understand what he actually wanted from the decision made on his action. The cause of the resolution is thus not to be sought after in the presentation, the object, but in the subject of the willing.

Thus the second problem comes about, as to how one is to ascertain, at least in respect of its form, an a priori definable law of resolutions in regard to the act of will. In order to be able to assert this idea, Schopenhauer presupposes a ‘so to speak permanent state of the subject of will’,\(^ {21}\) which with reference to Kant and
Schelling he entitles the ‘intelligible character’. To validate this supposition he refers to the observation that the actions of individuals, and therefore their individually differing manner of reacting to particular motives, have a certain regularity. Character can therefore be inferred, to a certain degree, from empirical observation. Yet, since it is only derived by means of fragmentary observations, there is a difference between the empirical character and the intelligible character that can never be eliminated entirely. For the intelligible character is to be understood as a pervasively determined condition.

The intelligible character is used by Schopenhauer in order that human action does not fall out of the range of the Principle of Sufficient Ground—so that one is then certainly entitled to ask: why did this human action take place? If actions were to be taken out of that range, they would no longer be able to be evaluated morally. In a similar way to Kant, the intelligible character is used in order to show the possibility of morality, even if Schopenhauer emphasises in his dissertation that it is not supposed to be about ethics. Accordingly, the intelligible character and causality of will strongly reflect Kant’s theory of causality as resulting from freedom.

But Schopenhauer has a different concept of causality, confined strictly to phenomena, that in its very premise leads away from the Kantian idea. Even if Schopenhauer speaks of the causality of will, the cause within the law of motivation is not the will, but the motive. Character is most certainly a presupposition of the moment of presentation’s becoming a motive for a resolution, that is, its becoming a reason for action: and in this sense it can be seen as the actual reason—yet Schopenhauer does not do this—oddly, it must be said, since the premise of the causality of willing is therefore in many ways withdrawn. However at this point in the thesis a much stronger differentiation is made than later between the moment of presentation and the motive, in so far as the effect of willing, the resolution, must be contained within the motive.

In addition, Schopenhauer draws conclusions from the Kantian idea of the intelligible character as something we cannot cognize and as independent of time. Once causality has been laid down as a relationship between ‘states’ (G 49 f.), will is consciously defined by Schopenhauer, in line with the Principle of Sufficient Ground of Becoming, as a ‘so to speak permanent state’. However he explicitly points out that this expression only concerns a comparative form of speech, since permanence and state are determinations of time, and that contrary to this the subject of willing and its intelligible character are not within time. After all, only the resolutions as acts of will are within time, not the character which defines them. It is more correct to express the intelligible character as ‘a universal act of will outside time’. After all, Schopenhauer is forced to accept that the subject of will can only be termed as object ‘with an important limitation’, since the immediate objects of inner perception are only the particular acts of will within time.

With this consideration in mind Schopenhauer then introduces the radical changes in the second edition and in the metaphysics of will. If, for Schopenhauer, time is the ‘prototype’ of the Principle of Sufficient Ground,
on which all its forms, including causality, are based, and if character lies outside of time, then it is clear that one can no longer talk of a causality of will. In place of the causal relationship between the subject of will and its actions a relationship which is independent of time is introduced that Schopenhauer calls ‘visibility’ or ‘mirroring’. The subject of will is therefore no longer the cause of its own actions; instead actions make the character of the subject visible. By presupposing character a law of motivation can be expressed, which, so far as its determination is derived from its actions, can only be defined very inexactlly. However, since the causality of will is no longer applicable, the law of motivation is no different from the law of causality in the Principle of the Sufficient Ground of Becoming. In his dissertation Schopenhauer already presents the relationship between the two laws by drawing a comparison in which visual metaphors are used extensively, for example:

The law of causality can be compared to ... the law of optics, which states that a ray of light has an effect on a colourless see-through body with parallel surfaces and on colourless mirrors. It states that the emitted light will either pass through the surface without any kind of change or will be reflected back to where it came from; where the light was before, it will be afterwards, and from the constitutions at the onset the outcome can be foreseen. The law of motivation however is comparable to the effect of light on coloured bodies, in which the same ray reflects red light from the one body, green from the second, and if the third is black does not reflect at all. In fact the way in which each different body reflects the light cannot be predicted by knowledge of the constitution of the particular body, or of light. Instead, the result can only be described by the actual appearance of the light on the body, yet how the body reflects the light once, it will do again, since there is only one type of light.  

In terms of this comparison, the law of causality and that of motivation are no longer different forms of the Principle of Sufficient Ground that contain different types of regularities. The causality is identical, only the medium is different, which leads Schopenhauer in the second edition and in his main work to say: ‘motivation is merely causality passing through cognition’. In line with these definitions, motivation is placed under the Principle of the Sufficient Ground of Becoming as a subordinate aspect of causality—with decisive repercussions for the development of the metaphysics of will.

Following on from here it becomes evident that motivation is no longer dependent upon the self-consciousness of the human being and so therefore can also be said to apply to animals, since they also have a cognitive faculty. In fact, in regard to motives, it is enough to have the capacity for presentations; the resolution no longer plays a role. The subjection of motivation to the Principle of Sufficient Ground of Becoming also introduces the necessity of a differentiation between different forms of causality, which were not apparent in the dissertation. In the three forms cause, stimulus and motive, specific moments of the Principle
of the Ground of Becoming are laid down. In the first edition such specific moments only appeared as characters within the Principle of Sufficient Ground of Action. Analogous to the relationship between the intelligible and empirical character, all presentations can be shown to be phenomena of timeless characters spread out in space and time. It is therefore not just the fact that motivation is grouped under the law of causality, but that causality is thought of in analogy to motivation. The entire world of presentation is therefore only ‘the becoming visible’ of a will acting through certain characters; and Schopenhauer’s philosophy, as was stated in one of his most famous notes from 1817, can be ‘summarised in the one expression: the world is the will’s self-cognizance’.31

This development towards his metaphysics of will, which was already being applied in the final stages of his doctorate and was more or less completed in the following year, is easily confirmed by reference to his handwritten manuscripts. In the first manuscripts (1814) concerning the cognizance of the body and his doctrine of Ideas within a philosophy of nature, ‘will’ and ‘intelligible character’ are used as interchangeable synonyms. Continuing on from here life, then body and finally animals, plants and inorganic phenomena are shown to be the visibility of ‘will itself, the intelligible character’.32

In connection with this, the concept of will in the early phase of Schopenhauer’s thinking is a moral one in the sense of his doctrine of ‘better consciousness’.33 However, I do not want to delve further into this doctrine,34 although it was considerably influential in the development of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Instead I wish to point out that, by distancing himself from the thoughts of the causality of will, a change in the moral meaning of ‘better consciousness’ was laid down.

The change from a causal relationship between will and action to a relationship which can only be expressed metaphorically by ‘visibility’ and ‘mirroring’ can be termed as a ‘Copernican revolution’ in moral philosophy. Kant’s conception of the Copernican revolution in his theory of knowledge concerned the idea that knowledge is not defined by objects, but instead the objects by knowledge. In a similar way, Schopenhauer’s will is not the cause of actions, in fact character as the visibility of will is a result of action. Life is nothing but a mirror of the essence outside of time; which outside of this mirror can only be defined as a negation. The revolution is a change from a scientific ethic, that is, one which rests on the principle of ground, to speculative ethics. In this sense the expression ‘speculative’ is to be understood as both ‘viewing’ and ‘mirroring’; in quite the same way as it had developed in the classical speculative thinking of antiquity and the Middle Ages.35 As far as Schopenhauer is concerned, ethics can only be metaphysical, since all experience is bound by the Principle of Sufficient Ground. The experience of life points to something that does not belong to experience, but that is made visible by it; and within this relation to a metaphysical sphere, the questions of ethics, of moral action and of the freedom of will are to be resolved.

Even before Schopenhauer had become acquainted with the Kantian distinction between the empirical and intelligible character, he had put forward a fundamental idea of learning through life as an interactive relationship between
infinite essence and the finite phenomenon of will, ideas which were later linked to the Kantian distinction. In one of the earliest handwritten notes he states: ‘Life is a language in which a teaching is given to us. If this teaching could be instilled in us in another way, we would not live’. And a little later, in 1812, these ethical connections suggest the metaphysical concept of the world as phenomenon of the will. Here Schopenhauer writes that the elements which make up the world have no reality and no meaning in themselves except through the will that they stand for. In taking up some earlier elements, which stand partly in connection with the so-called doctrine of better consciousness, this idea is then connected to the theory of the intelligible and empirical character, which in turn is related to the problem of causality introduced in the dissertation. The solution is to be found in a note from 1814:

Life is the intelligible character’s becoming visible; in life this [character] does not change, but it does outside life and outside time in consequence of the self-knowledge that is given through life. Life is only the mirror into which we look not so that it may reflect something, but so that we may recognize ourselves in it, may see what it reflects.

The examination of Schopenhauer’s handwritten manuscripts and the dissertation clarify that his metaphysics of will was developed as consistent with and out of the doctrine of character as its premise. Since the doctrine of character was used in his dissertation in order to prove the possibility of ethics, it is possible to confirm what Schopenhauer said about his metaphysics in his remarks quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Quite simply, that metaphysics is fundamentally ethical and that the physical order of things is proven to be dependent on the moral one, in that the first is nothing more than the mirror or the visibility of the latter.

There is no denying, however, that the concept of better consciousness was, from the very beginning, connected with a thinking based on the contrast between temporal and eternal consciousness that leads to the denial of the will; thus to an ethics which consists in the negation of the world interpreted metaphysically. According to this line of thought morality exists in the affirmation of a better consciousness outside time and in the negation of temporal or empirical consciousness. In consideration of that basic idea, even before the completion of the dissertation, Schopenhauer had established substantial features of the later ethics of the denial of will. With the concept of better consciousness this idea is also connected to the doctrine of character and leads to the fact that moral freedom can no longer lie in the character-forming decision, but solely in a complete nullification of character.

Despite this, the idea that better consciousness is achieved in the action of character is also applied in the main work: in the ethics of compassion as well as in the action and the mode of conduct in the life of the saint and ascetic. When Schopenhauer notes shortly before or perhaps during the completion of the dissertation: ‘in my hands and all the more so in my mind a piece of work has
developed, a philosophy, which is to be ethics and metaphysics in one ...⁴¹ it leads to two quite different interpretations. On the one hand, this could be a play on the doctrine of redemption, i.e. the radical denial of the will. Then however, as already stated, ethics would be in contradiction to metaphysics, since it only takes place where the will, recognised as essence, does not exist. In the following therefore, the other more probable and convincing interpretation is to be explained in short,⁴² in which ethics and metaphysics are one; as with the opening quote from the essay on the will in nature, where the physical order of things can be traced back to a moral one. This interpretation can be developed from the idea that the metaphysics of will is derived from the doctrine of character, that is from the statement that human life is a mirror of its essence, i.e. its intelligible character. In this regard, it is to be shown that the relationship between the intelligible and empirical character, which defines the experience of character and the doctrine that results from it, also includes the relationship to the world as will and presentation.

2. Schopenhauer’s Philosophy as Experience of Character

There are further consequences of the fact that the idea of the causality of will on appearance has to be abandoned in consideration of the development of the doctrine of will as a thing in itself. Action as an action of body is no longer a consequence of the act of will but combines with it in so far as action is the outward appearance of that which is internally experienced as an act of will. In the dissertation, the causality of will on appearance was already something very specific, since the subject of the will was the cause of an effect but not itself the effect of another cause. The contradiction thereby arises that, on the one hand, will can be seen as individually determined, but on the other hand as not lying within space and time and in no way comprehensible by means of the principle of reason and therefore as indefinable. The metaphysics of will can, in this sense, be regarded as a necessary correction of the first unsatisfactory causal model. Yet the consequence of this correction is that the will can no longer be understood as an individually defined intelligible character by simply inferring from consequences to cause. In the doctrine of his main work, therefore, the realization of the intelligible character presupposes the knowledge of the world as will and presentation as a progression of ideas. In order to appear in its proper significance, the Idea of the human being cannot be displayed by itself and torn out of context, but must be accompanied by the sequence of levels downward through all animal structures, through the realm of plants, to the inorganic: only in their complementarity do they lead to complete objectification of the will’, which then finds itself individually ‘in the human being, as a (Platonic) Idea’ and as ‘most distinct and most complete’.⁴³

The internal experience of the act of will within time thus merely points to something which is interpreted as that which makes its appearance by way of the act of will. The being in itself thus indicated remains inaccessible to any kind of
immediate understanding owing to presentational thinking. Therefore when Schopenhauer is precise, he does not directly identify the thing in itself with will but actually with ‘what in ourselves we call will’.\textsuperscript{44} It neither falls under the \textit{principium individuationis}, i.e. the forms of space and time, nor under the possibility of plurality. Thus it cannot be limited to the specific phenomenal appearance of my body and its actions; it must be the thing in itself of all phenomena, which are unified in the world as presentation.\textsuperscript{45} In replacing the causal relationships between the subject of willing and action with the being in itself and phenomenon that which shows itself in the act of will exceeds individuality. In other words: according to this new conception, the experience of character entails the experience of the world.

How is consciousness of the world achieved? A precondition for it is, in Schopenhauer’s opinion, thoughtful awareness (\textit{Besonnenheit}) which ‘enables [us] . . . to survey the whole of life’.\textsuperscript{46} Without thoughtful awareness the intellect only perceives singular presentations, which the intellect refers directly to the will, whereas the will itself does not come into view.\textsuperscript{47} The animal neither has a world nor does it reflect on its will.\textsuperscript{48} The whole of the world as presentation becomes conscious to humans in the aesthetic view of the Idea.\textsuperscript{49}

Only when the thinking subject ‘forgets’ his interest in the particular and becomes ‘a clear mirror of the object’ does the world become comprehensible as a whole, not as infinity in space and time, but through perception of the essence or Idea of the object.\textsuperscript{50} The world as infinite temporal-spatial expansion is a presentation to us derived from the perception of the essence, since the world presupposes the concept of a universal whole: and a universal whole is the Idea. If the adequate philosophical interpretation of that which comes to light by the act of will is the will as being in itself, which is as such necessarily related to the world, then it is only in aesthetic regard that an adequate cognizance of this being in itself is to be found. This is why it is not until this point that Schopenhauer talks of the ‘will’s self-cognizance’.\textsuperscript{51}

Aesthetic contemplation is achieved by a high degree of awareness, through which the distance from the individual, body-related willing, becomes so large that the object can demonstrate itself, in an objective manner. If, owing to thoughtful awareness, several possible motives of the mind are weighed up, therefore considered, the following may occur: that not only the relation of the prevailing motive on the will, but also the relations of the thoughts and presentations to each other are made objects of the mind. With increasing awareness the connection to one’s own will diminishes. Under the exceptional circumstance of aesthetic contemplation the relations between presentations no longer pertain to one’s own interest at all. In that case the relations must be understood as derived from the essence of the things themselves. If all such objectively determined relations of a thing to others are summarised, they then express the essence or character of the thing. What is being expressed here by manner of awareness—one might say—is the character of the conceived and depicted object of awareness itself. This character is the Idea.
An *Idea* apprehended in such a way is of course not yet the essence of the thing in itself, precisely because it has proceeded from the cognizance of mere relations. Nevertheless, as the result of the sum of all relations, it is the real *character* of the thing, and therefore the complete expression of the essence displaying itself to perception as object, apprehended not in reference to an individual will, but as it expresses itself of itself, whereby indeed it determines all its relations, which were only cognized until then.\textsuperscript{52}

Within the perception of the Idea there is contained the knowledge of to *how* the being in itself of a thing is by virtue of itself related to the world as presentation. The sum of all relations is the world as being ‘entirely relative’ in terms of its structure in space and time,\textsuperscript{53} yet realized as an unfolding of the essence of the perceived object it has real content. In the contemplation of an Idea the object is not present as part of the world before, and then related to, the embodied will. Instead the will as the being in itself, perceived in an object, creates the relationships and definitions of the world—however not in terms of time or causality, but by being mirrored in presentation.\textsuperscript{54}

However, this cognizance still has to be related to the experience of self-consciousness, since in viewing the Idea, the subject has ‘lost’ itself in the object, or it has ‘forgotten’ that in its bodily existence it is itself the will which it perceives.\textsuperscript{55} To express this in terms of the underlying thesis of this essay, the character of a thing has been realised, which is, as yet, different from the self. The distance has therefore been achieved through which that which occurs in the act of will can show itself as a being in itself, yet the reflection, that it is the self of the act of will, has not been fully realised. The aesthetic view is therefore not yet the complete self-cognizance of the will. Accordingly, this view can only be had for short moments, whereupon the subject again immediately falls prey to individual willing.

What remains is the memory of the experience of the world as a whole which, placed next to the disappearing singular transitory presentation, causes infinite expansion in space and time.\textsuperscript{56} The universal meaning (as world) and the individual meaning of that which is called ‘will’ are here combined in a way in which the unity of both is not comprehended. However, it is not only space and time, and other forms of the Principle of Sufficient Ground connected to these, that are created by that way of combination, but also a specific type of human motivation and its consequences. By virtue of the fact that this combination takes place in a condition of will-dependent cognizance, it is related to the individual will: the whole of the world is presented to the individual will as desire (*Wunsch*), from which, however, the singular act of will detaches itself. There are consequences of this thesis in the insatiable needs humans have, which create limitless suffering, as well as egoism, which is anchored in the individuality of character that the world as empirical reality is necessarily related to.\textsuperscript{57} In this instance one must look back once more to the genuine doctrine of character, since character is defined by the completed act of will set against the background of desire.
Desire is therefore the sphere in which the world is viewed as a necessary point of relation for the experience of character. Desire ‘merely indicates what man in general, not the individual who is feeling the desire, would be capable of doing’. What the human is capable of doing depends on what the motive of his action can be, and that is principally everything that he can perceive and think, that he can make present by virtue of his experiences of the past, that he experiences through the stories of others and that he can anticipate as future. This concerns all things which are possible in the world as presentation. Desire is therefore essentially universal and presents the relationship of the will to the world. Indeed, desire only ‘indicates’ this universality, since in desiring, depending on the capability of the intellect and the application of thoughtful awareness, only smaller or larger parts of possible motives are presented to the subject. But the capacity for thoughtful awareness, which separates humans from animals, and which, with regard to aesthetic contemplation, proves itself to be the presupposition for the cognizance of world, potentially contains the relationship to the entire field of possibility. Desire signifies the midpoint between objective cognizance of the essence in itself in the idea and subjective knowledge in immediate self-consciousness. In this sense awareness is very much the cause for the ‘Velleitas’ not becoming an act of will, in other words the will is suppressed and therefore the cognizance of objective relationships made possible; but as desires, presentations remain fixed upon the subjective will, and as potential acts of will constitute the foundation upon which the individualisation of the will, the formation of character, is achieved.

Schopenhauer described this function of desire, to indicate what man in general is able to want, as an expression of the ‘character of the species’ of the human. In contradiction to his statements concerning the character of the species of animals and the possibility of placing them in parallel with average man, the character of the species of the human is, according to this idea, not to be understood through the ‘principal qualities’ of humans, which result from abstraction, but through the totality of the possibilities of being human. The character of the species is not therefore simply common to all human beings owing to the fact that all human beings act more or less in the same way, but because individual character is only formed by virtue of the choice between an infinite number of possible motives that make up the character of the species. The individual character is a certain realisation of the character of the species, or being human as such, in so far as it has a specific individual character.

In the realisation of the character of the species through the individual, the intelligible character is recognised in its relationship to the world. The aspect of the individual points to the acts of will, in which the being in itself is experienced immediately. The aspect of being human in general points to the substantial unity of being in itself in strict contrast to phenomenal appearance. Through the character of the species a unity of the essence of human beings is brought into discussion, which is recognised as being compassion. This takes place where the principium individuationis is seen through, i.e. when one sees through the individual characters to their unified essence. If in addition one takes into
account that the impediment of the will through thoughtful awareness that makes desire possible means, de facto, a denial of the will—since in Schopenhauer will is tied to phenomenal action—then substantial elements of Schopenhauer’s ethics can be interpreted based on the experience of character.

The thing that separates the human being from animals in regard to motivation and that which makes up his intelligible character is that ‘human beings are as a rule in control of their reason, are thus thoughtfully aware (besonnen), i.e. make decisions in accordance with thought-out, abstract motives’, in brief: that he acts with thoughtful awareness. According to Schopenhauer the strongest motive leads to action, out of which character can be defined. However, through thoughtful awareness, depending on how long the human reflects, only a more or less strictly limited number out of an infinite number of possible motives can be apprehended. Therefore the strongest and most powerful motive cannot be said with certainty to be a clear indication of the constitution of character: it may be possible that a motive that is not realised by the subject (what one has not become thoughtfully aware of) could have made a stronger impression on the will. The strongest motive is therefore never the absolutely strongest, in fact it is only ever the relatively strongest motive of those that are apprehended and contemplated.

Consequently because humans possess the faculty of reason empirical actions can only express the individual definition of character incompletely. ‘This’ human being, in making his appearance as empirical character, is only ever in incomplete terms himself, that is, that which he can be in his individuality. The larger the extent of thoughtful awareness, the more clearly and completely actions express the individual character. Thoughtful awareness, in this sense, has two functions: on the one hand it causes, makes possible, the suppression of the immediate effect of the motive, the effect’s being, so to speak, pushed to the side until a reflectively considered decision is reached. On the other hand it enables the subject to ‘always have before him what belongs to man in general as the character of the species’; it is only in this regard that individuality can flourish. The individual behaves, as was stated in the above quote, in line with the degree of intensity of possible motives. The definition of the individual character remains necessarily related to the character of the species, to the possibility of man as such. Only he, ‘who is completely human’ can have a real character. The experience of character is at the same time the experience of the world, which comes to light through desire.

The character of the species can in this sense not be completely understood, even with a high degree of awareness. After all, in desire, all possible motives can exist potentially, but not actually. The limitedness of human reason therefore entails that the character of the species as well as the individual character of the human can be indicated, but not defined reliably. These two facets of character only exist in their relationship to each other when the human defines himself as an individual by acting decisively. The experience of character is therefore not, as Schopenhauer himself seems to suggest, a path from the character of the species to the individual character. In fact through singular actions the human defines
and recognises himself as that which he is in the tension between being an individual and a species. Character is not what is already present before it is itself realised, in other words as a so-called unrecognised essence, rather the character becomes that which it is in and with the experience through which it is recognised. At the same time this implies that the character in the process of becoming itself cannot change. The human in his singular actions is that which he is as a whole, however he is not the whole as a sum of all actions, but as a character, which he allots to his actions as being his actions.

3. Conclusion

In the first section the transition from an ethics based on the principle of causality to a ‘speculative’ ethics was laid down as a definitive step in the development of the metaphysics of will. Despite this, however, in his main work Schopenhauer did not so much analyse character in view of its expression, but rather in view of the question to what extent character could be defined in terms of natural science. By doing so, he laid more stress on the one aspect of its relationship to the development of the metaphysics of will, which is the subsumption of motivation under the principle of reason of becoming, rather than concentrating on the other, more important aspect, which is to be understood in opposition to this, that in fact all forms of causality are to be seen in analogy to motivation.

The thesis put forward in the second section attempted to show that the importance of this second aspect, in which the resolution was shown to be the sphere within which the essence appears, also remains central for viewing the world.

The subsumption of motivation under the law of causality causes a problem in ethics: if human action is in no way different from the mere laws of natural processes, how can it then be evaluated morally? This query pertains to the question of freedom, which in its first conception lies in the resolution and is also seen later by Schopenhauer as an absolutely necessary presupposition of his ethics. As was shown at the end of the first section, under the influence of the opposition of eternal and temporal consciousness, Schopenhauer sees the answer to the problem of freedom mainly in the doctrine of the denial of the will for life, which necessarily coincides with the complete nullification of character. The thesis expounded here offers a different solution, which can, at the same time, lend a more precise meaning to several statements by Schopenhauer that otherwise remain confusing. Namely that freedom must lie ‘in the character of the human being’ and that the character, which is the essence of man must be conceived ‘as his free act’.

Freedom, and with it ethical responsibility, is therefore also present in action, yet not as the freedom that the individual has, but rather as the freedom by which the individual becomes himself. The individual can only act in line with his character, yet every action gives a new definition of the individual character from the numerous possibilities of being human as such; and in that sense the action is
The character is perhaps on the one hand that which is experienced in action, yet not as already defined or laid down, but instead as a character that is realised anew in every action; the character is therefore also that which experiences, so that the expression ‘experience of character’ can be seen as binding both aspects.

This interpretation of Schopenhauer’s philosophy and ethics seems in some respect to differ from Schopenhauer’s intentions, especially as concerns his doctrine of redemption. Apart from the hermeneutical question as to whether it is possible at all to recognize an author’s actual intentions, it is not the main aim of the present study to discover the motives for Schopenhauer’s philosophizing, which may well be manifold. It aims at a systematic approach to Schopenhauer’s philosophy and attempts to provide a consistent interpretation of its different principal aspects, which are also of current interest. Therefore its aim is to draw conclusions from his undoubtedly crucial theory of character; and in this it requires no further premise than that laid down in Schopenhauer’s writings. Tracing back the metaphysics of will to its roots it becomes obvious that the point of departure is not the question as to how to found a metaphysical system, or how to uncover the thing in itself. The point of departure is the problem of responsibility. This led Schopenhauer to assume an intelligible character as the necessary condition for asking the question why a human action has taken place. This is by no means a weighty metaphysical assumption, since it does not include more than the claim that the subject of my acts of willing is one and the same. Nevertheless the realization that it is a metaphysical condition outside of time bears consequences that led Schopenhauer to further elaborate his metaphysics of will.72 As has been indicated above, our interpretation also provides an explanation of the theory of compassion and denial of will which is of course different to the doctrine of asceticism and ‘voluntarily elected death by starvation’,73 and yet maintains its ethical meaning. The doctrine of character, ethics and metaphysics therefore constitute a ‘single thought’.74

Translated by David Carus

NOTES

1 N 140/WN 139: ‘... daß das Wichtigste, ja allein Wesentliche des ganzen Daseyns, Das, worauf Alles ankommt, die eigentliche Bedeutung, der Wendepunkt, die Pointe (sit venia verbo) desselben, in der Moralität des menschlichen Handelns liege.’
2 N 141/WN 140: ‘Nur die Metaphysik ist wirklich und unmittelbar die Stütze der Ethik, welche schon selbst ursprünglich ethisch ist, aus dem Stoffe der Ethik, dem Willen, konstruiert ist; weshalb ich, mit viel besserem Recht, meine Metaphysik hätte “Ethik” betiteln können, als Spinoza, bei dem dies fast wie Ironie aussieht ..., da er nur durch Sophismen die Moral einem System anheften konnte, aus welchem sie konsequent nimmermehr hervorgehn würde ...’
3 W I 132/WWR I 111.
Since I am following the new translation of Schopenhauer’s main work by Aquila/Carus, terms of his philosophy occur in a translation different from the use that has been established in the English literature (cf. the general remarks under References at the end of the text). In the present case, the German word ‘Grund’ has been translated as ‘ground’ while traditionally the word ‘reason’ is used according to the Payne translation. Similarly in the following ‘presentation’ (Vorstellung) is used instead of ‘representation’; ‘cognizance’ or ‘cognition’ (Erkenntnis) instead of ‘knowledge’; ‘thoughtful awareness’ (Besonnenheit) instead of ‘reflectiveness’.

Malter 1991; Malter 1988. Concerning the basis for this interpretation on the development of Schopenhauer’s writings see De Cian 2002.

Atwell 1995: 182. This book and the interpretation contained within were already theorised in Atwell 1990.

Koßler. 1990: 226; see esp. p. 221 ff.

Gurisatti 2002: 35: ‘in Schopenhauer, come non c’è caratterologia senza metafisica, così non c’è metafisica senza caratterologia.’ Gurisatti does not take account of either my writings or those of Atwell, so that in regard to this theme—as well as unfortunately in consideration of research literature on Schopenhauer in general—there is a considerable shortcoming of international exchange of research results.

E V/BM 3. Concerning the difference between the definitions of ethics in the ‘prize essays’ and the main work see Koßler 1999a: 447–460.

W I 477/WWR I 403. Concerning the difference between the ethics of compassion and the ethics of ascetism as the completion of compassion see Malter 1991: 393 ff., who differentiates between moral as ‘ethics I’ and soteriological ethics as ‘ethics II’. Schopenhauer himself replaced the terms ‘ethics’ and ‘ethical’ in the second edition of the main work with ‘moral’ and ‘morally’ in all instances that concerned moral action.

Schopenhauer’s use of Kant’s concepts was probably through the indirect influence of Schelling, if not through that of Friedrich Jakob Fries. See Hühn 1998; Koßler 1995.

W I 121/WWR I 102.

G 145/FR 214.

The order in which Schopenhauer presents the forms of the principle of sufficient ground is only for didactic reasons; see G 150/FR 221.

G 156/FR 230.

The fact that he ignored changes becomes that bit more evident when Schopenhauer still refers to the statements on character made in the essay on the principle of reason in the third edition of W I 341/289, which he had in fact deleted.

G 27/FR 42; ‘daß alle unsere Vorstellungen unter einander in einer gesetzmäßigen und der Form nach a priori bestimmmbaren Verbindung stehn’.

A transition in the series of grounds and consequences is also apparent in the Principle of the Ground of Cognition; this is mentioned in § 50. However this is not seen as a problem, although for example, the transition from the premises of cognition to the premises of becoming is allowed, yet not the other way around. See: the changes in § 50 of the second edition regarding the end of the stages of the premises of action.

In extenso, see Diss. §§ 44–46.

Concerning the problem of categorising fantasies to either the 1st or 4th class compare Diss. 27/EFR 20 ff. and 80/58 ff. with G 31/FR 49.

Diss. 76/EFR 56: ‘gleichsam permanenter Zustand des Subjekts des Willens’.

It is peculiar that Schopenhauer should recognise Schelling’s influence concerning this point in the first edition as a ‘very interesting extensive description’, whilst later Schopenhauer only accuses Schelling of having plagiarised Kant (e.g. E 82 ss./FW 74 ff.).
23 Diss. 77/EFR 56.
24 Diss. 74./EFR 55.
25 Diss. 78/EFR 57: ‘For the empirical character the motive is therefore the sufficient reason for action. Yet the circumstances which become motives for actions are not the cause of actions as their effect, since actions do not derive from circumstances, but in fact are caused by the empirical character which was solicited by them’.
26 G 34 ff./FR 53 ff.
27 Diss. 76/EFR 56: ‘einen außer der Zeit liegenden universellen Willensakt’.
29 Diss. 78/EFR 57 ff.: ‘Das Gesetz der Kausalität läßt sich ... dem optischen Gesetz vergleichen, nach welchem der Lichtstrahl auf farbenlose durchsichtige Körper mit parallelen Flächen und farbenlose Spiegel wirkt: er wird spezifisch unverändert durchgelassen oder zurückgeworfen, wo er vorher war, ist er auch nachher, und aus der ersteren Beschaffenheit läßt sich die letztere vorhersagen. Das Gesetz der Motivation aber gleich demjenigen, nach welchem der Lichtstrahl auf gefärbte Körper wirkt: da wirft denselben Lichtstrahl dieser roth, jener grün, ein dritter, der schwarz ist, gar nicht zurück, und wie ihn jeder Körper zurückwerfen werde, läßt sich nicht aus der übrigen Erkenntnis des Körpers, noch aus der des Lichts, zum voraus sagen, sondern erst nach dem wahrgenommenen Zusammen treffen beider erkennen. So wie er ihn aber Ein Mal zurückgeworfen hat, wirft er ihn auch alle Mal zurück, weil es nur eine Art des Lichts gibt’; cf. HN I 65/MR I 71.
30 G 48/FR 72: ‘Den die Motivation ist bloß die durch das Erkennen hindurchgehende Kausalität.’ See also W I 137 ff./WWR I 115.
31 HN I 462/MR I 512: ‘Meine ganze Philosopie läßt sich zusammenfassen in dem einen Ausdruck: die Welt ist die Selbstkenntniß des Willens’.
32 HN I 106/MR I 115, 91/99, 144/157. In HN I 91/MR I 99 Schopenhauer draws a series of comparisons, which are meant to clarify the conditions of visibility: ‘Life is to man, that is to the will, precisely what chemical reagents are to the body. Only in these is there revealed what it is, and it is only to the extent that it reveals itself. [...] Life is the proof-sheet in which the errors made in setting the type become known’. It is true that Schopenhauer already discusses resolution in the postscript on Fichte’s lectures of 1811/1812 as an ‘act of the will which, as a thing in itself, stands beyond all time’ (HN II 57/MR II 60), yet the will, as a thing in itself, is to be added to the conception of the intelligible character, rather than to the metaphysics of will as a whole, in which the will as the thing in itself exists in all appearances.
33 See HN I 23/MR I 23, 36/37.
34 Concerning this theme see the recently published, extremely exact and informative work by De Cian 2002, in which references are made to other works on Schopenhauer and in which present day research is discussed extensively.
35 This is also related to the fact that Schopenhauer did not see his ethics as ‘prescriptive’ but rather as ‘descriptive’; see Malter 1991: 393 ff. On the meaning of ‘speculative’ see also Kößler 1999b.
37 HN I 16/MR I 16.
man sieht nicht damit er abspiegele, sondern damit man sich daran erkenne, sehe was er spiegelt’.  
39 HN I 38 ff./MR I 40 ff.  
40 W I 456/WWR I 386; 477 ff./403; 487/411.  
41 HN I 55/MR I 59: ‘Unter meinen Händen und vielmehr in meinem Geiste erwächst ein Werk, eine Philosophie, die Ethik und Metaphysik in Einem seyn soll …’  
42 See in this context: Kößler 2002a: 91–110.  
43 W I 182/WWR I 153 (197): ‘Obgleich im Menschen als (Platonischer) Idee der Wille seine deutlichste und vollkommenste Objektivation findet; so konnte dennoch diese allein sein Wesen nicht ausdrücken. Die Idee des Menschen durfte, um in der gehörigen Bedeutung zu erscheinen, nicht allein und abgerissen sich darstellen, sondern mußte begleitet seyn von der Stufenfolge abwärts durch alle Gestaltungen der Thiere, durch das Pflanzenreich, bis zum Unorganischen: sie alle erst ergänzen sich zur vollständigen Objektivation des Willens ….’  
44 For example W I 125/WWR I 105, in connection with the so-called ‘statement of analogy’. The term ‘will’, as that which is realised ‘indirectly’ by the act of will, is ‘only a denominatio a potiori’ (W I 132/WWR I 111).  
47 Cf. W I 196/WWR I 164 ff.  
48 Therefore it is not enough for Schopenhauer to base the world as a total presentation solely on the understanding as he does in G 29 ff./FR 46 ff. and say ‘nothwendig [ist] das Daseyn der ganzen Welt abhängig vom ersten erkennenden Wesen, ein so unvollkommenes dieses immer auch seyn mag (the existence of the whole world [is] necessary dependent on the first cognizant being, as imperfect as ever it may be)’ (W I 36/WWR I 30 (62)).  
49 W I 211/WWR I 179 (223): ‘Allererst indem auf die beschriebene Weise ein erkennendes Individuum sich zum reinen Subjekt des Erkennens und eben damit das betrachtete Objekt zur Idee erhebt, tritt die Welt als Vorstellung gänzlich und rein hervor … (Only insofar as, in the way described, a cognizant individual is elevated to the pure subject of cognition, and precisely thereby one’s object of regard elevated to an Idea, does the world as presentation come entirely and purely to the fore …).’  
50 W I 210 ff./WWR I 178 ff.  
51 W I 196/WWR I 165 (209): ‘Die einzige Selbstkenntniß des Willens im Ganzen aber ist die Vorstellung im Ganzen, die gesammte anschauliche Welt. Sie ist seine Objektität, seine Offenbarung, sein Spiegel. Was sie in dieser Eigenschaft aussagt, wird der Gegenstand unserer fernern Untersuchung seyn (The only self-cognition with respect to will as a whole, however, is presentation in its entirety, the whole perceptual world. That is its objectivization, its revelation, its mirror. What it has to say in this capacity will be the object of our further considerations); this is taken from the third book of the World as Will and Presentation, i.e. on aesthetics.  
That is why Schopenhauer in W I 222/WWR I 189 can say, without fear of contradiction, that the view taken in aesthetics ‘gerade nur den Inhalt der Erscheinung, die sich darin aussprechende Idee, aufsucht, von allen Relationen absehend (seeks only the content of the phenomenon, namely the Idea expressing itself in the phenomenon apart from all relations)’. The unfolding of relations should occur by simply considering the Idea, and the Idea cannot be defined by the sum of relations of presupposed relatives. The expression ‘sum’ in the aforementioned quote is misleading; it results in the systematic, but in no way genetic understanding of the view of Ideas, by manner of an extension of awareness. The definition of the Idea as character in the quote above in fact forces Schopenhauer to sound very much like his much-fought rival Leibniz.

Cf. W I 277/WWR I 235 (283): ‘... die Idee hingegen entwickelt in Dem, welcher sie gefaßt hat, Vorstellungen, die in Hinsicht auf den ihr gleichnamigen Begriff neu sind: sie gleicht einem lebendigen, sich entwickelnden, mit Zeugungskraft begabten Organismus, welcher hervorbringt, was nicht in ihm eingeschachtelt lag (... an Idea, by contrast, in whomever has grasped it, develops presentations that are new with respect to the homonymous concept. It is like a living, self-developing organism endowed with procreative powers, which produces something that had not been lying packaged within it’.

Compare W I 328 ff./WWR I 279 (330): ‘... der Berührungspunkt des Objekts, dessen Form die Zeit ist, mit dem Subjekt, welches keine Gestaltung des Satzes vom Grunde zur Form hat, die Gegenwart aus (In truth, however, ... only the point of contact of the object, the form of which is time, with the subject that has none of the modes of the principle of sufficient ground for its form, constitutes the present’, with W I 330/WWR I 280, where the thought that there could be time without the present is termed a ‘delusion’. Time as a form of the object therefore only becomes existent through the meeting of the subjective with the objective. Schopenhauer explains that time, as the outer correlation of world consciousness and present (wherein ‘present ... as an unextended point ... intersects the time that is infinite on either side ...’) (ibid.) is based on the insufficient knowledge of the identity of the will as the being in itself of subjective and objective experience, when he terms time as the ‘border of our intellect’, which prevents the realisation ‘daß die Vergangenheit nicht an sich von der Gegenwart verschieden ist, sondern nur in unserer Apprehension, als welche die Zeit zur Form hat ... (that the past is not in itself different from the present, but is so only in our apprehension. In which it has time as its form ...’ (W II 549/WWR II 480). Cf. W II 560/WWR II 489.

W I 354/WWR I 300: ‘... deutet bloß an, was der Mensch überhaupt, nicht was das den Wunsch fühlende Individuum zu thun fähig wäre’. 
The human facet of common reactions to motives, as can be seen in the areas of reproduction and in the sense of survival, is common to both humans and animals. That which separates the human as a genus is reason and thoughtful awareness, which therefore require this different genus.

That is why, according to Schopenhauer, a high degree of thoughtful awareness and an exceptional individuality come together in artistic genius; see W II 436 ff./WWR II 381 ff.

That experience of character seems in this instance to lead from the undefined character of the species to the individually defined character, in which the first is limited and defined by the intensity of possible motives, which are taken from outside experiences.

For example, W I 165/WWR I 139 (180): ‘Die Art und Weise, wie der Charakter [des Menschen] seine Eigenschaften entwickelt, ist ganz der zu vergleichen, wie jeder Körper der erkenntnißlosen Natur die seinigen zeigt (The mode and manner in which a character [of man] unfolds its properties is entirely comparable to the way in which all bodies in incognizant nature show theirs.’

See Diss. 74, EFR 78.

I think this is also the starting point of the problematic of the relation between two conceptions of the subject which Janaway 1989: 295, called ‘a true and profound point of contact between contemporary philosophical concerns and Schopenhauer’s philosophy’.

REFERENCES

Schopenhauer’s Works

General remarks on quotations of Schopenhauer and on the translation of terms of his philosophy:

I quote the English translation in the main text while the original German text is quoted in footnotes. The first reference relates always to the German edition, the second to the English edition, according to the rules of this book. The abbreviations used for the works of Schopenhauer which are quoted in German from the Sämtliche Werke, edited by Arthur Hübscher, Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 2nd edition 1946–1950, depend on the rules of quotation given in the Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch: E = Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik (vol. 4);
G = Ueber die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde, 2nd edition 1847 (vol. 1);
N = Ueber den Willen in der Natur (vol. 4); W I/II = Schopenhauer, Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (vol. 2 and 3); P I/II = Parerga und Paralipomena, (vol. 5 and 6); Diss. = die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde, 1st edition 1813 (vol. 7). In accordance with the same rules Schopenhauer’s handwritten manuscripts are cited in German as HN I-V referring to Der Handschriftliche Nachlaß (Arthur Hübscher ed.), 5 vols. München: dtv 1985.

Quotations from The World as Will and Presentation follow the translation of Aquila/Carus as a rule, but since the second volume of this edition is not yet published, references to that volume relate to the edition of Payne; in the case of larger quotes from the first volume the page of the former edition is added in brackets. As a consequence the use of important terms of Schopenhauer’s philosophy has been generally adjusted to that translation. In addition the translation published in the English editions has been modified slightly if necessary.


Other Works


Knowledge and Selflessness: Schopenhauer and the Paradox of Reflection

Bernard Reginster

Introduction

Freedom from the will, which Schopenhauer presents as the best condition available to human beings, also assumes the form of a kind of selflessness. We achieve freedom from the will in aesthetic contemplation and ascetic resignation. In the aesthetic contemplation of an object, Schopenhauer observes, ‘[w]e lose ourselves entirely in this object, to use a pregnant expression; in other words, we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object, so that it is as though the object alone existed without anyone to perceive it’ (WWR I 178–9; cf. 185–6). While we are absorbed in such contemplation, he notes elsewhere, ‘we are raised for the moment above all willing, above all desires and cares; we are, so to speak, rid of ourselves’ (WWR I 390; cf. 199; PP II 416). In aesthetic experience generally, ‘one is conscious no longer of oneself, but only of the perceived objects, ... one’s own consciousness has been left merely as supporter of the objective existence of those objects’ (WWR II 369). It is also in terms of selflessness that Schopenhauer describes the effect of ascetic resignation, the ‘negation of the will’. For instance, he cites approvingly the description of that state given by the mystic Madame Guyon: ‘Everything is indifferent to me; I cannot will anything more; often I do not know whether I exist or not’ (WWR I 391).

It is important to understand precisely in what this selflessness consists. It does not consist in the attitude of the altruist, who has learned no longer to take his own interests to be more important than the interests of others, and might even be prepared to sacrifice his interests to theirs. Nor is it the attitude of the self-denying ascetic, who judges his own self contemptible and proceeds systematically to suppress its interests. In these cases, selflessness takes the form of a devaluation of one’s own self, which is manifested in the deliberate suppression of one’s own interests. Such self-devaluation is compatible with, indeed it arguably requires, the possession of a sense of self, which is experienced as the object to be devaluated or altogether suppressed.¹ The selflessness Schopenhauer associates with willlessness, by contrast, is the loss or the dissolution of that very sense of self, the loss of ‘self-consciousness’, which is made manifest not in the deliberate suppression of our interests, but in the complete ‘indifference’ to them.
Furthermore, Schopenhauer argues that this condition of will-lessness is brought on by knowledge. Thus, the will-lessness of aesthetic contemplation is a condition achieved when ‘knowledge tears itself from the service of the will’ (WWR I 178), when ‘the accident (the intellect), so to speak, subdues and eliminates the substance (the will)’ (WWR II 369), thanks to ‘an excess of intellect’ (WWR II 377). The same goes for the ‘denial of the will’, or complete resignation: ‘that self-suppression of the will comes from knowledge, . . . from the innermost relation of knowing and willing in man’ (WWR I 404).

I propose to undertake here a tentative, largely provisional and inconclusive, exploration of three related themes. First, what is the relation between the will and the sense of self, such that emancipation from the one is also a loss of the other? Second, what is the mechanism in virtue of which knowledge ‘quiets’ the will—or what is this ‘innermost relation of knowing and willing in man’ that is the source of liberation from willing, and ultimately of selflessness? Finally, can the sort of ‘pure’ reflective knowledge achieved in aesthetic contemplation produce, as Schopenhauer claims it does, ascetic resignation? The examination of this last theme will expose a potential problem in Schopenhauer’s account of the possibility of complete liberation from the will, which I call the paradox of reflection.

1. The Self as Will

My self, in the present context, designates not a list of objective properties that circumscribe my individual essence, of which I may or may not be conscious, but a certain kind of conscious experience, a sense of self, or a representation of something as me or mine. Schopenhauer calls it ‘the I or ego proper’ (WWR II 377) or simply ‘subjectivity’ (WWR II 368). The relation between the will and this sense of self depends on a particular thesis, which he calls ‘the primacy of the will in self-consciousness’ (WWR II 201): it is as will that I become conscious of myself. The following passage describes one of his chief arguments for this thesis:

Not only the consciousness of other things, i.e., the apprehension of the external world, but also self-consciousness, as already mentioned, contains a knower and a known, otherwise it would not be a consciousness. For consciousness consists in knowing, but knowing requires a knower and a known. Therefore self-consciousness could not exist if there were not in it a known opposed to the knower and different therefrom. . . . Therefore, a consciousness that was through and through pure intelligence would be impossible. The intelligence is like the sun that does not illuminate space unless an object exists by which its rays are reflected. The knower himself, precisely as such, cannot be known, otherwise he would be the known of another knower. But as the known in self-consciousness we find exclusively the will. (WWR II 201–2; cf. FR 207–212)

Schopenhauer’s argument rests on a certain conception of the activity of the intellect as ‘illumination’. The light cannot itself be known, even though it makes knowledge possible: I cannot see the light, I can only see the objects that reflect it,
yet I would not be able to see these objects without the light they reflect. If I were 
pure intellect, then, I could never become conscious of myself: my consciousness 
would be filled with the objective world since I would only be the light shining 
on it. I must therefore be something more than a pure intellect to become 
conscious of myself. That something is the will: it is as will that I become 
conscious of myself. The will, according to Schopenhauer, ‘constitutes the real 
self’, it is ‘the I or ego proper’ (WWR II 377).

We might wonder, however, why it is only as will that I can become conscious 
of myself, and not, for example, as a body occupying a certain portion of space. 
Schopenhauer addresses this very question when he draws a fundamental 
distinction between the consciousness of ‘things’ in the ‘external world’ and ‘self-
consciousness’. This distinction applies paradigmatically to the experience of my 
own body: ‘this body is given in two entirely different ways. It is given in 
intelligent perception as representation, as an object among objects, liable to the 
laws of these objects. But it is also given in quite a different way, namely as what 
is known immediately to everyone, and is denoted by the word will. Every true 
act of will is also at once and inevitably a movement of his body; he cannot will 
the act without at the same time being aware that it appears as a movement of the 
body’ (WWR I 100). I can be conscious of my body as a portion of space, an ‘object 
among objects’, ‘a mere representation of the knowing subject, like all the other 
objects of this world of perception’ (WWR I 103), but this consciousness is not yet 
self-consciousness, or a consciousness of this body as my body. But, Schopenhauer 
declares, ‘it has become clear to us that something in the consciousness of 
everyone distinguishes the representation of his own body from all others that are 
in other respects quite like it. That is that the body occurs in consciousness in 
quite another way, toto genere different, that is denoted by the word will’ (ibid.; 
first emphasis mine). It is only insofar as I apprehend my body as will that this 
consciousness of my body amounts to self-consciousness.

Schopenhauer follows a venerable Cartesian tradition in supposing that my 
own self must be something to which I have a special or privileged epistemic 
access. He departs from this tradition in two fundamental respects, however. 
First, he does not appear to conceive of this epistemic privilege primarily in terms 
of immunity to error. It consists rather of the fact that I have a special, ‘immediate’ knowledge of myself, that is to say, a knowledge that it is not 
based on observation or inference, and cannot be ‘deduced as indirect knowl-
edge from some other more direct knowledge’ (WWR I 102). Knowing my body 
merely as ‘an object among objects’ cannot be knowing it as my own since my 
access to it is no more immediate than the access others have to it, or than the 
access I have to their bodies. Knowing my body as my own, by contrast, is having 
a cognitive relation to it that is immediate and as such available only to me: 
‘It is just this double knowledge of our own body which gives us information 
about that body itself, about its action and movement following on motives, as 
well as about its suffering through outside impressions, in a word, about what it 
is, not as representation, but as something over and above this, and hence what it 
is in itself. We do not have such immediate information about the nature, action, and
suffering of any other real objects' (WWR I 103; emphasis on the last sentence mine; cf. II 281).

Second, Schopenhauer’s claim that ‘as the known in self-consciousness we find exclusively the will’ also departs in another way from the Cartesian view, according to which we have immediate access to other mental states than those Schopenhauer characterizes as ‘affections of the will’, such as, for example, mere perceptions. For Descartes, I could be conscious of myself as the bearer of these perceptions, as a ‘pure knowing subject’, or ‘thinking thing’. Schopenhauer’s conception of consciousness in terms of the metaphor of illumination explains why the consciousness of my own perceptions could not produce self-consciousness, or why I could not be conscious of myself as a pure knowing subject. If to perceive is to be conscious, and if such consciousness is merely the illumination of an external object, then there is nothing to my consciousness of my perceptions over and above my consciousness of their objects. There is, in particular, no self I can apprehend as the subject of that consciousness. This is not to say that I cannot be aware of the existence of knowing subjects who are filled with such perceptions, but it is to say that I cannot be conscious of myself as such a knowing subject. As Schopenhauer says in the passage quoted earlier: ‘The knower himself, precisely as such, cannot be known, otherwise he would be the known of another knower’ (second emphasis mine).

In the final analysis, then, Schopenhauer establishes ‘the primacy of the will in self-consciousness’ with the following reasoning. The crucial insight is that if something is to count as me or mine, I have a special ‘immediate’ epistemic access to it: there is, in the individual, ‘a difference between the relation of his knowledge to this one object and its relation to all others’ (WWR I 104); the only thing to which I have such an immediate access is my will; hence, the locus of selfhood or subjectivity is the will.

What is this will, of which I have an ‘immediate’ knowledge, and in which I therefore recognize my very self? This question has proven vexing for generations of scholars, not without reason. Schopenhauer’s official conception of the will appears to present it simply as a repository of desires or, to put it more precisely, of dispositions. He invokes the Kantian notion of ‘character’ to describe its nature and function: the character of a thing is what accounts for the causal effectiveness of specific events on it (WWR I 287). For instance, it is by virtue of the force of gravity that releasing my hand’s grip on my pen causes it to fall to the ground. When it is applied to human beings, the notion of character designates the particular set of dispositions that explains why the consciousness of certain facts turns them into ‘motives’ that in turn produce certain actions. For example, it is by virtue of my compassionate disposition that I will be induced to deplore and alleviate the sufferings of others when I am exposed to them. On this view, the will encompasses a wide range of states, ‘from the mildest wish to passionate desire’, including ‘not only all emotions, but even all the movements of our inner nature, subsumed under the wide concept of feeling’ (FR 211).

Willing is often contrasted with mere desiring, insofar as it involves an element of deliberation, followed by decision or resolve. Schopenhauer acknowl-
edges this but offers a reductionist characterization of what this deliberation and decision amount to in the agent: ‘he can balance mutually exclusive motives as such one against the other, in other words, he can let them try their strength on his will; whereupon the more powerful motive then decides him, and his action ensues with precisely the same necessity with which the rolling of a ball results from its being struck’ (FR 72; cf. FW 37; WWR I 298). What looks like active, deliberate resolve is in reality nothing more than the passive acknowledgment of the prevalence of the more powerful motive. In Schopenhauer’s view, it is not the agent who decides which motive should prevail, it is rather the more powerful motive that ‘decides him’.

This understanding of the will, however, makes it difficult to see how I could have a special, immediate knowledge of it. Schopenhauer himself observes that I can only become aware of the character of my will through the observation of my own actions: ‘The intellect gets to know the conclusions of the will only a posteriori and empirically’ (WWR I 290). In other words, although Schopenhauer may be right that I can be conscious of myself only as a willing (or desiring) subject, it is far from clear how my knowledge of my own willing, when it is so conceived, could also be immediate. The notion that my willing is the object of immediate knowledge is usually linked to the idea that willing, the making of decisions or resolutions, is something the agent does: it is because I am the author of my decisions that I immediately know what they are, or that I have an access to them that is denied to others. But on Schopenhauer’s official view, I am not the author of my decisions, since a decision is nothing more than the passive acknowledgement of the fact that the most powerful among competing motives has become prevalent. It follows that my intellect ‘awaits the real decision just as passively and with the same excited curiosity as it would that of a foreign will’ (WWR I 291).

The ambiguity of Schopenhauer’s conception of the will will affect our understanding of various aspects of his ethical thought, in particular, as I shall suggest, his conception of resignation. I will not attempt to resolve this difficult issue here. Whether or not this difficulty can be resolved, however, Schopenhauer certainly seems right on one central point: if some object is to count as me or mine, I must have a special cognitive relation to it—whether it is special by virtue of being ‘immediate’, or in some other way, I shall leave undecided—that is to say, there is, in the individual, ‘a difference between the relation of his knowledge to this one object and its relation to all others’ (WWR I 104). This insight plays, in my view, a central role in his conception of how selflessness can be achieved.

2. Knowledge as the ‘Quieter of the Will’

Schopenhauer not only characterizes self-consciousness as consciousness of willing, he also credits liberation from willing, and therefore selflessness, to knowledge. The ability knowledge has to ‘calm’ or ‘quiet’ the will, moreover, ‘comes from the innermost relation of knowing and willing in man’ (WWR I 404).
In Schopenhauer’s view, knowledge is linked to willlessness in two distinctive types of experience, namely, aesthetic contemplation and ascetic resignation. He emphasizes the continuity and the similarities between these two types of experience, presenting ascetic resignation as little more than a more permanent form of the condition achieved in aesthetic contemplation (e.g., WWR I 267; 390). Compare, for example, the following two passages, the first of which describes the contemplation of natural beauty:

"Raised by the power of the mind, we relinquish the ordinary way of considering things, and cease to follow under the guidance of the forms of the principle of sufficient reason merely their relations to one another, whose final goal is always the relation to our own will. Thus we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither in things, but simply and solely the what. Further, we . . . let our consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether it be a landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag, a building, or anything else. We lose ourselves entirely in this object, to use a pregnant expression; in other words, we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object. (WWR I 178–9)"

The second passage describes the state of ‘complete resignation’ achieved by ‘a man whose will is silenced not for a few moments, as in the enjoyment of the beautiful, but for ever’:

"Such a man who, after many bitter struggles with his own nature, has at last completely conquered, is then left only as pure knowing being, as the undimmed mirror of the world. Nothing can distress or alarm him anymore; nothing can any longer move him; for he has cut all the thousand threads of willing which hold us bound to the world, and which as craving, fear, envy, and anger drag us here and there in constant pain. (WWR I 390)"

Although they emphasize similarities—in both cases the subject assumes a ‘pure’ cognitive stance toward the world, that is to say, he becomes a ‘clear mirror’ or an ‘undimmed mirror’ of the world—the two passages already suggest some important differences. In aesthetic contemplation, it is simply by assuming this pure cognitive stance that the individual frees himself from the will: ‘raised by the power of the mind . . . we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject’. In ascetic resignation, by contrast, the individual must free himself from the will before he can assume that pure cognitive stance: as Schopenhauer puts it, it is only when ‘he has at last completely conquered’ his will that he finds himself ‘left only as pure knowing being’.

This contrast notwithstanding, Schopenhauer also maintains that, in both cases, freedom from willing is achieved through knowledge. But the passages also suggest some significant differences in the manner in which knowledge liberates
from willing in the two cases. Schopenhauer attributes the possibility of pure aesthetic contemplation to ‘the power of the mind’. In his view, the intellect is primarily an ‘instrument’ or ‘tool’ of the will (WWR I 176; II 280). While the satisfaction of the simple needs of lower animals requires very limited intellectual skills, leaving them with weak intellects, the satisfaction of the vastly more complex needs and wishes of human beings demand far greater intellectual power. By virtue of its exceptional power, the human intellect can occasionally escape the sole service of the will and operate in a ‘pure’, disinterested way. Aesthetic contemplation is a paradigmatic instance of the human intellect raising itself above, or simply escaping, the service of the will. In ascetic resignation, by contrast, the achievement of a ‘pure’ cognitive stance results not simply from the fact that knowledge, the activity of the intellect, escapes the service of the will, but from the fact that knowledge somehow produces a ‘self-suppression of the will’. As Schopenhauer puts it, in aesthetic contemplation, knowledge does not really ‘quiet’ the will but simply temporarily escapes its service, while in ascetic resignation, knowledge actually ‘quiets’ the will, or induces its ‘self-suppression’. I propose to examine this distinction more closely, and I find it useful to begin with the case of ascetic resignation.

3. Resignation

Schopenhauer’s analysis of complete resignation emphasizes the respects in which it differs from other forms of renunciation, particularly those motivated by rational deliberation. It is useful to begin with his description of a condition, which we might have expected him to endorse, but which he appears to repudiate, namely, the idea of ‘stoical indifference to our own present ills’:

We are not usually distressed at evils that are inescapably necessary and quite universal, for example, the necessity of old age and death, and of many daily inconveniences. It is rather a consideration of the accidental nature of the circumstances that have brought suffering precisely on us which gives this suffering its sting. Now we have recognized that pain as such is inevitable and essential to life . . . . If such a reflection were to become a living conviction, it might produce a considerable degree of stoical equanimity, and greatly reduce our anxious concern about our own welfare. But such a powerful control of the faculty of reason over directly felt suffering is seldom or never found in fact. (WWR I, 315; cf. 379, 397)

The recognition that the frustration of the will, which is the source of pain, is ‘inevitable and essential’, is supposed to ‘produce a considerable degree of stoical equanimity, and greatly reduce our anxious concern about our own welfare’. The knowledge that its frustration is unavoidable affects our will by inducing in us a degree of indifference to whether or not it gets satisfied.
In this case, knowledge appears to affect the will by motivating an act of rational control, in which the agent, recognizing the impossibility of satisfying his will, deliberately prepares himself to endure its frustration (for example, by marshalling the necessary psychological defenses), or attempts to renounce its satisfaction altogether. However, Schopenhauer does not appear to endorse this strategy of rational control, partly because he doubts its effectiveness, but also because the ‘stoical indifference’ such rational control expresses differs from the ‘complete resignation’ he ends up advocating in two other respects.

First, stoical indifference (an expression Schopenhauer appears to use in its colloquial, rather than strictly philosophical, sense) may designate the fortitude to weather frustration, or the capacity to endure it, whereas complete resignation is a condition in which there no longer is frustration to weather or endure. Second, stoical indifference is presented here as a deliberate, rationally motivated renunciation: it is as though we first learn of the inevitability of frustration and then conclude from this that we should prepare ourselves for it, perhaps by renouncing the will thus doomed to be frustrated. As Schopenhauer describes it, by contrast, complete resignation, ‘that denial of willing, that entrance into freedom, is not to be forcibly arrived at by intention or design, but comes from the innermost relation of knowing and willing in man; hence it comes suddenly as if flying in from without [wie von aussen angeflogen]’ (WWR I 404).

How, then, does this complete resignation come about? It is important, in the first place, to distinguish between complete resignation and what we may call ordinary resignation. Ordinarily, to be resigned does not mean that I cease to desire a certain object, but only that I accept that it is out of my reach and therefore renounce its pursuit. Complete resignation, by contrast, requires not only that I renounce pursuing a desire, but also that I become indifferent to whether or not it is satisfied, and this amounts to renouncing the desire itself. For after all, to have a desire is precisely not to be indifferent to whether or not it will be satisfied. This crucial feature of complete resignation is apparent in Schopenhauer’s characterization of it as a state of ‘will-lessness’.

Despite this distinction, both kinds of resignation appear to share a common characteristic: they are both states directly induced by knowledge, and they cannot be ‘forcibly arrived at by intention or design’ (WWR I 404), which would be formed in part on the basis of such knowledge. It is not easy to see what this distinction amounts to, but two aspects of it may be brought out. First, the deliberate renunciation of the pursuit of certain desires, the satisfaction of which is recognized to be impossible, can only be motivated by the prudent concern for the satisfaction of other desires, from the pursuit of which such vain pursuits would pointlessly draw away energy and resources. This prudent allocation of resources is arguably not a kind of resignation at all: it differs in particular from ordinary resignation, in which my renunciation of the pursuit of one particular desire does not seem motivated by the concern to satisfy other desires. Once I have given up the pursuit of one of my desires in resignation, I may well turn then to my other desires, but these played no role in inducing me to give it up. Second, resignation is brought on directly by the sole knowledge that this desire
cannot be satisfied, rather than by this knowledge together with something else, such as the concern to maximize the satisfaction of my desires.

Crucial to this conception of resignation, therefore, is the assumption that knowledge can affect the will directly. A brief look at the phenomenology of resignation appears to confirm this view: resignation is not something that is brought on by a resolve or an act of will or even a form of practical deliberation, but it rather seems to be induced by a recognition, which affects me directly and of itself; resignation is a radical transformation, which dawns upon me ‘as if flying in from without’, a process which Schopenhauer frequently presents as a ‘conversion’, and which, while not an unmotivated leap, is also not the product of a deliberate decision.

Getting the phenomenology of resignation right is not yet explaining what it amounts to. I will begin here with a suggestion, which draws on one of the two concepts of will I distinguished earlier. In insisting that resignation cannot be arrived at ‘by intention or design’, Schopenhauer appears to suggest that it is not an exercise of agency, whereby the agent, considering the impossibility of pursuing one of his desires, decides to give it up or to divert resources from it. If we assume that the will is the faculty for deliberation and decision, then complete resignation, insofar as it produces ‘will-lessness’, would rather be something like a breakdown or dissolution of agency.

Agency does not lie simply in the kind of freedom whereby we are capable of not being swayed by our desires, but of reflectively standing back and deliberating about what we should do or desire; it is also the kind of causal effectiveness required to put the results of such deliberations into action. I fail as an agent, accordingly, not only when I do not deliberate or act in accordance with the reasons available to me, but also when I fail to bring about intended states of affairs. Indeed, it seems as though a conception of myself as possessing that sort of causal effectiveness is essential to my being an agent. I am arguably not behaving as an agent if, every time I resolve to bring about some effect, I consider it to be entirely not up to me whether this effect will be brought about. Even though it may be false, this belief nevertheless suffices to disable or destroy my agency. For deliberating and making decisions seems to make sense only against the background of a general expectation of causal effectiveness. If this expectation is undermined, then I will cease to deliberate or make decisions, and no longer being in the business of deliberating and making decisions is, arguably, no longer being an agent.

Schopenhauer defines suffering as ‘unfulfilled and thwarted willing’ (WWR I 363). Consequently, the insight that suffering is ubiquitous and inevitable ultimately constitutes an insight into the deep limitations of human causal effectiveness in bringing about intended effects in the world. Since, as we just saw, agency is partly constituted by the expectation of such a causal effectiveness, this insight directly and of itself undermines my agency, since it makes it impossible for me to continue to see myself as possessing the relevant sort of causal effectiveness. In this view, in other words, will-lessness is produced simply and directly by knowledge.8
Although it provides a plausible explanation of how knowledge can directly and of itself bring about will-lessness, this account also has one major shortcoming. In Schopenhauer’s view, complete resignation is supposed to deliver from pain and suffering and leave me a ‘pure knowing subject’, no longer troubled by worries, passions, or desires. The breakdown or dissolution of my agency does not obviously produce such a condition. For even though I no longer deliberate and decide on which among my desires I ought to pursue, I remain troubled by those desires and affected by their frustration. The breakdown of my agency means that I will no longer deliberate about, and decide, whether I ought to satisfy my hunger, but it does not obviously mean that I will become unaffected either by its frustration or by its satisfaction.

Accordingly, if complete resignation is to put an end to this trouble, it must amount to more than a breakdown of my agency. It must produce what Schopenhauer describes as a complete ‘indifference’ to whether or not my desires get satisfied, and this is equivalent to the elimination of these desires themselves. How the insight into the ubiquity and inevitability of suffering produces such indifference directly and of itself is less than ideally clear. An observation Schopenhauer makes frequently about the relation between knowing and willing suggests one possible answer to this question. He observes that our susceptibility to pain and pleasure, which he presents as reactions to the frustration and to the satisfaction of the will respectively, is responsive to what he calls ‘knowledge’. In particular, this susceptibility is influenced by a representation of the ‘merely possible satisfaction’ of the will in the following way:

Since man is a manifestation of the will illuminated by the clearest knowledge, he is always measuring and comparing the actual and felt satisfaction of his will with the merely possible satisfaction put before him by knowledge. From this springs envy: every privation is infinitely aggravated by the pleasure of others, and relieved by the knowledge that others also endure the same privation. ... The calling to mind of sufferings greater than our own stills their pain; the sight of another’s suffering alleviates our own. (WWR I 363–4)

Representations of ‘merely possible satisfaction’ affect our actual susceptibility to pleasure and pain by shaping our expectations. In general terms, the view is that our susceptibility to pleasure and pain will decrease if either the pleasure or the pain is expected, and increase if either is unexpected. For instance, if I believe that my current privations could not have been avoided, they will feel less painful than if I believe they could have.

In this context, expectations are beliefs about ‘merely possible satisfaction’, that is to say, beliefs about what and how much satisfaction is possible in my circumstances. As Schopenhauer sees it, expectations can be shaped by the memory of my past experiences, by the observation of the experience of others, or simply by my own imagination. Thus, I can diminish the pain I feel at a certain privation by remembering that it was once worse, by contemplating worse
privations in others, or simply by imagining possible worse privations. I can
cursively blunt the pleasure I take at a certain satisfaction by remembering that
it was once greater, by observing greater satisfactions in others, or by simply
imagining possible greater satisfactions.9

The lesson Schopenhauer draws from this observation is that the recognition
that ‘pain as such is essential and inevitable’ induces some degree of indifference
to it in us by presenting it as something to be expected. If the degree to which a
frustration is to be expected proportionately blunts the pain it causes, then the
recognition that it is ‘essential and inevitable’ should blunt it nearly completely.
Although Schopenhauer makes no attempt to explain how this takes place, we
might assume that the expectation of frustration diminishes the pain it causes by
triggering certain psychological mechanisms in me designed to absorb it. And
Schopenhauer suggests that such mechanisms can produce the sort of complete
indifference to frustration that is the distinctive mark of complete resignation:

No evil that has befallen us torments us so much as the thought of the
circumstances by which it could have been warded off. Therefore
nothing is more effective for our consolation than a consideration of what
has happened from the point of view of necessity . . . . Hence we see that
innumerable permanent ills, such as lameness, poverty, humble position,
ugliness, unpleasant dwelling-place, are endured with complete in-
difference, and no longer felt at all by innumerable persons, just like
wounds that have turned to scars. (WWR I 306–7; my emphasis)

Two central features of Schopenhauer’s conception of resignation deserve
emphasis. First, it is essentially in virtue of its content that knowledge quiets the
will: it is my coming to know that frustration is inevitable which leads me to
renounce altogether the will that is so bound to be frustrated. Second, knowledge
produces resignation by affecting and altering, directly and of itself, the will.

The relation of knowledge to the will in aesthetic contemplation, by contrast, is
different in precisely these two respects. First, knowledge does not quiet the will,
but simply momentarily escapes its service. Second, it is not so much what I know
about the world as that I know, or the fact that I adopt a ‘pure’ or ‘objective’
cognitive stance toward it, which accounts for the silence of the will. I now
propose to examine aesthetic contemplation more closely.

4. Contemplation

In its broadest outline, aesthetic contemplation consists primarily in an alteration
of my cognitive relation to the world: it ceases to be ‘subjective’ to become purely
‘objective’. As Schopenhauer sees it, my ordinary experience of the world is
‘subjective’ insofar it is shaped by my ‘interest’ (WWR I 177), or by how objects in
it bear on ‘the will and . . . its weal and woe’ (WWR II 278). Indeed my very
intellect is originally designed for the service of the will—it is an ‘instrument’ or
‘means’ of it (WWR I 176) or its ‘one great tool’ (WWR II 280), and it is no surprise
if the general forms of our representation are space, time, and causality, since these are the essential parameters in the pursuits of the will. For Schopenhauer, then, the most elementary perception of the world is interested from the start:

In the immediate perception of the world and of life, we consider things as a rule merely in their relations, and consequently according to their relative, not absolute essence and existence. For example, we regard houses, ships, machines, and the like with the idea of their purpose and suitability therefore; human beings with the idea of their relation to us, if they have any, and then of their relation to one another, whether in their present actions or according to their position and vocation . . . every inclination or disinclination twists, colours, and distorts not merely the judgment, but even the original perception of things. (WWR II 372–3)

An experience of the world that apprehends only the ‘relative essence and existence’ of things in it considers them only ‘in relation to the will’. This, in turn, means that objects in the word are apprehended as ‘motives’, or as opportunities or obstacles for the ‘striving’ induced by such motives (e.g. ibid. 369). Motives, in Schopenhauer’s conception, are not desires or inclinations, but states of affairs that assume the significance of reasons to act for an agent with certain desires or inclinations. Thus, to an man with an inclination to help, the distress of a homeless person is a motive of action, while a vacant house or a generous philanthropist are potential opportunities or means to achieve his end. Schopenhauer nicely summarizes the effect of my interests on my representation of the world when he observes that ‘in the head of a man filled with his own aims, the world appears just as a beautiful landscape does on the plan of a battlefield’ (WWR II 381). To be in the ‘thraldom of the will’, then, is essentially to have a certain experience of the world.

We get a firmer grip on this crucial insight by focusing on one particular instance of ‘modification’ or ‘affection’ of the will, for instance an emotion such as jealousy. If we follow Schopenhauer’s general suggestion, to be jealous is primarily for me to have a certain experience of the world: it is given to me with a specific organization, in which some of its aspects become salient or vanish into the background, depending on their significance to a jealous perspective. From such a perspective, for example, the long absences and evasive answers of my lover become at once remarkable and suspicious. As a ‘modification’ of the will, my jealousy also underwrites a particular ‘striving’ or project of ‘action’, in relation to which various aspects of the world are experienced as motives, opportunities or obstacles: for example, a large crowd or the dark corner in a hallway present themselves as means to observe, without being seen, the comings and goings of my unfaithful lover; she herself is experienced as having to be controlled or punished, and so on.

We now begin to see another dimension of this ‘innermost relation between knowing and willing in man’, which is the key to the achievement of willlessness. In the final analysis for Schopenhauer, willing is a kind of knowing, or at
least it essentially involves a kind of knowing. Willing is having a certain consciousness of the world, or being conscious of a certain world. The world of the willing subject is a world of ‘particular individuals’ bearing various sorts of ‘relations’ to one another (WWR I 3177). I, too, appear in the world given to my interested consciousness: it is in virtue of her relationship to me that the behavior of my lover assumes its particular significance, for example, and it is insofar as I can position myself in it without being seen that I notice the large crowd. But I appear in that world in a very special way. I do not figure in it, in particular, merely as an ‘object among objects’, but as the ‘immediate object’, by which Schopenhauer means two crucial things: first, I am the one object known immediately as ‘objectified will’, and so recognized as me or mine; second, by virtue of being immediately known, my body is also the ‘starting-point’ or the nexus to which all the relations among objects collected in ordinary cognition ultimately refer: ‘the individual finds his body as an object among objects, to all of which it has many different relations and connexions according to the principle of sufficient reason. Hence a consideration of these always leads back, by a shorter or longer path, to his body, and thus to his will’ (WWR I 176–7).

Schopenhauer insists, as we saw, that there is ‘a difference between the relation of his knowledge to this one object [his body] and its relation to all others’ (WWR I 104). My conscious relation to my body, insofar as I apprehend it as mine, is not the same as the conscious relation I have to any other object in the world. This presumably applies to all other ‘affections’ or ‘modifications’ of the will. For example, when I am jealous, my conscious relation to this jealousy is not the same as my conscious relation to the world I experience from the perspective of this jealousy. I take this to imply that, when I am jealous, my jealousy, or my self as jealous, does not appear in the world simply as ‘an object among objects’. For me to be jealous, therefore, is not to be conscious of my jealousy in the same way as I am conscious of the dark corner in the hallway or of my unfaithful lover, but it is rather to take a jealous consciousness of these objects, and indeed of the entire objective world.

Accordingly, if I came to see my jealousy, or my body, merely as ‘an object among objects’, I would no longer be jealous, or be this body, and the web of relations of which my body and its interests previously formed the nexus would lose all connection to me: I would no longer be ‘involved’ in it and it would float free, so to speak, before my mind, utterly ‘foreign’ to me. Achieving this sort of detachment is, for instance, a privilege of the artistic genius: ‘there floats before the mind of the genius, in its objective apprehension, the phenomenon of the world as something foreign to him, as an object of contemplation, expelling his willing from consciousness’ (WWR II 387). This formulation is misleading, however, insofar it suggests that the genius remains conscious of himself as that to which the phenomenal world has now become foreign. Presumably, in this sort of consciousness, the world is experienced as ‘foreign’ not because it is without relation to me or my interests, but because there is no longer any ‘me’, or any interests, to which this world could be related. To be sure, Schopenhauer does occasionally suggest that the genius remains self-conscious “not as an individual,
but as pure, will-less subject of knowledge' (WWR I 195; cf. 180), but the description he favors, which is in keeping with his conception of self-consciousness and is phenomenologically more accurate in any case, is that ‘genius is the capacity to remain in a state of pure perception, to lose oneself in perception’ (WWR I 185; my emphasis), a condition in which ‘the entire consciousness is filled and occupied by a single image of perception’ (WWR I 179).

It is important to understand precisely what this loss of self-consciousness amounts to. When Schopenhauer characterizes it as forgetting myself ‘as an individual’, he misses his own mark if he means to suggest that I no longer perceive my body, or indeed any other object, as particular individuals in the world. What he really means, in my view, is that although I continue to perceive individual objects, I no longer identify with any one of them; I become completely disengaged from the world I contemplate (it ‘floats’ in front of my mind, it is ‘foreign’ to me). My interested consciousness of the world is the consciousness of a world in which I find myself engaged in a particular way: it is not just a world in which particular individuals are related in various particular ways to particular objects, but also, and crucially, a world in which all these relations refer to one particular individual—myself. So, Schopenhauer simply overreaches when he insists that to a disinterested consciousness the world can no longer be a world of particular individuals bearing particular relations to each other, but must be universals considered in their ‘absolute essence and existence’, that is to say, ‘Ideas’. This insistence results from a false inference to which he shows an unfortunate proneness, namely, the inference from the view that the principle of sufficient reason, whereby objects are given as particular individuals bearing various particular relations to one another, frames my interested consciousness of the world, to the view that it cannot apply to the world as it is given to my objective, disinterested consciousness, that is to say, as it is in itself. Essential to this objective consciousness is that I am somehow absent from the world I apprehend. My body may continue to figure in that world, but only as ‘an object among objects’, that is to say, as a body, but not as my body.

It is in virtue of this ‘innermost relation of willing and knowing’ that a change in knowing can also be a change in willing. If willing is a kind of knowing, then will-lessness may well result from knowledge, from a change in our cognitive relation to the world.

5. Two Conceptions of Contemplation: Diversion and Reflection

A close examination of Schopenhauer’s descriptions of the ‘objective knowledge’ achieved in aesthetic contemplation reveals two different conceptions of it. In the case of what I will call diversion, knowledge ‘succeeds in snatching us, although only for a few moments, from subjectivity, from the thralldom of the will’ by diverting our attention ‘to the most insignificant objects’, that is to say, objects with no bearing on the will and its weal and woe. Schopenhauer singles out the paintings of ‘still life’ of the Dutch school as paradigmatic instances of works
resulting from, and eliciting, this sort of diversion (WWR I 197). Indeed, focusing on objects that bear no relation to our will is a common way of calming or appeasing ‘all the miseries of willing’. ‘For example, the sight of a wholly strange town often makes on the traveller an unusually agreeable impression, which is certainly not produced on the person living in the town; for that impression springs from the fact that the traveller, being out of all relation to the town and its inhabitants, perceives it purely objectively’ (WWR II 371). Schopenhauer also suggests that particularly unpleasant circumstances might induce us to seek diversion in pure contemplation: ‘as the will constantly reasserts its original mastery over the intellect, the latter withdraws more easily from such a mastery in unfavourable personal circumstances, because it readily turns from adverse circumstances in order to divert itself to a certain extent. It then directs itself with all the greater energy to the foreign external world, and thus more easily becomes purely objective’ (WWR II 383).

In the case of what I will call reflection, by contrast, relief from the ‘miseries of willing’ is actually afforded by the very contemplation of them:

Every state or condition, every person, every scene of life, needs to be apprehended only purely objectively, and made the object of a description or sketch, whether with brush or with words, in order to appear interesting, delightful, and enviable. . . . Therefore Goethe says: ‘What in life does us annoy,/We in picture do enjoy.’ There was a period in the years of my youth when I was constantly at pains to see myself and my actions from outside, and to picture them to myself; probably in order to make them enjoyable to me. (WWR I 372)

Schopenhauer understands the ‘reflectiveness’ of the genius in precisely these terms: ‘the genius, with his unfettered intellect, could be compared to a living person playing among the large puppets of the famous Milan puppet-show. This person would be the only one among them who would perceive everything, and would therefore gladly quit the stage for a while in order to enjoy the play from the boxes; this is the reflectiveness of genius’ (WWR, II xxxi, 386). The point of reflection is not to divert attention away from the miseries of willing, but rather to come to see them ‘from outside’, to adopt a reflective, objectifying, and therefore disengaged stance toward them.

To appreciate the nature of this reflective objectification, let us return briefly to the example of jealousy. According to Schopenhauer, remember, to be jealous is to have my consciousness of the world, down to my most fundamental perceptions of it, assume a particular shape. Common observation shows that if I manage to reflect on my jealousy, I also thereby, if only for a moment, cease to be jealous. This is presumably the case because when it is the object of such a reflective contemplation, my jealousy becomes a mere ‘object among objects’, which means that the cognitive relation I have to it is now the same as the cognitive relation I have to any other object in the world. But we saw that it is a constitutive
requirement of my being jealous that my cognitive relation to my jealousy should be different from the cognitive relation I have to other objects in the world.

6. The Paradox of Reflection

Some scholars have worried that conceiving of aesthetic contemplation as a form of reflection, rather than diversion, appears to create a paradox: is not the presentation of the ‘miseries of willing’ just as likely to rekindle their sting as to relieve us from it? Among the various art forms, the highest, tragedy and music, display this paradox in a particularly acute way. If, according to Schopenhauer, the purpose of tragedy is ‘the description of the terrible side of life’ (WWR I 252), and if music presents us with a nearly unadulterated ‘copy of the will’ (WWR I 257), if, indeed, ‘it reproduces all the emotions of our innermost being’, how, then, could the production of either type of art thereby calm the miseries of willing in us?

Several proposals have been made to solve this apparent paradox. One such proposal, for instance, consists in showing that musical experience is in fact a kind of diversion. Schopenhauer notes that music does not represent the particular vicissitudes of the wills of particular individuals, but the vicissitudes of willing in general: ‘music does not express this or that particular and definite pleasure, this or that affliction, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, or peace of mind, but joy, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, or peace of mind themselves, to a certain extent in the abstract, their essential nature, without accessories, and so also without the motives for them’ (WWR I 261). By presenting these emotions in their universal rather than their particular form, music, in the words of one commentator, ‘can distract the listener from the pains attendant on his own will’.15

I will not discuss here the merits of this and other proposals to solve this paradox,16 because I take the real paradox in Schopenhauer’s conception of reflection to lie elsewhere. The problem is not so much that reflection seems ill-suited to calm the will by inducing the knowing subject to disengage from the object of his reflection, to experience it as something ‘foreign’; it is rather that, precisely for this reason, it seems unable to affect the will and bring about resignation. Two of Schopenhauer’s claims frame this paradox of reflection.

On the one hand, he claims that the kind of knowledge that forms the path to ‘true salvation, ... complete denial of the will’ (WWR I 397) is precisely the knowledge we achieve when we are in the ‘pure’, ‘objective’ cognitive state that is the source ‘from which all genuine productions in every art, even poetry, and philosophy, have their origin’ (WWR II 379). The path to salvation therefore goes through a state in which, as we have seen, the will and its miseries are contemplated, as it were, ‘from the outside’, as something ‘foreign’: ‘This state is conditioned from outside by our remaining wholly foreign to, and detached from, the scene to be contemplated, and not being at all actively involved in it’ (WWR II 373).
On the other hand, Schopenhauer also concedes that there is a difference between the cognitive state of aesthetic contemplation and the cognitive state that induces ascetic resignation: ‘That pure, true and profound knowledge of the inner nature of the world now becomes for him [= the pure contemplator] an end in itself; at it he stops. Therefore it does not become for him a quieter of the will as . . . in the case of the saint who has attained resignation’ (WWR I 267). In other words, the sort of knowledge achieved in aesthetic contemplation, which a moment ago we saw described as the path to ‘salvation’, is here described as failing to deliver it. Of course, Schopenhauer might simply mean that the same sort of knowledge can be put to different uses, now to produce contemplative pleasure, and now to induce resignation. But it turns out that, in the terms of his own views at least, things are not so simple.

Schopenhauer indeed places two apparently conflicting demands on reflection. On the one hand, reflection allows me to gain the necessary knowledge of the world and its miseries by making me take a pure, objective stance toward it and contemplate it as it were ‘from the outside’, as something ‘foreign’ to me, in which I am ‘not actively involved at all’, and so which cannot affect me. The adoption of such a stance is a source of temporary relief from these miseries precisely because I am disengaged from them, and therefore no longer feel concerned by them: it is as though they are the miseries of someone else. On the other hand, if this reflective knowledge of the world and its miseries is supposed to induce resignation in me, then it must affect me (or my will), which means that I must experience myself as actively involved in the world I know in this manner. For unless I came to recognize that the miseries I contemplate are also my own, such contemplation could not affect my will and elicit resignation. These two conflicting demands create what I have called the paradox of reflection.

It will not do, to resolve this paradox, to suggest that an interested knowledge of the world, that is to say, a view of the world in which I find myself engaged, might suffice to produce resignation. For Schopenhauer adamantly maintains that interested knowledge is also distorted knowledge: ‘the intellect can fulfill its function quite properly and correctly only so long as the will is silent and pauses. . . . [T]he function of the intellect is disturbed by every observable excitement of the will, and its result is falsified by the will’s interference’ (WWR II 215). In particular, the interests that frame my representations bar me from the kind of insight into the ‘inner nature of the whole’—that it is involved ‘in a constant passing away, a vain striving, an inward conflict, and a continual suffering’ (WWR I 379)—which alone can produce complete resignation. Even leaving aside Schopenhauer’s peculiar appropriation of Kantian idealism to make a case for this view, it is intuitively plausible enough: it does seem as though I must disengage from my own desires and feelings to gain a clear understanding of their nature and of the world in which they are pursued and experienced. It takes not only disinterested knowledge, but also the reflective awareness of the disinterested character of this knowledge, to produce the sort of conviction that frustration is essential and inevitable in the world, which is necessary to induce resignation. But this disinterested knowledge seems to be gained at the cost of
estranging me from the world, of experiencing it as utterly ‘foreign’, as a world in which I am ‘not at all actively involved’.

To produce complete resignation, this estrangement must be overcome, and my knowledge must become a ‘living conviction’: I must recognize that the world in which frustration is essential and inevitable is also my world. Therein lies the paradox of reflection: the reflection capable of producing resignation is presented as a state in which I must come to see myself in something I also experience as foreign, a state in which I am moved or affected by something from which I am also detached or disengaged. Schopenhauer does not tell us how this is to be accomplished, presumably because the paradox of reflection is one he never recognizes, and consequently never addresses.

It seems fitting to end my provisional and inconclusive exploration with some provisional and inconclusive suggestions to solve Schopenhauer’s problem. One source of the problem is a certain lack of clarity in his conception of the relation between willing and knowing. His most frequent claim is that the intellect—the instrument of cognition—is ordinarily ‘at the service’ of the will, and that knowledge is therefore ‘interested’. But this claim is ambiguous, for as Schopenhauer speaks of it, knowledge can be interested in varying ways, with varying effects. In the most general terms, knowledge is interested when the intellect operates under the influence of needs, desires, or feelings. But this influence can assume different forms. Consider again the example of jealousy. Jealousy may influence the focus of cognition, on the one hand, through the practical interests it dictates, such as an interest in spying on, and exposing, my unfaithful lover. These interests induce me to direct my attention to the features of the surrounding world that are relevant to them, and ignore the rest. On the other hand, jealousy may also influence the content of cognition, when it induces me to see the world in a determinate way—for example, by making the long absences of my lover appear cognitively salient. In both cases, the influence of the will creates a cognitive bias, but its effects differ greatly from one case to the other. In the first case, the will’s influence does not necessarily interfere with, but arguably fosters, the autonomous operation of the intellect: my practical interests are presumably better served if it represents the relevant features of the surrounding world accurately. In the second case, by contrast, the will’s influence interferes with the autonomous operation of the intellect, and is therefore likely to introduce falsification: under the sway of jealousy, I may come to see things as they are not.

In the first case, the agent’s determinate practical interests direct the intellect’s focus to specific aspects of the world, to be sure, but within those limits, the agent’s very interests motivate him to let the intellect operate autonomously. Moreover, in order to ‘serve’ it, the knowledge the intellect delivers to the agent must be able to influence his will: for instance, the realization that current circumstances are not propitious to the fulfillment of his interests might induce the agent to postpone, or perhaps even renounce, it. There is no reason to think that philosophical knowledge is not influenced by the will in this way: after all, the fundamental philosophical insight Schopenhauer claims to uncover is that the
world is essentially inhospitable to the complete satisfaction of the will—an insight to which one is presumably driven by an interest in the will’s satisfaction. Since this sort of knowledge is supposed to have influence on the will, we might surmise that the knowledge of the impossibility of a complete satisfaction of the will would compel the agent to postpone it indefinitely, that is to say, to produce his resignation.

In the second case, by contrast, the will continuously disrupts the operations of the intellect to ensure that it delivers the representations the will expects. Such ‘knowledge’ can obviously have no impact on the will, since its ‘service’ of it now consists in confirming its expectations (think again of the jealous individual who insists on finding evidence of his lover’s infidelity everywhere). So long as the intellect of the jealous individual is at the ‘service’ of his jealous disposition in this sense, it will remain unable to produce any knowledge that could alter that disposition. In this case, obviously, the intellect must break free from the influence of jealousy if it is to achieve an accurate representation of the world and affect his jealousy. But such a representation need not be disinterested in the first sense I discussed above, it does not have to estrange the agent from the world and represent it to him as ‘foreign’, or without relation to his will and its weal and woe. He may then come to see that his jealous obsession is contrary to his interests and manage to modify it.

The paradox of reflection I have described may result from Schopenhauer’s confusion of these two senses in which knowledge can be interested. The knowledge necessary for the possibility of resignation must certainly be disinterested in the second sense discussed above, but it does not have to be disinterested in the first sense, and so it remains capable of affecting the will.

NOTES

1 It might be objected that Schopenhauer would reject the idea that altruistic compassion requires a sense of self, since in his view compassion is supposed to rest precisely on a dissolution of the boundaries of individuation. But Schopenhauer himself insists, in my view correctly if perhaps not consistently, that compassion requires a clear consciousness of the difference between us and the other: ‘at every moment, we remain clearly conscious that he is the sufferer, not we; and it is precisely in his person, not in ours, that we feel the suffering . . . we feel his pain as his, and do not imagine that it is ours’ (BM 147).

2 It may well be the crucial argument for this view, as it reproduces the argument singled out by Schopenhauer in his dissertation On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

3 Schopenhauer unfortunately assumes that the kind of immediate, non-inferential and not ‘purely’ representational experience I have of my own body must also be an experience of it as it is ‘in itself’ since it does not answer to the strictures of the principle of sufficient reason. This appears to confuse the manner of knowing (‘immediately’) with its content (the ‘thing-in-itself’). The value of his insight, however, can be separated from this particular way of formulating it.

4 We might also offer the following further suggestion: according to Schopenhauer, a perception is anything to me, in other words, it counts as mine only by virtue of its
relation to my will. Arguably, therefore, it would only be insofar as it is an ‘affection
of the will’ that I have an immediate access to my perceptions as mine (see WWR II 381).

5 It is worth quoting in full this passage from the essay On the Freedom of the Will: ‘The
ability to deliberate . . . yields in reality nothing but the very frequently distressing conflict
of motives, which is dominated by indecision and has the whole soul and consciousness of
man as its battlefield. This conflict makes the motives try out repeatedly, against one
another, their effectiveness on the will. This puts the will in the same situation as that of
the body on which different forces act in opposite directions, until finally the decidedly
strongest motive drives the others from the field and determines the will. This outcome is
called resolve, and it takes place with complete necessity as the result of the struggle’ (FW
37).

6 This is the view advocated by Hamlyn 1980: 82ff., and also by Gardiner 1963: 169ff.
who nevertheless acknowledges the sort of confusion between two views of the will I
discuss here.

7 Schopenhauer attributes genuine agency to what he calls the ‘intelligible character’,
which is the locus of freedom and responsibility. But he also denies that we have
immediate or even direct access to it (e.g. WWR I 290).

8 This is not to deny that agents can sometimes fail to bring about intended states of
affairs, and still remain agents. But besides being frustrating, this failure will also inspire
a certain anxiety concerning their very status as agents. This anxiety will often induce these
agents to reassert their agency by testing their causal effectiveness over their environment,
even in arbitrary ways.

9 When Schopenhauer defines what I have here called expectation as a belief in
‘merely possible’ satisfaction, I assume he means to contrast it with actual satisfaction,
rather than to refer to unqualified possibility. For the influence of my expectations on my
susceptibility to pleasure and pain will depend on how close or how remote the possibility
of satisfaction is. Presumably, the more remote the possibility of satisfaction, the less
painful my actual deprivation will be, whereas the closer its possibility, the more painful
the deprivation will feel. This explains why the contemplation of the privations or
satisfactions of others in circumstances vastly different from my own will not affect much
my experience of my current predicament: it will have an effect only if I can see these
privations and satisfactions as possibilities close or real enough for me.

10 For a succinct and illuminating characterization of this ordinary ‘interested’
consciousness of the world, see Young 2005: 108–111.

11 Thus, Schopenhauer will describe disinterested contemplation as stepping ‘into
another world, so to speak, where everything that moves our will, and thus violently
agitates us, no longer exists’ (WWR I 197).

12 It is worth mentioning, in this connection, Sartre’s phenomenological description of
jealousy, which emphasizes the idea that being jealous is less a certain consciousness of
oneself than a certain consciousness of the world; in Sartre 1956: 347–8.

13 Rather more bizarre, in this connection, is the idea, particularly salient in the
account of the sublime, that we achieve peace of mind by becoming conscious of ourselves
as the ‘supporter of this whole world’, so that far from being dependent on a perhaps
hostile and dangerous world, it is this world that is dependent upon us (see WWR I 205–6).

14 This objection is raised in various contexts, where Schopenhauer’s proneness to this
form of inference creates regrettable confusion. For instance, it motivates the metaphysically
awkward introduction of Platonic Ideas in a Kantian framework, as Christopher
Janaway 1996: 39–61 points out. And it also underwrites Schopenhauer’s view of the
possibility of compassion, in ways that threaten the coherence of his own account of it: see Simmel 1986: chapter 3.

Guyer 1996: 109–132 argues that Schopenhauer acknowledges, besides this purely negative aesthetic pleasure, the existence of a positive pleasure taken at cognition as such. The chief evidence for this view is the following passage: ‘But yet the source of aesthetic enjoyment will lie sometimes rather in the apprehension of the known Idea, sometimes rather in the bliss and peace of mind of pure knowledge free from all willing, and thus from all individuality and the pain that results therefrom’ (WWR I 212). Guyer finds in this pleasure in cognition the legacy of 18th century cognitivism in aesthetic theory, a prominent instance of which may be found in the Kantian view that aesthetic pleasure arises out of the ‘free play’ of our cognitive faculties. Unlike Kant, Schopenhauer makes no allusion to such free play and appears to derive aesthetic pleasure instead from the ‘apprehension of the known Idea’ itself. Even though one cannot deny that Schopenhauer asserts the existence of such a positive pleasure, it is quite difficult to reconcile this assertion with the bulk of his other views. We should first ask what, in the ‘apprehension of the known Idea’, is a source of pleasure. According to one possible reading, it is the ‘known Idea’ itself, or the content of cognition, that gives pleasure. But this simply does not jibe with Schopenhauer’s view that the Ideas, particularly in the highest forms of art (e.g. tragedy), are presentations of ‘the terrible side of life’ and so are unlikely to arouse pleasure. According to another possible reading, the apprehension of the Ideas is pleasurable by virtue of involving the optimal functioning of our cognitive faculties. The problem with this proposal is that it relies on a broadly Aristotelian functionalist conception of pleasure, which Schopenhauer neither endorses nor even mentions, and which moreover represents an alternative incompatible with the essentially negative conception of pleasure that forms the basis of his pessimism, and of his ethical thought in general.

Schopenhauer sometimes appears to suggest that the universality with which, for example, feelings and actions are expressed in ‘genuine lyric poetry’, or even in music, is rather designed to allow individuals whose lives are filled by particular feelings and actions to see a reflection of their ‘inner nature’ in the productions of these arts nevertheless (see, e.g. WWR I 249).

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It is a rare moment in our conscious lives when we are not desiring something, and most of our desires aim for satisfactions that worldly things and relationships promise to provide. There are usually more desires than we can satisfy, and upon those infrequent occasions when we do attain a high degree of satisfaction, the satisfaction tends to fade, making way for new desires in what seems to be a continued quest for a permanent satisfaction. We usually die while in the midst of this pursuit, passing away in Schopenhauer’s opinion, tragically, comically and fruitlessly into meaningless oblivion.

Schopenhauer believes that some people—and in human history to date, it seems to be only a small minority of them—are not fated to such an unfulfilled life, for their characters and lives unfold in a manner that resists the seductions of worldly desire, allowing them to cultivate instead, a more select, universalistic mode of awareness, instantiated through either an aesthetic, moral or ascetic attitude. Each of these modes of awareness, Schopenhauer claims, diminishes a person’s sense of individuality and makes him or her more attentive to a transcendent presence that remains unaffected by the passing of time and the enticements of desire. In aesthetic experience there is the apprehension of timeless archetypes through either natural objects or the visual and literary arts, or the apprehension of abstract forms of human emotion in music. In moral experience, there is the identification with the universal consciousness of humanity itself, or even life itself, considered as a single, amalgamated, state of being. In ascetic experience, there is the radical minimization of desire, where one apprehends the daily world from a psychological distance as if attending a theatrical play, experiencing relief in a supremely detached, suspended and fundamentally tranquil awareness.

Within the context of these alternative paths towards transcendence, it is illuminating to consider the systematic significance of a specific type of aesthetic awareness within Schopenhauer’s philosophy, namely, that of natural beauty. This is an interpretively complicated aspect of his aesthetics. Some passages invite us to ascribe to him the following position as his definitive stance: although the experience of natural beauty has a thoroughly positive value, its value remains less than that of moral and ascetic experience. Its positive value is of a lower magnitude, supposedly because aesthetic experience in general tends to be less permanent than the other two styles of universalistic awareness, and hence,
less effective in sustaining a tranquil, relatively desire-free outlook in the long run. However, this rendition of Schopenhauer’s attitude towards the experience of natural beauty overlooks the fact that when speaking generally, he also associates it with his unsympathetic criticisms of philosophies such as Hegelianism, and of religions such as Judaism and Islam. This arises within the context of acknowledging without any further qualification that the mountains, plants, etc., are beautiful simply to look at, or ‘zu zehen,’ as Schopenhauer would say. His target on these occasions is what we might call an ‘aestheticist’ attitude to natural beauty, an attitude that, in his view, reduces natural beauty to a false glitter that misleads us into optimism, and obscures our perception of human and animal suffering, just as attractive clothing or a dissimulated smile can distract us from perceiving that a troubled, if not evil, soul happens to be wearing it. Schopenhauer considers it optimistic, for instance, to suppose that since the natural world has strikingly beautiful aspects, it is an essentially a good place—even the best of all possible worlds—where, through the proper exercise of human freedom, a peaceful and moral society may someday become a reality.

Schopenhauer is not entirely negative about the pleasurable experience of natural beauty, often noting—and these are the passages with which his readers are usually familiar—how natural beauty can transport us into a state of pure, relatively pain-free contemplation (e.g. see WWR I 200). His less-recognized critique of natural beauty—a critique of an aestheticist approach towards it—which we will now pursue, nonetheless serves more extensively to reveal his philosophy’s otherworldly, suffering-alleviating tenor, for his critique of the aestheticist approach can help us appreciate the limits of his more preferred aesthetic attitude, which we will see involves a kind of superficiality of its own that points to a more ethically- and ascetically-aware orientation towards the world.

1. Natural Beauty as a False Glitter

To appreciate the implications of Schopenhauer’s negative remarks about natural beauty, we can begin by recalling his fundamental description of the human condition and the ideal role that genuine aesthetic experience plays within it. He states:

All willing springs from lack, from deficiency, and thus from suffering. Fulfilment brings this to an end; yet for one wish that is fulfilled there remain at least ten that are denied. Further, desiring lasts a long time, demands and requests go on to infinity; fulfilment is short and meted out sparingly. But even the final satisfaction itself is only apparent; the wish fulfilled at once makes way for a new one . . . Therefore, so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with its constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we never obtain lasting happiness or peace . . . Thus the subject of willing is constantly lying on the revolving wheel of Ixion, is always drawing water in the sieve of the Danaids, and is the eternally thirsting Tantalus (WWR I 196).
... [however, in aesthetic experience] the attention is now no longer directed to the motives of willing, but comprehends things free from their relation to the will. Thus it considers things without interest, without subjectivity, purely objectively; it is entirely given up to them in so far as they are merely representations, and not motives. Then all at once the peace, always sought but always escaping us on that first path of willing, comes to us of its own accord, and all is well with us. It is the painless state, prized by Epicurus as the highest good and as the state of the gods; for that moment we are delivered from the miserable pressure of the will. We celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing; the wheel of Ixion stands still. (WWR I 196).

In the second excerpt, Schopenhauer describes genuine aesthetic experience as a kind of will-less, painless, state of pure knowledge. This experience is importantly, although not exclusively, a mode of pain relief, but a mode quite unlike that which a dose of opium provides to the craving addict. Its relief is more like that which follows upon freeing oneself more generally from the burdensome pendulum swings of opium addiction itself.

Now in WWR II (Chapter XXIX) Schopenhauer begins his discussion of genuine aesthetic experience by noting that despite the virtues mentioned above, it only briefly provides tranquillity, suggesting that aesthetic experience’s drawback is simply its short-lived quality. This presents us with only one side of his characterization of the experience of natural beauty, however, for he also criticizes it—and these are cases where nature’s pleasurable, aesthetic surface is experienced in a way that conflicts with his own, allegedly more insightful attitude towards that very same surface—in connection with its power to inspire an optimistic and superficial interpretation of the world:

An optimist tells me to open my eyes and to see how beautiful the world is with its mountains, plants, fresh air, animals and so forth.—Naturally these things are beautiful to behold [zu sehen], but to be them is something quite different. (MR 188; cf. WWR II 581).

The above excerpt harbours two Schopenhauerian worries concerning natural beauty, relative to the further assumptions such an advocate of natural beauty happens to hold. First, one might assume naively that the world we perceive is, by and large, the way the world is in itself, and interpret from natural beauty’s pleasurable presence that the world in itself is essentially beautiful, reasonable and morally good. Second, one might assume that the world we perceive is, by and large, not the way the world is in itself, but nonetheless interpret from natural beauty’s pleasurable presence that the world in itself is likely to be reasonable and morally good. Either assumption yields the same result: natural beauty’s pleasurable presence reinforces the belief that the world is a fundamentally good place, and that despite its pains, life is a pleasant gift bestowed upon us for which we should be thankful.
Schopenhauer surprisingly characterizes both versions of this optimistic line of reasoning—one that, in the second version above, bears a close similarity to the teleological argument for God’s existence—as a ‘wicked way of thinking, a bitter mockery of the unspeakable sufferings of humanity’ (WWR I 326). To see why he does so, let us consider an image that captures the spirit of Schopenhauer’s charge.

Imagine someone who, on a remarkably beautiful day and in a normally healthy condition, is standing in the midst of a battlefield strewn with hundreds of wounded and dying people, whose attention is dominated, not empathetically by their combined pain, but aesthetically by the sunny, morning sky, the passing clouds, the warm breeze, the light mist hanging over the fields, the surrounding springtime flowers, and the bubbling brook, and who is inspired by this overwhelming natural beauty to believe that despite the horror before his or her eyes, the eventual course of human society will somehow reveal that the war’s devastation is justified. The person then proceeds to help the wounded, filled with a strong confidence and metaphysical comfort, convinced that all is basically well with the world.6

The Schopenhauerian criticism would be that the optimistic assurance of being a participant in the supreme moral task that natural beauty can inspire, or of simply feeling the magnificent presence of the infinite universe here and now, conflicts with the screaming horror and subjective reality of those who are in excruciating pain. Whether one is immersed immediately in nature’s infinite expanse as a nature mystic or pantheist, or whether one is more future-oriented and convinced that all evils will be morally justified and reconciled in an upcoming social unity, Schopenhauer’s remarks imply that such attitudes undermine a person’s ability to empathize realistically with the suffering that exists, since the compensatory greater good or alternatively, greater mystical consolation, that one projects, renders the suffering less terrible by absorbing it into a more positively-valued, cosmic whole.

We can discern this attitude scattered across Schopenhauer’s writings. For instance, he condemns audiences who expect poetic justice (i.e. meaningful, balanced, rational resolution) in tragic art, and who remain dissatisfied when the ending is not just.7 Also exemplary are his repeated condemnations of optimism—sometimes associated with pantheism—as an insensitive, wicked outlook.8

This contrast between the satisfactions associated with an aestheticist, sensory-surface based experience of natural beauty, and what it is like to suffer severely, complicates the interpretation of natural beauty’s value within Schopenhauer’s aesthetics. The aestheticist experience of natural beauty focuses on the mere appearances of physical objects, environments and processes, i.e., on their sensuous surfaces and attractiveness. And this focus can either distract us from the inner realities of which these surfaces are manifestations, or lead us, when thinking teleologically, to draw false inferences about what those inner realities are like. It inhibits our realization that the inner reality—and Schopenhauer believes that there is such a reality—of naturally beautiful things is at odds with
the pleasure that their appearances cause. For Schopenhauer, moreover, this inner reality is radically different from those pleasurable appearances.

These reflections suggest the following formulation of Schopenhauer’s criticism of the aestheticist approach to natural beauty: since natural beauty in its aestheticist presentation issues from the surface of the ‘world as representation,’ it concerns only objects and their relationships to us. However, for the sake of apprehending metaphysical truth (and this is what Schopenhauer maintains we more closely approximate, but do not attain, in the case in genuine aesthetic experience)9 we need to apprehend the inner reality that underlies naturally beautiful objects, and not remain content with merely how these objects pleasantly appear.

This is a useful first-approximation to Schopenhauer’s critical attitude towards the aestheticist, optimism-supportive approach to natural beauty, for he distinguishes between ‘representation’ and ‘will’ (i.e. between objects and subjects; between appearances and reality), often stating that objects are different in kind from one’s inner nature, and that there is no interactive relationship between mind and body. As we shall see, natural beauty’s grounding within the world of objects has an important role to play in Schopenhauer’s negative assessment of the aestheticist approach towards it, but it is not at the heart of his criticism. More fundamental is the implication that natural beauty so considered does not directly reveal the world’s suffering intensely enough to foster the development of empathy. We will see that Schopenhauer’s conception of genuine aesthetic experience of natural beauty has this same limiting feature, and that we can have a more revealing metaphysical apprehension of the world through moral, and ultimately, ascetic awareness.10 To experience moral and ascetic awareness, and accordingly, a more profound level of wisdom than natural beauty can provide, empathy is required. The essential shortcoming of even what Schopenhauer regards as a genuinely aesthetic, as opposed to aestheticist, experience of natural beauty—and this will be brought to light by using as our take-off point his critique of the aestheticist approach to natural beauty—resides in the limited kind of wisdom it offers, owing to the rudimentary level of the Ideas manifested, objectified or instantiated in the natural world.

2. Natural Beauty and the Emergence of Suffering in Artistic Expression

Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory divides into two parts, one of which concerns the art of music, and the other of which concerns the remaining arts and the aesthetic experience of natural objects. With the exception of music, he claims that genuine aesthetic experience serves primarily to reveal timeless archetypes, conceived of as idealized objects, in an extraordinarily intense and discernable manner, principally as a means to inner peace. Art’s main purpose is to serve as a catalyst for evoking this type of quieting perception, for the knowledge that it provides is usually difficult to attain when contemplating the majority of natural objects in their ordinary condition. Unlike most of the actual trees, ants, birds or
humans, for example, aesthetically perfected artistic representations of these beings can reveal their ideal formats more clearly, since the actual examples often depart significantly from how a perfect instance would appear. Such artworks would present clearly either the thing’s ideal physical format or its ideal type of subjective character, both of which reflect different kinds of Ideas that the thing can manifest.

Schopenhauer’s references to these ideal representations tend to highlight an object’s ideal physical format, as we might encounter in a textbook of botany or biology. However, an aesthetically perfected representation, say, of a cat, can also reveal its ideal type of subjective character, which would presumably include what it is like to feel disposed to attack and eat birds and fish, or to enjoy playing with small objects that roll freely on the ground. Similarly, an aesthetically perfected representation of a human being can render more easily perceivable either a person’s ideal physical format, a person’s general character type, or a person’s characteristic state of mind at some point in time. It is also possible to live in accord with a more idealized sense of self, where one’s inner character becomes more clearly manifested through an aesthetically perfected behavioural style.

Within this theory of aesthetic experience, since inanimate natural objects have an inner reality (but no obviously determinate inner feeling to display), our aesthetic perception of them is drawn to their ideal formats. A beautiful snowflake, seashell, sunset, waterfall, cloud or mineral formation, would typically reveal to us the ideal format of every snowflake, seashell, etc., and what is worth noting here, is that such experiences of natural beauty do not lead us to empathize with any suffering. The attractiveness, the universal knowledge, and the timeless forms associated with natural beauty instead contribute to a tranquil, pain-free experience. Schopenhauer writes:

Thus with aesthetic contemplation . . . of natural beauty in the inorganic and vegetable kingdoms and of the works of architecture, the enjoyment of pure, will-less knowing will predominate, because the Ideas here apprehended are only low grades of the will’s objectivity, and therefore are not phenomena of deep significance and suggestive content.

(WWR I 212)

Schopenhauer’s account of natural beauty is consequently ambiguous about the value of the satisfaction involved in suffering-reduction, for he describes the experience of natural beauty positively insofar as it provides relief from our personal suffering, but also implies that it distracts us from the world’s suffering insofar as genuine aesthetic experience withdraws us from all suffering. His critique of the aestheticist approach to natural beauty draws our attention to this deficiency, insofar as within such an approach, we pleasurably and exclusively fix our attention upon resonant textures, colours and shapes (e.g. WWR II 403-5). The deficiency arises also, however, within the universalistic consciousness, or genuine aesthetic experience, that Schopenhauer holds in high regard, namely,
where we apprehend ideal physical forms, such as that of the perfect snowflake, tulip, butterfly or human being. Both modes of aesthetic experience inhibit us from empathizing with the suffering of other sentient beings, mainly because the approaches are both object-centred, either upon spatio-temporal objects or upon universal objects, and because their subjective content is thin.

When the apprehended beauty reveals an object’s ideal format, there is a satisfaction involved, and since this satisfaction leads us either to overlook or diminish the presence of suffering (having withdrawn from all [or from most] suffering in such genuine aesthetic experience), the beauty of ideal form works in optimism’s favour. Just as the ideal format of a snowflake or seashell does not help us apprehend the inner reality of a snowflake or seashell, classical Greek sculptures do not help us apprehend the inner reality of the human being, at least if we remain concerned exclusively with well-proportioned bodily parts arranged in formally pleasing relationships to each other.13 Such examples indicate that when we judge an object’s beauty with respect to its ideal physical format as a means to apprehend the object’s Idea, and if our experience is of pure beauty, then the experience will remain pleasurably and morally superficial; we will not apprehend the inner reality of the object in question required for moral awareness, and we will implicitly be receptive to the optimistic attitude of which Schopenhauer is so wary. This holds even in the paradigmatic case where we aesthetically apprehend the timeless archetype (i.e. Platonic form) of some beautiful object, such as a snowflake or tulip.

Only when the experience of beauty incorporates a greater subjective depth, do we enter the territory that, for Schopenhauer, works against optimism’s misguided stance. Within his aesthetic theory, the immediate, and in a sense, most abstract, place to appreciate this depth is in his theory of music, for he believes that since music expresses abstract forms of human feeling, it reveals the essential qualities of the inner subjectivity of things that natural beauty does not express. Owing to music’s restriction to emotional form, however, music expresses feeling in a relatively painless way, although not to such an extent where we become oblivious to the pain with which the expressed emotions might be associated. We can listen to sad, tortured, lamenting, melancholy, gloomy, or heartbreaking music, recognize the respective emotions and feel emotionally moved, but since the music presents only the emotional forms, rather than concrete feelings of sadness, torture, etc., it remains on the surface of actual emotional life, rather than extending into its sometimes painful reality that involves those actual feelings of sadness, torture, etc. Nonetheless, through its capacity for emotional expression, music reveals the inner being of people more clearly than do generic images of ideal human bodies, as one might encounter in an anatomy textbook. In this respect it is a metaphysically more profound art, in contrast to kinds of art that centre upon the portrayal of ideal physical types.

Schopenhauer is well known for his claim that music is unique among the arts, owing to its alleged capacity to replicate formally the flow of emotion as it moves through the paths of desire. With respect to being able to express emotion, however, music is not unique, and one can even argue that its style of expressing
emotion displays a kind of deficiency. This limitation arises from its abstract quality, for music omits the specific emotional contexts and associated richness that, for example, complicated representational paintings, photographs, sculptures or works of literature can provide. To appreciate this, we can consider some of Schopenhauer’s examples of the highest achievement in painting, and reflect upon how the same emotions, if they were expressed musically, despite their temporal elaboration, would remain more indeterminate than what the paintings express:

... [we refer to] those [paintings] in which the real, i.e., the ethical, spirit of Christianity is revealed for perception by the presentation of persons full of this spirit. These presentations are in fact the highest and most admirable achievements of the art of painting, and only the greatest masters of this art succeeded in producing them, in particular Raphael and Correggio, the latter especially in his earlier pictures. Paintings of this kind are really not to be numbered among the historical, for often they do not depict any event or action, but are mere groups of saints with the Saviour himself, often still as a child with his mother, angels, and so on. In their countenances, especially in their eyes, we see the expression, the reflection, of the most perfect knowledge, that knowledge namely which is not directed to particular things, but which has fully grasped the Ideas, and hence the whole inner nature of the world and of life. This knowledge in them, reacting on the will, does not, like that of other knowledge, furnish motives for the will, but on the contrary has become a quieter of all willing. From this has resulted perfect resignation, which is the innermost spirit of Christianity ... and hence salvation. (WWR I 232)

The paintings described here combine ideality of physical form with a determinate expression of human subjectivity, and integrate what Schopenhauer originally describes in the case of natural beauty as idealized physical form, with the expression of emotion that we find more abstractly embodied in music. In this instance, he emphasizes the state of transcendence and insight into the nature of the world, and for him this involves as a precondition, the recognition of pain and suffering with a high degree of actual intensity. The image of Jesus as an adult is among the best representatives of this type of awareness, since among the variety of characters Schopenhauer mentions above, only Jesus is described in religious writings as having had a deep empathy for the world’s universal suffering and as embodying the consequent attitude of resignation that Schopenhauer locates at the heart of Christianity.

Again, we encounter the ambiguity in the role of satisfaction in aesthetic experience mentioned earlier, for in these beautiful paintings of human subjectivity that reflect an insight into the world’s nature, it is essential that the aesthetic experience does not inspire a wholly satisfactory attitude that would fail to combat optimism, which would occur if we were to appreciate the work in
merely formal terms, or if our approach to it were exclusively aestheticist. To the contrary, the images must also invoke an empathetic awareness of the actual suffering of animals and people. Hieronymous Bosch’s image of the crucifixion (*Christ Carrying the Cross*, c. 1515) appropriately represents the transition to the resigned state of mind that Schopenhauer identifies as the epitome of Christian consciousness, and it coheres well with his following remark:

> In short, it [pantheism] is optimism; hence its ethical side is weak, as in the Old Testament, in fact it is even false, and in part revolting. With me, on the other hand, the will, or the *inner nature of the world*, is by no means Jehovah; on the contrary, it *is, so to speak, the crucified Saviour*, or else the crucified thief, according as it is decided. Consequently, my ethical teaching agrees with the Christian completely and in its highest tendencies, and no less with that of Brahmanism and Buddhism. (WWR II 644-45)

By recalling how Schopenhauer condemns the aestheticist attitude towards natural beauty for its capacity to inspire optimism, we can now notice a fundamental developmental structure within his aesthetics. This follows the hierarchy of Platonic Ideas, or the great chain of being, starting with natural forces, and ascending to humans via the minerals, plants and animals. As we advance through the hierarchy, the expression of subjectivity becomes more pronounced, and accordingly, the notion of beauty that begins with the experience of natural objects that have an indeterminate inner being and no feelings to display, becomes increasingly enriched to the point where we aesthetically experience higher levels of being in animals and humans which have the capacity to suffer. Here, the experience of beauty reflects that inner reality by including a factor of suffering (e.g. as in Bosch’s painting). This presence of suffering creates a tension with what was originally beauty’s purely satisfactory content, and the result is a pleasure-pain amalgam, where the beauty tempers, or sublimes, the pain. At first, beauty prevails and the presence of pain is absent or very faint, but as the pain’s presence increases, it soon predominates atmospherically as the keynote of the artwork’s subjective mood. Among the results of this is an increase in sublimity, viz., a mixed feeling, either of oneself as a finite, pain-susceptible individual in conjunction with oneself as an eternal, serene subject of knowing, or of oneself as a mere speck of dust situated in an infinitely extended universe in conjunction with oneself as a being whose consciousnesses contains within itself, the infinite cosmos as a mental representation.

Schopenhauer’s aesthetics thus begins with the experience of natural beauty and the presentation of ideal physical form, and upon the set of ideal forms that constitutes the hierarchy of Platonic Ideas—one that ranges from natural forces, to minerals, to plants, animals and humans—he coordinates types of art with the different intensities of inner reality that match each level of the hierarchy. As the expression of subjectivity becomes more pronounced, so does the expression of suffering. His aesthetics eventually draws our attention to, and urges us to
empathize penultimately with a peaceful, yet tortured, soul that is essentially Christ-like. This is a sublime character whose quality (he believes) opposes the optimistic spirit, and that indicates the gradual emergence within his aesthetics, of what can be called the 'art of suffering'.

3. The Sublimation of Beauty's Peacefulness

Despite the imaginatively painful feelings it can invoke, the artistic portrayal of suffering tends to keep actual suffering at a distance through its character as a mere representation, just as music keeps actual human emotion at a distance through its highly abstracted form. With respect to static arts such as painting, moreover, we can contemplate an image of the crucifixion and can empathize with the scene only to a certain extent, for the painting represents a particular moment of a larger episode and remains based on the external appearance of the moment portrayed. To approach more closely the subjective reality of the portrayed moment, we might look towards a dynamic literary portrayal (or a literary portrayal combined with visual imagery and music, as we experience in motion pictures), since words can duplicate what the characters are actually thinking, and these thoughts can stimulate a distinctive pattern of emotional experience.

Insofar as artistic portrayals in general remain fictional or imaginative, our emotional experience is not quite the same as when we empathize with an actual, suffering person and feel the raw emotion ourselves. Artistic portrayals can nonetheless bring us to a transitional point between imaginative and actual empathy, and when we make the transition from one to the other, our awareness transforms from an aesthetic to a moral one. For Schopenhauer, this moral style of awareness ultimately extends to coincide with the subjectivity of humanity itself, with all of its joys, but more significantly and irreconcilably, with all of its suffering.

It is no accident that Schopenhauer’s characterization of the summit and end of art, cited above as the expression of resignation, fits systematically with his description of the ideal moral awareness that eventually leads to such resignation:

If that veil of Maya, the principium individuationis, is lifted from the eyes of a man to such an extent that he no longer makes the egotistical distinction between himself and the person of others, but takes as much interest in the sufferings of other individuals as in his own, and thus is not only benevolent and charitable in the highest degree, but even ready to sacrifice his own individuality whenever several others can be saved thereby, then it follows automatically that such a person, recognizing in all beings his own true and innermost self, must also regard the endless sufferings of all that lives as his own, and thus take upon himself the pain of the whole world. No suffering is any longer strange or foreign to him. All the miseries of others, which he sees and is so seldom able to
alleviate, all the miseries of which he has indirect knowledge, and even
those he recognizes merely as possible, affect his mind just as do his own.
(WWR I 378-79)

The quality of Schopenhauerian moral awareness is not thoroughly tortured,
even though one realizes that from a universal standpoint, every possible and
actual pain is literally one’s own. Serving to temper the pain, moral awareness
also contains a complementary universal quality that introduces a serenity and
uniformity of disposition in the knowledge that one’s inner nature lives in
everything. Schopenhauerian moral awareness is deeply communal, in other
words, and although it does not justify the presence of suffering, becoming aware
of this community provides a measure of inner peace.

At this point, we can again discern a pain-pleasure amalgam that, at a moral
level, corresponds to how Bosch’s painting sublimates the representation of
Jesus’s suffering with an aura of beauty at the aesthetic level. In moral
consciousness, the peaceful component that the beauty artistically expresses
becomes subjectivized and sublimated into a uniformity and serenity of inner
character. There is some minor currency in describing this condition as a
‘beautiful’ soul, but the so-called beauty of moral awareness has little to do with
pleasurable appearances, for we are now directly indicating a peaceful quality of
consciousness that underlies the awareness of an immeasurable degree of
suffering.

This image of the calm and tranquil foundational consciousness is not unique
to Schopenhauer’s characterization of Jesus. We find it, for instance, in the
Buddhist Lankavatara Sutra (4th century C.E.), where universal mind is
compared to a great ocean, with its surface ruffled by waves and surges, but
with its depths remaining forever unmoved. We also encounter it in F. W. J.
Schelling’s Winckelmannian characterization of the ideal Greek personality that
compares consciousness to a great ocean:

The authenticity and perfection of conceptions expresses itself in the
object through that which Winckelmann calls noble simplicity, and
through that quiet power which, in order to appear as power, does not
need to withdraw from the equipose and balance of its existence—this is
what Winckelmann has called quiet greatness. Here, too, the Greeks
serve as archetypes for us. Just as the depths of the ocean always remain
peaceful no matter how impetuous and agitated the surface may be, so
also does the expression of Greek figures demonstrate a peaceful and
stable soul in the midst of passion. In the expression of pain and physical
torpidity itself we see the soul triumph and arise as a divine light of
incorruptible serenity above the figure. Such a soul is expressed in both
the face and in the entire body of Laocoön. (Schelling 1989: 153)

These cross-cultural comparisons reveal not only the universality of the model
Schopenhauer uses for his characterization of moral awareness. They show more
importantly how the tranquillity that he originally associates with beauty becomes desensualized and sublimated in moral awareness, such that we no longer refer to a kind of satisfaction that derives from the apprehension of Ideas through the appearances of the physical individuals that instantiate them, but rather to a quality of consciousness where such satisfaction has fallen away to leave present only its associated tranquillity. This tranquillity, as noted, derives partly from the metaphysical consolation that one’s inner nature lives in everything, or more generally stated, it derives from the awareness that despite all changes, what one essentially is, is what always was and always will be. This has less to do with beauty, and more with what a Christian would refer to as salvation, or a Buddhist, as enlightenment. Schopenhauer’s aesthetics as a whole, just as do individual works of art in his view, consequently guides us to a more desire-free, enlightened, awareness. It leads also to wisdom, as we shall now see.

Schopenhauer completes the sublimation of beauty by describing a purely tranquil, suffering-free state of consciousness that he associates with asceticism. In terms of pictorial imagery, we can make a transition from Bosch’s crucifixion that depicts the cross-carrying Jesus, to Raphael’s and Correggio’s tranquil images of the infant Jesus that Schopenhauer describes as embodying the end, or final purpose, of art. At this point we have completed the path to salvation by arriving at a peaceful state of mind, the calm bottom of the ocean, no longer troubled by the desires, suffering and the frustrations that attend daily life, and yet without being ignorant of, or oblivious to, the world’s suffering.

4. Natural Beauty and the Expression of Wisdom

Schopenhauer’s interest in alleviating suffering permeates his writings, but he is not simply interested in providing anaesthetics that happen to take a philosophical form. He is interested in wisdom as a philosopher, and one of his main insights is that the highest wisdom alleviates suffering without ignoring it. Given this concern, it is important to show how his discussion of natural beauty and genuine aesthetic experience coheres with his advocacy of wisdom, since natural beauty inspires in many people an immediately enlightened awareness that often precipitates into wisdom. There are two well-known examples of this in Buddhism: the first is the moment of Buddha’s awakening, where he was enlightened upon observing the morning star in a clear sky; the second is Buddha’s merely holding up a flower to his disciples, to stimulate a similarly enlightened state of mind in them. Moreover, since Schopenhauer’s own wisdom appears to have been partly inspired by his observation of rainbows (WWR I 185; 209; 278; 398; WWR II 383; 479; 483) and sunbeams (WWR I 185; 208; WWR II 302) among other natural phenomena, it is important to explain how such experiences have nothing to do with the aestheticist approach to natural beauty, where he sees beautiful rainbows and other such phenomena as presenting a false glitter that misleads us into thinking optimistically.
To situate Schopenhauer’s examples of natural beauty constructively within his own theory, we can distinguish between two general types of expressions, namely, those that we assume refer to actual states of consciousness and those that we admit may or may not refer to them. Within the former group we can include psychological expressions of actual states of consciousness (e.g. actual laughing or crying; honest verbal reports) and instrumental expressions of a general desire (e.g. how a swimmer, dancer, runner, bodybuilder or wrestler modifies the shape of his or her body to function well as swimmer, etc.). Within the latter group we can include aesthetic expressions of emotions, moods or feelings (e.g. someone’s acting as if they were happy or sad, or a bulldog that looks sad, but is not feeling sad) and symbolic expressions in general (e.g. the colour green as indicating life, red as indicating danger, a scale as symbolizing justice, and the like).18

The above listing of subcategories is mostly illustrative, since the question about Schopenhauer’s positive references to naturally beautiful objects finds its answer in the broader distinction between expressions that we assume to be referring to actual states of consciousness and those that, as far as we can see, may or may not be so referring. Schopenhauer’s criticism of the aestheticist, and particularly teleological, approach to natural beauty amounts to asserting, (1) natural beauty may or may not refer to the activity of an actual consciousness, (2) his metaphysical theory implies that it does not, and (3) if we are inspired by natural beauty to believe that it refers to some benevolent creator or intelligence, we have reasoned optimistically and fallaciously.

This does not imply that natural beauty cannot aesthetically or symbolically express emotions or themes consistent with Schopenhauerian conceptions of wisdom. A singly-shining star within a clear, infinite expanse, or a single flower quietly raised in the air, can serve as metaphors for a clear consciousness that is detached from all worldly detail. Similarly, a shimmering rainbow or a sunbeam can serve as a metaphor for a constantly illuminating presence amidst a field of change. Schopenhauer’s point about natural beauty is only that we should not infer that naturally beautiful phenomena indicate a divine consciousness (as in the teleological argument for God’s existence) whose quality they are expressing through their beauty. This compares to reminding someone who speaks to a bulldog consolingly as if it were a sad person, that the bulldog’s facial structure does not express its inner reality.

Schopenhauer criticizes those who experience natural beauty as indicating a benevolent consciousness behind, or embodied within, the natural scenes, but his theory of the genuine aesthetic experience of beauty also implies that the peaceful nature of pure beauty conflicts with supplying metaphors that can singly express the higher levels of Schopenhauerian wisdom, namely, types of wisdom that have been tempered by suffering. Some natural objects can supply such metaphors (e.g., a tortured-looking tree), but none would be instances of pure beauty. The more suffering we add expressively to a beautiful image, the more it transforms into either a sublime image or into a morally disturbing one, as is the case of beautifully crafted photographs of starving people.
These considerations need not stand in the way of recognizing a more superficial kind of wisdom that arises within the sphere of pure beauty and genuine aesthetic experience. Although we do acquire a kind of universal knowledge, we still might not acquire wisdom by contemplating merely the perfect contours of objects such as snowflakes, tulips or even statuesque human bodies. If we contemplate the Platonic forms of actions, however, such as those that display honesty, cheating, greediness, benevolence and the like, some wisdom is obtainable. In such reflection, we would disregard where and when the action takes place, ignore whether it is performed by a prince or pauper, and effectively condense years of experience into a single insight. Apprehending actions aesthetically can yield what could dawn on an ordinary person only after having lived hundreds of years, and after having witnessed the same types of human behaviour over and over again, until the constant repetition stimulated an act of reflection that revealed the basic character types, basic situations, and basic outcomes from the perspective of a physical age to which no living body can now in fact extend.

This type of wisdom does not require or entail a high degree of empathy. It is a more scientific type of wisdom, so to speak, where one objectively apprehends the general principles of human behaviour in their formulaic structure. It is also a cousin to the type of abstract knowledge that music provides of the emotions, and it would benefit a great writer of tragedy. Such a person, though, would not thereby merit comparisons with Jesus, Buddha, or any outstandingly empathetic or saintly characters. At the level of Schopenhauerian aesthetic awareness, then, this type of aesthetically-acquired wisdom is notable, but it lacks compassion and it is not the most profound sort of wisdom that Schopenhauer recognizes. To appreciate the latter, we need to follow the inner teleology of his aesthetic theory that leads to moral and ascetic awareness, where wisdom includes the compassionate recognition of suffering.

Schopenhauer discusses music in the culminating sections of his aesthetic theory (WWR I §52), and as noted above, the transition from the contemplation of Platonic Ideas to the experience of music brings us closer to empathizing with human subjectivity, albeit in an abstract, superficial and painless form. Upon entering into moral awareness, we remain universalistically-oriented and selfless, but we fill in the emotional detail that music abstractly expresses with concretely-imagined human experiences that contain the very pain from which music distances itself. This morally-acquired wisdom we have already described above. It arises when the principle of individuation is diminished to the point where distinctions between people become irrelevant, and where, in a universal social consciousness, one regards the endless sufferings of all lives as one’s own, taking upon oneself the pain of the world.

We have implicitly mentioned the subsequent transition from morally-acquired wisdom to ascetically-acquired wisdom in the references to the peaceful, although not suffering-innocent, consciousness of Christian resignation. In asceticism, we detach ourselves from the empathetic outlook, having been repulsed by the entire human and cosmic scenario of violence that we ourselves
have precipitated. Similar to the examples of enlightenment-stimulating experiences mentioned in connection with Buddha, Schopenhauer adds some more dramatic ones that direct us away from the world as a whole. Notable is the experience of Abbé Rancé, reformer of the Trappist monastic order:

His youth was devoted to pleasure and enjoyment; finally, he lived in a passionate relationship with a Madame de Montbazon. When he visited her one evening, he found her room empty, dark, and in disorder. He struck something with his foot; it was her head, which had been severed from her body because, after her sudden death, her corpse could not otherwise have been put into the leaden coffin that was standing beside it. After recovering from terrible grief, Rancé became in 1663 the reformer of the order of the Trappists, which at that time had departed entirely from the strictness of its rules. (WWR II 630)

Such traumatic experiences exemplify situations where the promises of desire—in this case, romantic desire—radically explode, and they compare to experiences through which a person realizes that money, fame, power, professional success, longevity, enjoyment-seeking, travel, family, and security are not only addictive, but are not absolutely satisfying. These traumas also compare to the horror that Buddha is said to have experienced upon leaving his palace, upon apprehending sick, aging and dying people with genuine compassion for the first time. As we know, Buddha’s and Schopenhauer’s common prescription to soften the impact of such mental disturbances, is to minimize one’s desires and to contemplate the world as a seamless whole.

5. Beauty, Tragedy and Ascetically-Acquired Wisdom

Schopenhauer identifies an ascending hierarchy of wisdom that starts with aesthetic awareness and advances to moral and ascetic awareness. We can consequently ask whether aesthetically and morally acquired wisdom are left behind upon achieving ascetically-acquired wisdom, for the well-known final lines of The World as Will and Representation state that from the perspective of the ascetic, this world, with all of its suns and galaxies, ‘is nothing.’ Ascetic wisdom’s detachment from worldly affairs is austere, but it is arguably accumulative in a way that does not detach itself from aesthetic and moral wisdom. This is supported by Schopenhauer’s characterization of the ascetic perspective:

He now looks back calmly and with a smile upon the phantasmagoria of this world which was once able to move and agonize even his mind, but now stands before him as indifferently as chess-men at the end of a game, or as fancy dress cast off in the morning, the form and figure of which taunted and disquieted us on the carnival night. Life and its forms merely float before him as a fleeting phenomenon, as a light morning dream to one half-awake, through which reality already shines, and which can no longer deceive. . . . (WWR I 390)
An apt artistic representation of this perspective is captured by the Buddhist Wheel of Life, where life’s typical episodes are held up objectively to be seen as an endless circle of desire from which we should distance ourselves. When observing the daily world from such a distance, the patterns of character discernable in aesthetically-acquired wisdom reveal themselves, and as one perceives this circle of life, it remains filled with the memory of the moral compassion one once felt excruciatingly for the entire scene. With the introduction of psychological distance, this compassion is not forgotten, but is transformed or sublimated into understanding, as one watches the people suffering with the knowledge that one ‘has been there.’ It compares to reminiscing about an earlier time in one’s life, when one was addicted to fame, pleasure-seeking, power and the like, as one now stands free of such seductions. It also compares to watching a familiar tragic play, knowing beforehand how it will end, and contemplating the characters’ fate in advance of what they themselves happen to know.

Such an enlightened condition completes the teleology of Schopenhauer’s critical remarks about natural beauty, for this critique is like a thread that hangs from an apparently solid, intricately-woven tapestry—one depicting the circle of life with bright and attractive colours, and suggesting in its pleasing and intelligent presentation, a weaver’s benevolent artistic intention. As one pulls upon the thread as a Schopenhauerian, the tapestry unravels to reveal beneath it, yet another, metaphysically truer and disturbing image. This looks more like Edvard Munch’s 1893 painting, *Der Schrei der Natur* (*The Scream*), wherein Munch intended to portray an infinite scream passing through nature that can leave a person trembling with anxiety. His image was inspired by a dramatic sunset—one that perhaps others might have experienced as intensely beautiful—but whose overwhelmingly blood-red quality suggested to Munch, a world permeated with suffering and death, filled with expressive qualities inconsistent with beauty.

Perhaps only if we first experience nature in this horrifying way, can we fully appreciate Schopenhauer’s observation that the aestheticist approach to natural beauty reduces the latter to a false glitter that obscures the world’s frightening inner reality—a glitter comparable to how rationality and civilized society constitute in a Freudian way, an attractive surface that obscures the morally offensive, instinctual, psychologically foundational, and reproductively-aimed Id.\(^2\)

NOTES

1 ‘Therefore it becomes clear to the person who has reached the knowledge referred to, that, since the will is the in-itself of every phenomenon, the misery inflicted on others and that experienced by himself, the bad and the evil, always concern the one and the same being [immer nur jenes eine und selbe Wesen treffen]’. (WWR I §63).

2 The final paragraph of Book III in WWR I (§52) suggests such a view, as does the first paragraph of Chapter XXIX in WWR II.
3 Schopenhauer ascribes a kitsch-like quality to human life, stating that human life ‘like all inferior goods, is covered on the outside with a false glitter [wie jeder schlechten Waare, die Außenseite mit falschem Schimmer überzogen]; what suffers always conceals itself’ (WWR I 325). His remarks about natural beauty (cited below) suggest that it also presents a false glitter upon nature’s surface.

4 Schopenhauer often has Leibniz negatively in mind when he refers to optimism. The association of Leibniz with optimism is reflected in the title of Voltaire’s, Candide, ou L’Optimisme (Candide: Or, Optimism [1759]), which lampoons Leibniz’s philosophy.

5 Some of Schopenhauer’s affirmative descriptions of natural beauty resonate with the aestheticist approach. In these passages (WWR I §38, and WWR II Chapter XXXIII), he emphasizes the perception of light (as in reflections in water), as providing an experience that is unaffected by desire and that within the field of pure sensory (or aestheticist) perception, is analogous to the will-less perception of Platonic Ideas. The tranquillity and absence of suffering involved in such aesthetic experiences is what attracts him. Since Schopenhauer here praises the virtues of attending to the sensory surface, albeit in a certain way that leads to tranquillity, one cannot say simply that Schopenhauer rejects the aestheticist approach to natural beauty in favor of a conception of aesthetic experience that attends more transcendentally to timeless ideas and the knowledge such ideas provide.

6 This example is inspired by Nietzsche’s theory of tragedy (1872) along with an episode in Tolstoy’s War and Peace (Book X, Chapter XXX) where one of the main characters, Pierre Bezukhov, contemplates a battle scene, at least initially, in a purely aesthetic manner. (Both Nietzsche and Tolstoy draw non-Schopenhauerian conclusions from similar types of examples.)

7 WWR I §51. Schopenhauer’s critical attitude towards the quest for balance, meaning, rationality, justice, etc., also shows in his critical remarks on how Hegel’s teleology misguidedly strives to render everything in the world meaningful (WWR II Chapter XXXVIII, ‘On History’).

8 One of his more forceful expressions is in his discussion of pantheism, which he equates with optimism (PP II Chapter V, ‘A Few Words on Pantheism.’). Here, Schopenhauer queries pantheism, and asks what sort of God would transform himself into the ‘misery in the shape of six million Negro slaves who on the average receive sixty million cuts of the whip on their bare bodies.’ To him, a pantheist who ecstatically glorifies the world as the manifestation of God, also downplays suffering.

9 The experience remains an approximation, since the typical objects of genuine aesthetic experience are Ideas, which are immediate objectifications of the Will, rather than the inner reality of the Will itself. Among the arts, music (as a ‘copy’ of the Will) brings us closest to this inner reality, or metaphysical truth, of things.

10 This point is implicit rather than explicit in Schopenhauer’s aesthetics, and one of this chapter’s aims is to render it more explicit. To see this, though, he states that in genuine aesthetic experience we ‘withdraw from all suffering’ (WWR I §38 [. . . uns allem Leiden entziehn . . . ]). If we withdraw from all suffering, then we cannot empathize with others’ suffering.

11 Schopenhauer maintains that everything has an inner reality, modelled upon how we can feel our bodies. The metaphysical truth is this inner reality. The vocabulary that we have on hand to refer to this inner reality becomes more indeterminate as we descend from humans, to animals, to plants, to inanimate beings, and there is an increasing tension in applying words such as ‘consciousness,’ or ‘subjectivity’ or ‘awareness,’ as we enter the realm of plants and rocks. What remains true for Schopenhauer, nonetheless, is that there is an ‘inner reality’ that is modelled upon our own self awareness and attendant sense of inner reality, and this is what we aim to refer to here.
A thing’s function, rather than its form, can reveal this subjective quality. Many differently-appearing forms have the same function (consider the variety of noses, ears, eyes, etc., across the animal kingdom), so their appearance is not crucial to revealing the associated quality of subjectivity. ‘X is an objectification of Y’ does not imply that from X’s shape, we should expect to discern the desire Y that X’s function expresses (although sometimes we can do so).

In the quoted passages, the boldface has been added.

The peaceful, and yet tortured, Christ-like soul can be alternatively interpreted. On the one hand, it can represent a peaceful foundation to one’s consciousness in the midst of, and despite, unjustifiable suffering, insofar as one has either (1) found peace within one’s identity with the cosmos as whole in moral awareness, or (2) distanced oneself from the suffering and has transcended it in ascetic awareness. On the other hand, it can represent a peaceful foundation to one’s consciousness as a result of having reconciled oneself with the world’s suffering, knowing that all of the suffering is morally justified in light of a higher good. The former alternatives represent a Schopenhauerian style of peaceful consciousness; the latter represents an optimistic style of peaceful consciousness that is more consistent with traditional interpretations of Jesus as the representative of a positive moral kingdom to come.

Schopenhauer refers to Raphael’s painting, St. Cecilia with Saints [1514-16] as representative of this transition from the aesthetic to the moral outlook (WWR I 267).

Perhaps more effectively than the image of the infant Jesus, this end-state would find a more distinct expression in the peacefully-faced adult Jesus whose image also features a sacred heart encircled by a crown of thorns (representing empathy and the awareness of universal suffering).

The more standard typology of signs into symbolic (i.e. arbitrary), iconic (i.e. resembling) and indexical (i.e. referring) ones, does not capture the distinction that is operating in Schopenhauer’s discussion, viz., the distinction between signs known or assumed to be indexical, as opposed to those which admittedly may or may not be indexical. This would be the distinction, for example, between a smile we assume to be genuine and a smile we assume an actor is playing.

The Bhagavad-Gītā expresses a similar outlook: ‘As fire is covered by smoke, as a mirror is covered by dust, or as the embryo is covered by the womb, similarly, the living entity is covered by different degrees of lust.’ (Prabhupāda 1968: 60)

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Compassion and Solidarity with Sufferers: The Metaphysics of *Mitleid*

David E. Cartwright

William James sketched a thought experiment that he could not refrain from answering for us:

> [I]f the hypothesis were offered to us of a world in which Messrs. Fourier’s and Bellamy’s and Morris’ utopias should be outdone, and millions kept permanently happy on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edges of things should lead a life of lonely torture, what except a specifical and independent sort of emotion can it be which would make us immediately feel, even though an impulse within us to clutch at the happiness so offered, how hideous a thing would be its enjoyment when deliberately accepted as the fruit of such a bargain? (James 1956: 188)

The American pragmatist assumed that his readers would share the same ‘specifical and independent sort of emotion’ that would have led them to find hideous any enjoyment bought by such a bargain. He must have also thought that utilitarians would not read a pragmatist, since the purchase of a heaven-on-earth at the expense of a single individual is inestimably worth more than the cost.

James also captured Arthur Schopenhauer’s response to this hideous bargain. Schopenhauer advanced an analogous anti-utilitarian stance, and he drove it to a pessimistic conclusion:

> [T]hat thousands had lived in happiness and joy would never do away with the anguish and death-agony of one individual; and just a little does my present well-being undo my previous suffering. Therefore, were the evil in this world even a hundred times less than it is, its mere existence would still be sufficient to establish a truth that may be expressed in various ways, although only somewhat indirectly, namely that we have not to be pleased but sorry about the world; that its nonexistence would be preferable to its existence; that it is something that ought not to be, and so on. (*WWR* II 576/661)

But why would Schopenhauer share James’ sentiments, and what underlies his own variation of James’ theme? How would the philosopher of will, who claimed that egoism was the ‘natural standpoint’ (*WWR* I 332/392) and that ‘egoism is colossal; it towers above the world; for if every individual were given
the choice between his own destruction and the rest of the world, I need not say how the decision would go in the vast majority of cases (BM 132/197), explain the minority view that would find James’ bargain reprehensible? How would he explain the ‘specificial and independent sort of emotion’ that would find the happiness promised by the lonely torture of the lost soul repugnant?

Motivational Pluralism

Schopenhauer held that the will, an unconscious, goalless, striving to be, is ‘the inner content [\textit{der innere Gehalt}]’ (WWR I 275, 286/324, 337), ‘the essence of the world [\textit{das Wesentliche der Welt}]’ (WWR I 275/324), ‘the kernel of the world [\textit{Kern der Realität}]’ (WWR II 494/566), ‘the ultimate substrate [\textit{letzte Substrat}] of every appearance’ (WN 47/34), ‘the inner essence of nature [\textit{innere Wesen Natur}]’ (PP II 94/100) and the ‘common substance [\textit{der gemeinsame Stoff}] of all being’ (PP II 599/643). The will is his \textit{ens realissimum} and in everything ‘the will to life exists whole and undivided’ (PP II 221/236), and ‘the world is only the mirror of the willing; and all finiteness, all suffering, all miseries that it contains, belong to the expression of what the will wills, are as they are because the will so wills’ (WWR I 351/415). The will is singular for Schopenhauer, more precisely, nonplural, and he is committed to metaphysical monism, since all appearances devolve into the will. With this stance, it appears that Schopenhauer should have been a motivational monist in some sense of that term, recognizing that there was some single motive that ultimately accounts for all human actions. And given the caricature of Schopenhauer’s temperament and the singularity of the will, it is easy to imagine that he would have been a psychological egoist, holding that all human actions aim at the well-being of the actor.

Schopenhauer, however, rejected any type of motivational monism, and he explicitly rejected psychological egoism just as he had its correlate, theoretical egoism, the thesis that there is but one real being, everything else being mere representation. Theoretical egoism, he held, could never be refuted by proofs, and he dismissed it as a mere ‘skeptical sophism’ whose advocate needed ‘not so much a refutation as a cure’ (WWR I 104/124). Practical egoism, however, was something he took more seriously. In his not-awarded-a-prize essay, \textit{On the Basis of Morality}, and prior to his attempting to establish his own foundation for morals in that essay, he confronted moral skepticism, the view that ‘there is no natural morality at all that is independent of human institutions’, and that morality cannot be founded on an appeal to the nature of things, including human nature (BM 121/186). Working from a commitment to the Kantian thesis that self-interested actions are void of moral worth, he regarded the moral skeptic as an advocate of psychological egoism, claiming that actions like ‘voluntary justice,’ ‘pure loving kindness,’ and ‘real magnanimity’, actions to which we ascribe moral worth, altruistic actions per se, are motivated by agents’ desires for their own well-being. If the moral skeptic is correct, he reasoned, morals would be a science without any object, like alchemy and astrology.
Schopenhauer was willing to concede that much of what passes as morally worthwhile conduct is egoistic, motivated by fear of legal punishment, loss of reputation, divine retribution, or the desire for eternal reward. Nevertheless, he thought there were ‘indubitable cases’, although relatively rare, in which nonreligious people act morally in situations in which they would be beyond suspicion and have confidence they would not be detected if they were to act immorally. Thus he mentions the examples of a poor man returning lost property to a rich man, another returning an unrecorded deposit to an estate, and another returning money to a fugitive. ‘Indeed’, he wrote, ‘there are really honest people just as there are actually four-leaved clovers; but Hamlet does not exaggerate when he says, “to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man pick’d out of ten thousand”’ (BM 126/191). Then, of course, there is his paradigm case of a nonegoistic action, the sacrificial death of the Swiss folk-hero, Arnold von Winkelried, who hurled himself against the spears of the enemy Austrian soldiers, allowing his countrymen to escape slaughter and to ultimately prevail in 1386 at the battle of Sempach. Yet, Schopenhauer sensed that his ‘indubitable cases’ were not immune to doubt, even the Winkelried case, and although he confessed that he could not imagine a selfish motive behind the Swiss hero’s conduct, he also recognized that others might be more imaginative. With these, however, he will have no truck, and he addresses ‘... myself to those who admit the reality of the matter’ (BM 139/203).

Nevertheless, Schopenhauer was wise for ignoring further debate with the psychological egoist and sticking to the assumption that there is more than one ultimate motive for human conduct. Psychological egoism has not been established conclusively by either philosophy or psychology, and it may well be the case that an evolutionary perspective favors some type of motivational pluralism, which includes altruistic motives, over motivational monism of an egoistic stripe. Still, Schopenhauer himself was ill-at-ease with his commitment to motivational pluralism, and he sensed the tension between his metaphysical monism and motivational pluralism. Two years prior to the publication of On the Will in Nature (1836), a work in which he strove to provide a metaphysical basis for science, he recognized that his commitment to motivational pluralism, which entailed ethical diversity of behavior, was problematic: ‘But ethical diversity seems to proceed directly from the will, otherwise it would not be above and beyond time, for only in the individual are intellect and otherwise united. The will is above and beyond time and is eternal and the character is innate and has sprung from that eternity, and consequently it cannot be explained by anything immanent’ (MR IV 222). This led him to wish that someone else would cast some light into this abyss. By the second edition of The World as Will and Representation (1844), he recognized that the question concerning how far the roots of individuality go in ‘the being in itself of the world’ was beyond the pale of philosophy and that its answer would be transcendent (WII 641/737). It is to Schopenhauer’s credit that he resisted moving to a form of motivational monism to develop an ethics in greater conformity to his metaphysics.
Schopenhauer’s derivation of his ultimate incentives for human actions is straightforward. It is also logically incomplete. All human actions are a function of a person’s character and a sufficient motive, he argued, and each action is intentional, having as its final end something ‘in agreement with or contrary to a being’s will’ (BM 141/205). By identifying things in agreement with a person’s will, with a person’s weal or well-being (Wohl), and things contrary to a person’s will with a person’s woe or misfortune (Wehe), he claimed that all human actions have as their final end someone’s weal and woe. Because he held that morality dealt with relationships between individuals, he claimed that there are four ultimate ends for human action; namely, one’s own weal, one’s own woe, another’s weal, and another’s woe. The cognition of these ends for actions become motives that can stimulate four basic incentives (Triebfedern): egoism, which desires a person’s own weal; an unnamed incentive, which desires a person’s own woe; compassion, which desires another’s weal; and malice, which desires another’s woe. Every human action, he held, ‘must be attributed to one of these incentives, although two can act in combination’ (BM 145/205), and he held that each one of us possess these incentives to some degree. He thus thought of the human character as an amalgam of these incentives, and he held that ‘the prevalence of one or the other [incentive] … gives us the principal line in the ethical classification of character’ (BM 136/201).

It is well-known that Schopenhauer rejected any prescriptive ethical theory and his descriptive ethics sought to examine human behavior from a moral point of view, setting the foundation for morals on empirical grounds. To accomplish this task, he recognized three classes of actions; viz., those that are morally reprehensible (moralisch verwerfliche), those that are morally indifferent (moralisch indifferentente), and those that possess moral worth (moralischer Wert). For the voluntaristic Schopenhauer, the moral point of view, which serves as the grounds for the classification of actions, is a function of the affective responses to a deed by the actor and an impartial witness. Morally reprehensible actions provoke the disapprobation of both the actor and witness; morally indifferent actions draw neither the approbation nor disapprobation of the actor and witness; and actions possessing moral worth draw the approbation of both parties. After developing his account of his fundamental incentives, he argues that malice is the incentive for morally reprehensible actions, egoism for morally indifferent actions, and compassion for actions possessing moral worth. To show that compassion is the source for all actions possessing moral worth, he mounts an argument by elimination in which he claims neither egoism nor malice can be the motive for these types of actions, which leaves compassion as their source. He realizes that arguments by elimination are not intellectually satisfying, however. Thus he argues that the virtues of justice and loving kindness (Menschenliebe) are based on compassion, and since he holds that these are the cardinal virtues, the virtues from which all other virtues are derived, and by demonstrating that justice and loving kindness follow from compassion, he claims to have proven that compassion is the basis of all virtue.
Schopenhauer believes he has demonstrated that ‘only insofar as an action has sprung from compassion does it have moral worth; and every action resulting from any other motive has none’ (BM 144/208f). He describes compassion itself as ‘... the immediate participation [unmittelbare Teilnahme], independent of all ulterior considerations, primarily in the suffering of another, and thus in the prevention or elimination of it; for all satisfaction and well-being and happiness consists in this... As soon as this compassion is aroused, the weal and woe of another are nearest to my heart in exactly the same way, although not always in exactly the same degree, as otherwise only my own are. Hence the difference between him and me is now no longer absolute’ (ibid.). This phenomenon requires, he argues, that the others’ weal and woe become the motive for my action just as if it were my own weal and woe. This is only possible, he holds, that in the case of another’s suffering ‘I suffer directly with him [ich bei seinem Wehe als solchem geradezu mit leide], I feel his woe just as I ordinarily feel only my own; and, likewise, I directly desire his weal in the same way I otherwise desire only my own’ (BM 143/208). In compassionating another, Schopenhauer holds, I treat another’s suffering as normally I treat my own—I act to prevent or relieve it. Since he holds the odd thesis here that all satisfaction, well-being, and happiness consists in the prevention or elimination of suffering, Schopenhauer immediately connects compassion to the pursuit of another’s well-being.8

From the above remarks, Schopenhauer’s conception of compassion can be detailed as follows:

A has compassion for B, if and only if

(i) A and B are sentient beings;
(ii) A cognizes that B will be or is suffering;
(iii) A participates immediately in B’s suffering;
(iv) A feels sorrow for B;
(v) A desires B’s well-being; and
(vi) A is disposed to prevent or eliminate B’s suffering, and other things being equal, A will act to prevent or eliminate B’s suffering.

I believe and have argued elsewhere (Cartwright 1982: 60–69) that conditions (i), (ii), (iv), (v), and (vi) are relatively uncontroversial, and Schopenhauer’s analysis of (iii), that A participates immediately in B’s suffering, is highly problematic. It is also the feature of compassion for which he sought a metaphysical foundation.

The First Metaphysics of Mitleid

Schopenhauer’s claim that compassionate agents participate immediately in another’s suffering is the centerpiece of his conception of compassion, and it is that for which his metaphysics provided a grounding explanation. His first
account of the metaphysics of compassion is found, not unexpectedly, in the fourth, the ‘ethical book’ of *The World as Will and Representation*, and his treatment of compassion remained virtually unchanged in each of its three editions. It is remarkable, however, that Schopenhauer said relatively little about compassion in his main work, even when one includes the supplementary essays of its second edition. Still, since the fourth book completes what Gerard Mannion aptly called the ‘soteriological grand narrative’ of his philosophy and that ‘the denial of the will is its central them’, as Rudolf Malter has noted, it is not surprising that Schopenhauer did not dwell on compassion. He had, obviously, bigger fish to fry, and his entire treatment of human actions from a moral point of view is but a passing stage along the route to the denial of the will. Instead of keenly analyzing compassion, he was driven to demonstrate that ‘... from the same source from which all goodness, affection, virtue, and nobility of character spring, there ultimately arises also what I call the denial of the will to life’ (WWR I 378/447).

This same source of both virtue and the denial of the will is a cognition in which the ‘veil of *māyā* has become transparent (WWR I 373/441) and whose content is described by one of the *mahāvākyas* or great pronouncements from the *Chandogya Upanishad*, ‘*tat tvam asi [this art thou]*’ (WWR I 374/442). Schopenhauer claimed that an individual possessing a good character sees through (*durchschauen*) the *principium individuationis*, space and time, and ‘cognizes immediately [*erkennen unmittelbar*], and without inferences, that the being in itself of his own appearance is also that of others, namely, that will to life which constitutes the inner nature of everything, and lives in all; indeed, he recognizes that this extends even to animals and to the whole of nature; he will therefore not cause suffering even to animals’ (WWR I 572/440). Schopenhauer holds that this cognition admits of degrees of clarity; that is, this metaphysical unity is perceived more dimly by a person displaying the virtue of justice than it is by a person displaying the virtue of loving kindness. It appears that the veil of *māyā* becomes fully transparent to the ascetic; that this person has the clearest cognition of the metaphysical unity of will, and this ‘... cognition of the whole, of the inner nature of the thing in itself ... becomes the *quieter* of all and every willing. The will now turns away from life; it shudders at the pleasures in which it recognizes the affirmation of life. This person attains to the state of voluntary renunciation, resignation, true composure, and complete will-lessness’ (WWR I 379/448). Schopenhauer holds that a just person perceives this unity to the extent of not causing others suffering, the lovingly kind person to relieving others’ suffering, and the ascetic resigns—perhaps out of a sense of the fruitlessness of attempting the impossible—eliminating suffering in a world that is doomed to suffer from its very nature as will.

This first metaphysical explanation of compassion appears to claim that compassionate agents participate immediately in another’s suffering, because they realize that others are metaphysically identical to themselves. Consequently, they are moved to prevent or relieve others’ misery because they perceive others’ woes are their own. Therefore, just as they are naturally inclined to avoid or relieve their own suffering, they are moved to do so for the miseries of others.
This type of analysis, however, has led commentators, such as Eduard von Hartmann, Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Scheler, Patrick Gardiner, and D. W. Hamlyn to suggest that Schopenhauer reduced compassion to some form of egoism. Recently, Julian Young has argued that:

\[\ldots\] Schopenhauer asserts, first, that the difference between the egoist and the altruist is that while the former acts for his own interests the latter acts for the sake of another's\ldots As the discussion proceeds, however, it becomes clear that, after all, the altruist *does* act for the sake of his own interests, the only difference between him and the egoist being that he acts for the sake of the interests of his *metaphysical* rather than his empirical self, so, as we might put it, the empirical altruist turns out to be a metaphysical egoist. (Young 2005: 182f.)

Schopenhauer’s first metaphysics of compassion certainly provokes the charge that he reduced his sole moral incentive into some form of metaphysical egoism. It did provoke Johann August Becker, whom Schopenhauer regarded as his most astute ‘apostle’, to level this criticism against the philosopher. In his reply to Becker, Schopenhauer wrote that he might say that ‘\ldots compassion, along with all of the virtues flowing from it, is *egoistical* \ldots because it depends on the cognition of my own being in another. But this argument rests solely on your wanting to take the phrase, “I once more” literally, while it is just a figurative turn of expression. For “I” in the proper sense of the term refers exclusively to the individual and not to the metaphysical thing in itself which *appears* in individuals, but which is directly unknowable \ldots [W]ith regard to this, therefore, the individual ceases, and by *egoism* is understood the exclusive interest in one’s own individuality’ (Hübscher 1987: 221).

Schopenhauer, however, used the phrase, ‘I once more’ in a way that invites a literal interpretation. In *On the Basis of Morality*, he even wrote that whenever a person aids another without any object other than lessening the other’s want, ‘[it] is possible only insofar as he recognizes that his own self \ldots now appears before him \ldots he recognizes again his own inner being in itself in the appearance of another’ (*BM* 212/273). If, however, he is simply using this idea metaphorically—perhaps he was attempting to advance our cognitive stock without obviously violating the bounds of meaningful discourse—this seems to contravene his insistence that meaningful discourse must ultimately be based on intuition (*Anschauung*). Yet, Schopenhauer’s metaphysical will is nonplural, which makes it difficult to understand, moreover, how some cognition of the metaphysical will in another would serve to motivate an agent to do something for that other. Indeed, it is difficult to determine how this cognition would preserve the distinction between the agent and the patient, since the metaphysical will is neither the agent nor the patient. It is where individuality ceases. Morality itself, Schopenhauer avers, is always a relationship between individuals, and this grand cognition into the unity of being abrogates individuality.
The thinness of Schopenhauer’s treatment of compassion in *The World as Will and Representation* is due not simply to his treatment of it as a transitionary step towards the denial of the will. In his main work, his analysis of compassion presupposed his metaphysics of the will. His unsuccessful prize-essay, however, operates without this presupposition. Therefore, he has to argue from moral phenomena to their primary phenomena (*Urphänomene*), and then he has to provide a metaphysical explanation of those phenomena. Consequently, he provides a more robust description of compassion than that found in his main work; one that sets the stage for his metaphysics. In doing so, he needs to show specifically how individuals are moved to feel compassion for others, and there Schopenhauer provides an alternative explanation of compassion that requires ultimately a metaphysical explanation, since he rejects a psychological explanation of condition (iii). In particular, he argues against the Italian philosopher Ubaldo Cassina’s claim that compassionate agents are immediately motivated by another’s suffering, since they imagine themselves in the position of the sufferer and have the idea that they were suffering that person’s misery in their own person. Schopenhauer claims ‘This is by no means the case; on the contrary, at every moment we remain clearly conscious that he is the sufferer, not we; and it is precisely in his person, not in ours, that we feel the suffering, to our sorrow. We suffer with him and hence in him [wir leiden mit ihm, also in ihm]; we feel his pain as his, and do not imagine that it is ours’ (BM 147/211f.). This extraordinary experience of another’s pain in another’s body cannot be explained psychologically, Schopenhauer continues; it can only be explained metaphysically, which he promises to do in the last chapter of his prize essay on morality. He also provides no evidence or argument for the existence of this extraordinary experience.

**The Second Metaphysics of Mitleid**

The first metaphysical explanation of compassion focused on the agent’s intuition of metaphysical unity with the patient. Schopenhauer warns, however, that we are not to take literally the idea that compassionate individuals view others as themselves and that this is what moves them to participate immediately in another’s woe. In *On the Basis of Morality*, which contains Schopenhauer’s most robust analysis of compassion, he claims that it involves the truly extraordinary experience of another’s suffering, an experience that requires not a naturalistic or psychological, but a metaphysical explanation. He turns to this in the essay’s closing chapter, ‘On the Metaphysical Explanation of the Primary Ethical Phenomenon’. Here he claims that a metaphysical explanation of a primary phenomenon involves ‘… the question of why that which exists, and is understood, is as it is, and not otherwise; and the question of how the exhibited character of the phenomenon results from the essence in itself of things’ (BM 200/261). If this is what is entailed by a metaphysical explanation of primary phenomena, one would expect that in addition to compassion, he would also
supply a metaphysical explanation for egoism and malice, since both of these incentives are also primary phenomena, the former for morally indifferent actions and the latter for morally reprehensible actions. More deeply, if these, along with the desire for one’s own woe, constitute the fundamental incentives for human action, one would also expect that Schopenhauer would ground his motivational pluralism in his monistic metaphysics.

Schopenhauer, however, does none of these things. Instead, when he turns to Section 22, ‘Metaphysical Foundation’, he examines what he claimed to be essential to the characters of good and evil persons. Good characters, those expressing the virtues of justice and loving kindness, make less of a distinction between themselves and others than do evil characters, those that express extreme egoism or malice. The good person will go as far as sacrificing him or herself to save others, whereas the egoist will inflict great harm on others for a small, personal gain, while the malicious person delights in another’s misery without any further personal advantage. Schopenhauer summarizes this difference between good and evil characters by claiming that the former treats other egos like their own, whereas the latter treats others as nonegos. This leads him to ask ‘… whether … the relation between one’s own ego and another’s, which is the basis of the actions of a good character, is mistaken and due to a delusion, or whether such is rather the case with the opposite conception on which egoism and malice are based’ (BM 205/266).14

Schopenhauer contends that the evil character’s standpoint is strictly justified from an empirical perspective, since according to experience, space and time separates individuals from each other and from each other’s weal and woe. Thus it seems as if there is an insuperable abyss between individuals, and it appears that evil characters are warranted in viewing others as nonegos.Appearances, however, are metaphysically deceiving. From a phenomenological stance, Schopenhauer argues, we cannot conclude that others are absolutely nonegos. Through the outer sense, we experience our bodies and those of others as spatial and temporal objects standing in causal relationships. Through our inner sense we are aware of ourselves as a continuous series of acts of will. But ‘… that which wills and cognizes is not accessible to us. We see only outward; within it is dark and obscure’ (BM 206/267). For this reason, he claimed, we lack complete and exhaustive knowledge of ourselves; we remain riddles to ourselves. He then evokes Kant: ‘As Kant put it, the ego [Ich] knows itself only as appearance, not according to what it might be in itself’ (ibid.). Due to this unknown dimension of ourselves, it is possible, Schopenhauer concludes, that this unknown dimension of each individual could be one and identical in all. Because of this possibility, we cannot conclude that others are absolutely nonegos.

Schopenhauer continues to ride Kant’s coattails to refute the perspective of the evil character, something he has to do, given the strict incognito required for his prize essay and because his own metaphysics was unknown by the members of the Royal Danish Society of Scientific Studies, who would be assessing the essay’s merits. Space and time, he continues, make plurality and numerical diversity possible, and Kant had conclusively demonstrated in his ‘Transcendental
Aesthetic’ the ideality of space and time, which cannot be features of things in themselves but only of appearances of things. This entails, he continues, that plurality itself must be foreign to the thing in itself, ‘... to the true essence of the world ...’ (BM 207/267). Of course, Schopenhauer tended not to be critical about views that mattered to him, and immediately he moves to the claim that this unknown essence was one and the same in all appearances and, employing one of his standard moves, he claims that this insight had been recognized in the Upanishads, and formed the basis of the wisdom of Pythagoras, the Eleatics, the Neoplatonists, Scotus Erigena, Christian and Sufi mystics, Bruno, Spinoza, and Schelling. He then summarizes his argument: ‘... if plurality and separateness belong only to the appearance, and if it is one and the same essence that manifests itself in all living things, then that conception that abolishes the difference between ego and nonego is not erroneous; but on the contrary, the opposite conception must be’ (BM 209/270).15

Schopenhauer, however, does not return to his earlier claim that compassionate agents feel another’s pain in the other’s body. One would imagine that he might have argued that this extraordinary experience is possible because each individual is metaphysically identical—twangs of pain reverberate through the connecting metaphysical substrate. Instead, he returns to claims found in his first metaphysics of compassion: ‘The magnanimous person who forgives his enemy and returns good for evil is sublime, and receives the highest praise, because he still recognized his own true nature even where it was emphatically denied’ (BM 212/272). Likewise, he again employs the Vedic phrase ‘tat tvam asi’, and he claims that good people view others as ‘I once more’ (ibid.). Yet he counter-balances these claims with others that do not suggest that compassionate agents act due to some cognition into the unity of being. Instead, he writes of their actions expressing this knowledge and that it ‘shows itself [zeigt sich]’ in their conduct, in their general dispositions, and in their world views (BM 211/272). He calls their behavior ‘practical wisdom’ and claims that it harmonizes perfectly with the most profound ‘theoretical wisdom’, since ‘the just, righteous, beneficent, and magnanimous person would express by deed [spräche durch die That ... aus] that knowledge only which is the result of the greatest intellectual depth and the most laborious investigation of the theoretical philosopher’ (BM 210/270). Elsewhere, he claims that ... to be just, noble, and benevolent is nothing but to translate my metaphysics into actions’ (WWR II 600/690). It is, as Bryan Magee has pointed out, ‘practical mysticism,’ expressing in conduct what is clearly cognized by the mystic (Magee 1983: 189).16

Although Schopenhauer lapses into language that suggested that compassionate agents view others as having the same essence, by claiming that their conduct ‘shows’ or ‘expresses’ what his metaphysics describes—the unity of the will—he distances himself from the claim that these agents are moved by a cognition that others are themselves. Instead, their behavior shows what his metaphysics explained. The behavior of evil characters, which expresses that others are nonegos, is not metaphysically warranted, since individuality is merely apparent. Good characters, whose conduct expresses that others are an
‘I once more’, engage in conduct that is metaphysically warranted. Certainly, one of the difficulties with Schopenhauer’s analysis here concerns the sticky issue of how conduct expresses or shows a metaphysics. It would almost seem as if we could view compassionate conduct as expressing a different metaphysics than Schopenhauer’s. We could, for example, view a compassionate agent as expressing some type of metaphysical dualism, insofar as this agent’s concern is limited to sentient beings. Such a person in preventing or relieving others’ suffering may trample grass and thoughtlessly kick stones, leaving the nonsentient world in the lurch—plants and rocks are absolutely nonegos. Perhaps this person’s conduct shows a form of metaphysical dualism—sentient being and the nonsentient exhausting the significant categories of being—ego and nonego.17

Naturalizing Compassion

Although there is something theoretically satisfying in Schopenhauer’s attempt to ground compassion metaphysically, I do not believe that an adequate account of compassion requires the sort of metaphysical explanation that Schopenhauer tried to provide. If my analysis of his conception of compassion is correct, what drove Schopenhauer to provide a metaphysical explanation of compassion was condition iii): compassionate agents participate immediately in another’s suffering. His first metaphysics of compassion appeared to attribute this immediate participation in another’s woe to the agent’s intuitive cognition of his or her self in the other. Pressed by the charge of articulating some metaphysical form of egoism, Schopenhauer distanced himself from this view by claiming that he did not mean for the phrase that others were an ‘I once more’ to be taken literally. In his unsuccessful prize essay, he appears to explain this immediate participation in another’s woe to involve the extraordinary experience of another’s pain in the other’s body, but instead of providing a metaphysical explanation of this phenomenon, as he promised, he moves to consider whether the behavior of good or evil characters is metaphysically warranted. He then argues that the conduct of good or compassionate characters is warranted, since their conduct expresses what the philosopher demonstrated as the unity of being. Conversely, individuals who treat others as nonegos engage in conduct inconsistent with the metaphysical unity of the will and, for that reason, are said to engage in a delusion; the veil of maya has not been lifted from their eyes.

Schopenhauer is moved to attribute the extraordinary experience of another’s pain in the other’s body in reply to Cassina’s ‘psychological’ analysis of compassion. He views Cassina as claiming that compassion arises from a deception of the imagination; that in feeling compassion for another we think of ourselves in the position of the sufferer and we imagine that we suffer the other’s pain in our person. Schopenhauer rejects Cassina’s claims that this feeling of another’s pain is a deception and that we feel this pain in our body, holding instead that we experience the other’s pain in the other’s body. While I agree with
Schopenhauer’s intuition that Cassina’s view is defective—that it is a description of emotional identification or infection rather than compassion—the problem is that he accepts the claim that we feel another’s pain. In other words, when Bill Clinton told a member of his audience during a campaign stop that he felt her pain, Schopenhauer would have taken him literally. Indeed, if compassion involves this extraordinary experience, I must also confess that I have never felt compassion and that I lack such Clintonesque sensitivity. I have, however, felt compassion, and sometimes this did involve my feeling something like or analogous to others’ woe, but it was not, literally, the others’ woe. It would seem that it is my immediate consciousness of pain that makes it my pain and that I cannot have an immediate consciousness of another’s. Certainly, I could think of what I would feel if I were in the other’s situation. I could imagine what I would feel if I were the other, or if I know the other person intimately, I might even experience something analogous to the other’s experience when I imagine what this person feels, but this is a different phenomenon than feeling the other’s distress in the other’s body.

In other words, I believe that we should reformulate Schopenhauer’s conception of compassion by understanding (iii) not as that A participates immediately in B’s suffering but as (iii)*: A participates imaginatively in B’s suffering. Moreover, Schopenhauer himself recognizes this phenomenon. In his analysis of weeping [Weinen] which, like laughing, he views as a uniquely human trait, he claims that it results from ‘compassion for oneself [Mitleid mit sich selbst]’ (WWR I 377/445). We weep, he holds, not because of an immediately experienced pain, but because of its idea (Vorstellung) in reflection, after we have ‘imagined it as that of another [als fremdes vorgestellt], sympathized with it as such [als solches mitgefühlt], and then suddenly perceived it again as directly our own’ (ibid.). Not only do we weep at our own sufferings, he continues, but also at others, when ‘either in imagination [Phantasie] we put ourselves vividly in the sufferer’s place, or we see in his fate the whole of humanity, and consequently above all our own fate. Thus, we always weep for ourselves in a round about way; we feel compassion for ourselves’ (WWR I 377/446).

Schopenhauer does not attribute moral worth to weeping itself, probably because it is ultimately self-regarding, even when it was evoked by another’s woe. It also does not dispose the weeper to relieve the other’s misery: weeping, itself, comforts the crier. Still, he holds that weepers show that they are neither hardhearted nor without imagination, and he regards weeping as signifying that the weeper possesses a certain degree of a goodness or character, ‘because it is felt that whoever is still able to weep must necessarily be capable of affection, i.e. of compassion for others, since this enters in the way described into the mood that leads into weeping’ (WWR I 377/445).18

Schopenhauer also recognizes the capacity to imagine another’s misery as a means for compassion to move a person to refrain from acting in ways that would cause others to suffer: ‘If my disposition is susceptible to compassion up to that degree, it will restrain me, wherever and whenever I feel inclined to use another’s suffering as a means to the attainment of my ends; it is immaterial whether that suffering is instantaneous or comes later, whether it is direct or
indirect, or effected through intermediate links’ (BM 149/213). He summarizes the line of conduct flowing from the virtue of justice as *neminem laede*, ‘harm no one’, and he argues that while principles themselves are not the original source of morality, they are indispensable for a moral course of life, for in many cases a feeling of compassion ‘would often come too late for a just person to do the right thing’ (BM 150/213). Individuals with a noble disposition, he says, have the self-control to observe moral principles, in spite of motives that act against them. With just people, he continues, compassion operates indirectly by means of principles, but when resolve fails these individuals in specific causes, life is put back into resolve by evoking compassion; ‘nothing will bring us back to the path of justice so readily as the idea [Vorstellung] of the trouble, grief and lamentation of the loser’ (BM 152/216).19

Schopenhauer’s analysis of the virtue of justice itself is better served by reformulating condition (iii) as (iii)* ‘A participates imaginatively in B’s suffering’.20 His account of the virtue of justice emphasizes how compassion restrains individuals’ self-regarding behavior, due to the recognition of the suffering it would cause others. This suffering, however, does not exist, and this is what compassion seeks to prevent. But, since this suffering does not exist, it is not possible here for any person to feel another’s pain in the other’s body.21 Moreover, Schopenhauer recognized what could be called ‘compassion at a distance’, compassion for individuals beyond immediate perception, anonymous individuals, understood only as occupying undesirable social roles or suffering natural disasters. Thus he praised ‘… the magnanimous British nation … [for] giving twenty million pounds to purchase the freedom of black slaves in its colonies …’ and he claimed that ‘this fine action on a grand scale is traceable to compassion …’ (BM 166/230). But, if compassion functioned directly in this act, rather than indirectly through a principle of justice, it would seem that a means for understanding the plight of slaves would not result from feeling slaves’ pains in slaves’ bodies, but by thinking of oneself in such conditions, or by imagining slaves’ woes, or by imagining what people suffer in such inhumane circumstances, or by knowing that in such circumstances humans suffer. Moreover, this reformulation eliminates the very phenomenon that leads Schopenhauer to call compassion ‘the great mystery of ethics’ and which led him to claim that compassion required a metaphysical rather than a psychological explanation. By understanding compassion as involving the imaginative participation in another’s suffering, compassion is returned to the province of psychology and, in theory, to sociobiology and evolutionary theory. In this way compassion could be explained by the natural sciences, which seems to be perfectly compatible with the descriptive and empirical nature of Schopenhauer’s ethics.

The Solidarity With Sufferers and Different Worlds

On the centenary of Schopenhauer’s death, Max Horkheimer praised the philosopher for confronting the wretchedness of existence without delusion
and for articulating an ethics in which the solidarity of those who are suffering could become decisive in human life. Schopenhauer’s *Mitleids-Moral* articulates solidarity with sufferers and his metaphysics of the will validates this unity, not simply of sufferers but, more deeply, of all of nature. Yet, I have argued that his attempts to ground compassion metaphysically were unsuccessful, and I have suggested that a naturalized conception of compassion is sufficient for explaining this significant fellow-feeling. It is only natural, moreover, that Schopenhauer’s empirical and descriptive ethics become the domain of those ‘impartial investigators of nature who pursue their special science’, perhaps, these ‘unprejudiced empiricists’ might corroborate his insights concerning compassion and the role of altruism within the economy of life (*WN* 9,19/ix,1).

But, have I lost the sense of unity, solidarity, and identity that undergirds Schopenhauer’s conception of compassion by rejecting its metaphysical support? I think not—well, I hope not. Schopenhauer’s ethics of compassion acknowledges solidarity with those who suffer without resignation and the denial of the will to life. As Christopher Janaway has observed, Schopenhauer’s ethics recognized a genuine intersubjectivity of the morally good, nonegoistic view of life. This intersubjectivity is expressed by compassionate agents’ ability to transcend an egocentric standpoint by making the suffering of another an object of concern and by disposing them to treat it as their own. Thus, just as our own suffering generally provides a sufficient motive to act to prevent or relieve it, another’s suffering generally provides a compassionate person with a sufficient motive to act to prevent or relieve another’s woes. Since Schopenhauer defined the good as that which is in agreement with one’s will, the well-being of another becomes a good for a compassionate person. Conversely, if the bad or evil is that which is contrary to the will, compassionate agents view another’s woe as an evil to prevent or relieve. And, insofar as compassion leads to beneficent actions, as Schopenhauer said, ‘Since I do not exist inside the other person’s skin, then only by means of the cognition I have of him, that is, the idea [Vorstellung] in my head, can I identify myself with him to such an extent that my deed declares the differences abolished’ (*BM* 144/208). And as it is suffering that makes one an object of compassion, it is unconcerned with a being’s species, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, sex, and other factors that could separate us.

Compassionate agents possess a good character, which entails, from a Schopenhauerian perspective, that they have a good conscience concerning their conduct, enjoy the approbation of impartial witnesses, and are deemed good by those whose suffering they seek to prevent or relieve. These attitudes build community, and it was this that led Schopenhauer to claim that the lived worlds of a good person were fundamentally and radically different from that of evil characters ‘... in the whole nature of consciousness and disposition’ (*BM* 211/272). The solidarity with suffering experienced by good people eludes the ‘moral isolation’ experienced by the wicked (*BM* 212/272). The latter are estranged from others and have no confidence that others would aid them, unless by folly or accidentally, by having others pursue ends that they also share. The world itself appears hostile to such people. Alternatively, good people are at home in the
world, and their relations with others, Schopenhauer held, are friendly. Wicked people, who would show no gratitude when others act to promote their interests, also lack the confidence of a good person, who feels intimately akin to others, and, by taking an interest in others’ well-being, ‘...confidently assume the same sympathy [Teilnahme] ...’ in others (BM 211/272). Due to this, Schopenhauer wrote of the deep inward peace, confident, calm, and contented mood expressed by good people ‘in virtue of which everyone if happy when they are near at hand’ (BM 212/272). If these descriptions of compassionate agents are true, they do not live in a world from which they would resign. Yet, despite the fact that these characters are less metaphysically informed than the world denying ascetic, Schopenhauer obliquely recognized that compassion binds us to life and to a world where, perhaps, our evolutionary heritage has endowed our species with a will to exist. As Horkheimer reminds us, ‘to aid the temporal against merciless eternity means morality in Schopenhauer’s sense’. We live as temporal beings.

In closing, however, I should not forget to return to James’ lost soul. On the one hand, Schopenhauer would reject this bargain because, metaphysically, the suffering of one is the suffering of all. A metaphysically enlightened person would not be deceived by this Hobson’s choice. One the other hand, we could also imagine, despite the initial attractiveness of the bargain, a compassionate Schopenhauer would also reject it, being deeply moved to prevent the lost soul’s misery. But here is the rub. What of all the suffering everyone else would be spared by accepting this bargain? A compassionate person should also be sensitive to the almost infinite pain such a sacrifice would prevent. This is one of the points at which we can see why compassion needs to be directed by a sound normative theory.24

NOTES

I hereby express my gratitude to Gudrun von Tevenar for her kind and thoughtful comments to an earlier version of this chapter, which was presented on 10 July 2007 at the conference ‘Schopenhauer and the Philosophy of Value’, University of Southampton. She persuaded me to use the terms, ‘compassion and solidarity with sufferers’ rather than ‘compassion and solidarity of sufferers’. As she observed, compassionate agents are typically not as needy or suffering as those they compassionate and, qua compassionate agents, they are not within the community of the patients of compassion. Their solidarity with sufferers is reflected in their feelings of benevolence for sufferers and in their disposition to treat this suffering as their own, i.e. to act to relieve it. Compassionate agents, however, are also fellow sufferers for Schopenhauer. They, like all, are objectifications of will, and they also suffer from their very essence. This entailed, he argued, that the really proper address between one human and another should be, ‘instead of Sir, Monsieur, and so on, Leidensgefährte, socii malorum, compagnon des misères, my fellow sufferer. However strange this may sound, it accords with the facts, puts the other person in the most correct light, and reminds us of that most necessary thing; tolerance, patience, forbearance, and love of our neighbors, which everyone needs and each of us, therefore, owes to another’ (PP II 304/323).
Sober and Wilson (1998: 296–328) make a compelling case that motivational pluralism, including altruistic motives, is more probable than psychological egoism as an outcome of the evolutionary process.

I do not mean to suggest that this problem is simply due to Schopenhauer’s commitment to motivational pluralism. Indeed, his recognition of ‘intelligible characters’ introduces the same difficulty.

See BM 145-6/209-10. Schopenhauer claimed that he did not discuss the unnamed incentive in On the Basis of Morality because it was written in the spirit of philosophical ethics prevailing in Protestant Europe and because members of the Royal Danish Society would not understand it, see WWR II 607/697. In a letter to Johann August Becker, 10 December 1844, he claimed that the desire for one’s own woe possessed ‘ascetic value’ (Hübscher 1987: 221).

Incentives (Triebfedern) are features of a person’s will and, technically, egoism, the unnamed incentive, compassion, and malice are not motives, which are always cognitions of perceived objects or abstract motives (thoughts or concepts). Schopenhauer does not tightly maintain the distinction between incentives and motives in his discussion of egoism, compassion, and malice.


I am following Schopenhauer’s discussion in BM, Section 16. In this essay, he did not recognize the fourth, unnamed incentive.

In a note from 1815, Schopenhauer claimed that there was no Mitfreude as there is Mitleid, ‘because joy, satisfaction and strengthening of the will is always futile and dances on undermined ground’ (MR I 324). He does not, however, say why Mitfreude is futile. Perhaps it is due to what he saw as strengthening the will to life.


From Schopenhauer’s letter to Becker, 10 December 1844.

Schopenhauer described the differences between his methods of the presentation of his ethics in The World as Will and Representation and his prize essays at BM 3/V.

Schopenhauer refers here to Cassina’s Saggio analytico sulla compassione (1788). It is likely that Schopenhauer read the German translation by K. F. Pokkels, Analytischer Versuch über das Mitleid. Hannover: Ritscher, 1790; see HN V: 26.

One might say that the practical egoist lives a form of life that expresses the standpoint of the theoretical egoist; that is, lives as if there are no other real beings, because he or she has no concern for the weal or woe of others. A malicious person, however, is concerned with producing another’s woe and, therefore, has a stake in recognizing others.

There are a couple of big ‘ifs’ in this quote. Even if space and time are a priori forms of human cognition, it does not logically follow that that which is beyond human cognition is nontemporal and nonspatial and is, somehow, one or nonplural.

Also see BM 212/273.

I believe that Schopenhauer ultimately revealed his metaphysical hand in the second edition of The World as Will and Representation, when he classified compassion as a form of sympathy [Sympathie], which he defined ‘as the empirical emerging of the will’s metaphysical identity, through the physical multiplicity of its appearance’ (WWR II 601/
Here he views compassion like sexual love, which asserts the life of the species over the individual, and magic, such phenomena as animal magnetism, sympathetic cures, and action at a distance. To discuss sexual love and magic profoundly, he held, involves transcendent claims and that the best that could be said of them employs metaphorical language. The connection between the unity of will and these phenomena, Schopenhauer contended, ‘... is entirely different from that which is brought about the forms of appearances and that which we comprehend under the principle of sufficient reason’ (WWR I 602/692). Also, see BM 212/272, where Schopenhauer claimed that altruistic actions spring from the same cognition that constitutes the basis of all mysticism.

18 Darwin also recognized weeping as an expression of sympathy with ourselves, occasioned, for example, when we think of long past happy times, which will never return. Unlike Schopenhauer, he also recognized sympathy with the happiness of others, such as that of a lover who achieves some success after many hard trials, as exciting our tears. Indeed, he thought that this emotion was ‘especially apt to excite the lachrymal glands whether we give or receive sympathy’. Contrary to Schopenhauer, he recognized weeping in nonhuman animals, such as female Indian Elephants weeping in distress from being removed from their young; see Darwin 1965: 215–17, 165–67.

19 Schopenhauer seems here to be displaying reverse Kantian sensibilities. Kant claims that we have an indirect duty to cultivate our natural compassionate feelings and to use them as means to sympathy based on moral principles, see Kant 1964: 122.

20 I do not believe, however, that (iii)* is necessary for compassion per se, but that it is a specific iteration of (ii) A cognizes that B is or will be suffering. In this regard, imagining another’s woe seems to be a means for agents’ apprehending the misery of someone very different or physically remote from themselves. In so far as (iii)* suggests ‘empathy (Einfühlung)’, it is significant to note that this mode of cognizing another’s distress is morally ambivalent; that is, malicious people could enhance their joy by empathizing with others’ woe and become further disposed to make it even worse.

21 Mannion takes my argument to task by claiming that the immediate participation in another’s suffering is connected to the noumenal, to which time, space, and causality are ‘meaningless’, and thus it would be ‘meaningless to question how another’s “future” mental state could be participated in by the agent,’ and that ‘the whole notion of transcendence of the principle of individuation, the removal of the “wall” which egoism builds between different people, is something of a mystery and is properly... something which occurs noumenally’ (Mannion 2003: 209). Although I am not sure about noumenal occurrences—I am as indifferent to the noumenal as it is to me—Mannion is more sympathetic to Schopenhauer’s analogical and metaphorical attempts to express or hint at things than I am. I prefer it when Schopenhauer remains faithful to his commitment to an immanent philosophy. For Schopenhauer’s use of the term ‘will’ as a metaphor, also see Neeley 2003: 64–71.

22 See Horkheimer 1977: 145–164. This essay, ‘Die Aktualität Schopenhauers’, is from a lecture Horkheimer delivered on 21 September 1960 at the Goethe-Universität (Frankfurt am Main).

23 See Janaway 1989: 282–3. Janaway points out that Schopenhauer’s metaphysics precludes the intersubjectivity inherent in his ethics. By naturalizing compassion, we elude this problem—a move, of course, that would not please Schopenhauer.

24 Nussbaum 2001: 335–400 argues that compassion requires a plausible normative theory to articulate proper sort of concern for others, desert, and responsibility. Schopenhauer appeared to be obliquely sensitive to these concerns, and he did recognize that a proper moral course of life requires principles, especially concerning issues of justice (see BM 150/214). He also realized that sometimes preventing suffering requires others to
suffer. For example, he claimed that humans have a right over the powers and lives of nonhuman animals to minimize suffering. Consequently, he argued that meat-eating and the use of animal labor are justified in instances in which ‘... the will to life as a whole endures more suffering than if the opposite were the case’ (WWR I 372n./440n.).

REFERENCES

Schopenhauer’s Works

I cite Schopenhauer’s books using the following acronyms, with the first set of Arabic numerals referring to the page number of the following English-language translations, and the second set to corresponding page numbers of Schopenhauer: Sämtliche Werke, A. Hübscher, ed., 7 volumes. Mannheim: F. A. Brockhaus, 1988).


BM, FW, and WN receive fresh numbering in volume 4 of the Sämtliche Werke. I will generally follow Payne’s translation.

Other Works


Mindful of Schopenhauer’s Buddhist affinities, one might venture a summary of the four-booked *World as Will and Representation* by means of four ‘noble truths’: the world is my representation; its essence is will, that is to say, suffering; temporary release from suffering is possible through art; permanent release is possible through ‘denial of the will’, that is to say, death. Since the appearance of death in the fourth ‘noble truth’ may cause some surprise, let me begin by justifying its introduction.

Pierre Hadot¹ has helped us remember that at its inception, philosophy had not theoretical knowledge but practical wisdom as its ultimate goal and justification, the wisdom of how to live a happy life in an uncertain world. Ancient philosophy was *philo-sophia*, not *philo-theoria*. It is to this original understanding of the enterprise that Schopenhauer returns² when he writes that it is the chief task of philosophy, as it is of religion, to provide a ‘consolation’ in the face of death. This, he says, is why Socrates was right to define philosophy as a ‘preparation for death’.³ To this definition of the task he adds a further specification: since death conceived as entry into a ‘dark’ and empty ‘nothing’,⁴ as absolute annihilation, is, for human beings, the *sumnum malum*, our worst fear, any effective consolation must satisfy the ‘metaphysical need’;⁵ the need to be assured of ‘the indestructibility of our true nature’ by death.⁶

Schopenhauer satisfies his own meta-philosophical requirement⁷ by appeal to the idealism announced in the first of his ‘noble truths’. Idealism is, he says, the ‘most complete answer’⁸ to the question of immortality, guaranteeing, as it does, the ‘indestructibility’ of our true self. For according to idealism, life and the world are, ultimately speaking, a ‘dream’. But a dream requires a dreamer who is not part of the dream, a transcendent subject. It follows that death is no more than the end of the dream (or nightmare), that our real self is untouched by it. Of course most of the time we use that ‘equivocal’ word ‘I’⁹ to refer to our ordinary, everyday, embodied egos. But the metaphysical insight—and ensuing practical wisdom—that Schopenhauer’s philosophy is intended to help us achieve leads us to see that the *true ‘I’* is the transcendent self, the self that lies beyond the dream, beyond time, and so beyond both birth and death.

Of course, eternal existence is not by itself sufficient to satisfy the ‘metaphysical need’. It is further required of any religion or any philosophy capable of healing the wound of mortality, of offering a genuine ‘antidote’¹⁰ to death, that it should display one’s post-death existence as, in some way or other, blissful: it must represent it as genuine—in Schopenhauer’s word—‘salvation’.
Only thus can it solve the tormenting ‘riddle’\textsuperscript{11} of life, provide an account of the totality of our existence that will compensate for the miserable character of its terrestrial portion and so reconcile us to that totality.

As I shall discuss in greater detail later on, this more difficult task Schopenhauer seeks to achieve by appeal to mysticism and art. Though reason (and so philosophy) cannot speak of the transcendent, we only have to attend to ‘that ocean-like calmness of the spirit’ as depicted, especially, in great art, ‘to banish the dark impression of that nothingness . . . which we fear as children fear the dark’.\textsuperscript{12} Attending to the testimony of the mystics, ‘vouched for with the stamp of truth by art’,\textsuperscript{13} Schopenhauer suggests, establishes that that which is indeed ‘nothing’ to the rational mind, is in fact a \textit{heavenly} ‘nothing’. It establishes that the primal Oneness which lies beyond the ‘dream’ of individuality is a \textit{divine} Oneness: ‘pantheistic consciousness’, writes Schopenhauer, ‘is essential to all mysticism’, as exemplified by Master Eckhardt’s spiritual daughter who cried out after her epiphany, ‘Sir rejoice with me, I have become God’.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Nietzsche’s Conversion}

Schopenhauer’s four ‘noble truths’ are, then, to repeat: the world is my representation; the will is the ‘thing in itself’ and so pain is the essence of the world; temporary relief from pain is possible through art; permanent relief is possible through ‘denial of the will’, through, that is, the only finally effective form of such ‘denial’, death.\textsuperscript{15} This is the extraordinary doctrine that confronted the twenty-one-year-old student of classical philology, Friedrich Nietzsche, one day towards the end of October 1865, in Leipzig, as, in spite of his straitened student means, he succumbed to a sudden impulse:

\begin{quote}
At that time I stood absolutely alone full of the most painful experiences and disappointments . . . Now let anyone try to imagine how the reading of Schopenhauer’s masterpiece must have affected me in such circumstances. One day I came across this book in old Rohn’s second-hand bookshop, and taking it up very gingerly I turned over its pages. I know not what demon whispered to me: ‘Take this book home with you’. At all events, contrary to my habit of not being hasty in the purchase of books, I took it home. Back in my room I threw myself into the corner of the sofa with my booty, and began to allow that energetic and gloomy genius to work upon my mind. In this book, in which every line cried out renunciation, denial and resignation, I saw a mirror in which I espied the whole world, life, and my own mind depicted in frightful grandeur. (\textit{HKG} III 297–8)
\end{quote}

Nietzsche’s first reaction to the reading was, he recalls, to practice bodily penances such as allowing himself only four hours sleep a night.\textsuperscript{16}

Though Nietzsche had enrolled at the University of Bonn in 1864 intending to prepare himself for the priesthood, by the time he moved to Leipzig in the following year he had definitively lost his previously passionate faith in the
Christian God. Yet he still possessed a Christian sensibility: he continued to be easily moved to tears by religious music and still, on occasion, attended church services. As his practice of bodily penance indicates, what appealed to him above all in *The World as Will* was its quasi-religious dimension, its doctrine of salvation. Describing his stance to Christianity in 1866 he writes:

If Christianity means ‘faith in an historical event and an historical person’ I have nothing to do with this Christianity. But if it means a need for salvation then I value it highly . . . Oh, if only all philosophers were disciples of Schopenhauer.

And he confesses to still experiencing ‘the metaphysical need’ which is, he says, universal to all human beings. Four years later, hearing of the deaths of school-friends barely out of their ‘teens on the battlefields of the Franco-Prussian War and indicating that (as I do) he reads Schopenhauer’s philosophy as offering, above all, a ‘consolation’ in the face of death, he writes to his close friend Carl von Gersdorff (himself in mortal danger on the battlefield):

For me, too, this [is] . . . the time when [Schopenhauer’s] fundamental teaching had proved itself to be firmly rooted: one can die with it, which says more than were one to say that one can live with it. (KGB II.1 103)

As is typical of religious and quasi-religious conversion experiences, Nietzsche immediately began to proselytise on behalf of his new ‘faith’, began, as he put it, to ‘make propaganda on [Schopenhauer’s] behalf and lead various people by the nose to him’. Over his new friendship with fellow classicist, Erwin Rohde, he writes, ‘the genius of . . . Schopenhauer of course presides’, as it did over the friendship formed in Bonn with Hermann Mushacke and soon would over relations with his old school friends, Carl von Gersdorff and Paul Deussen. The latter proved the most resistant to the new ‘faith’, forcing Nietzsche effectively to threaten to break off the friendship if he did not see the light. (There is irony in this, since, when he eventually did convert, Deussen remained, unlike Nietzsche, faithful for life, founding the Schopenhauer Gesellschaft and becoming the first editor of its *Jahrbuch.*) And of course, when Nietzsche formed his fateful friendship with Richard Wagner in November 1868 (an event which lies beyond the scope of this chapter) Schopenhauer presided over that friendship too.

Nietzsche records that every fortnight he, von Gersdorff and Mushacke met with the Naumburg pastor, Friedrich Wenkel, ‘an inexhaustible researcher and protagonist for Schopenhauer’s teaching’, in their favourite coffee shop, Café Kintschy, in order to ‘schopenhauerianize’. Within the network of Schopenhauer-cultists, both in Leipzig and in other parts of Germany, Schopenhauer was referred to as ‘our master’ and was elevated to almost Christ-like status. On one occasion on which wine was drunk Nietzsche compares the gathering of ‘friends of Schopenhauer’ to a gathering of the first Christians. As with any group of devotees, the disciples become desperate to obtain a visual image of the guru. Eventually von Gersdorff tracked down the owner of a portrait by Jules
Luntenschütz belonging to a former acquaintance of Schopenhauer. Breathlessly, he reports that the owner of the icon,

... took us to his study and here I saw the heavenly picture of our master, before which one could stand for hours, in order to look into his clear eyes. A god-like brow that appears to rise to infinity, framed by beautiful white hair under white eyebrows like those of the Olympian Zeus, two eyes of clarity and depth which possess a gaze that seems to dazzle but then, as one becomes accustomed to the gaze, are such that one cannot tear oneself away from them. The mouth is broad but has the friendly, mild expression of inner peace, though one cannot miss his capacity for cascades of bitter, satirical scorn, (KGB 1.3 letter to Nietzsche 193)²⁵

and so rhapsodically on. Nietzsche replies, equally breathlessly, that he has passed this precious description on to ‘two other disciples of our master, namely Rohde ... and Wenkel’.²⁶

The Impact of Lange

About nine months after first falling under Schopenhauer’s spell, Nietzsche became engrossed in another book: Friedrich Lange’s History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance. This work, which Nietzsche read when it first appeared in 1866, provided him with something of a grasp on Kant’s philosophy which he increased, during late 1867 and early 1868, by reading the Critique of Judgment²⁷ and Kuno Fischer’s recently appeared, two-volume study of Kant.²⁸

Lange’s book is divided into two halves. The first contains a history of materialism from the Greeks to Kant, the second is a critical discussion of materialism from Kant to the mid-19th century.

Lange constituted the beginning of German Neo-Kantianism, the beginning of a return from the metaphysical ambitiousness of German Idealism to Kant’s epistemological modesty. Impressed by the advance of natural science in the 19th century, Lange was at the same time, like Kant, intensely worried by it. More exactly, he was worried, not by science as such, an estimable and vital enterprise, but rather by science turned into metaphysics—the metaphysical thesis of materialism, the thesis that reality consists of matter in motion and nothing else. Like Kant, who said that the aim of his Critique of Pure Reason was to ‘sever at the root’ the triple evils of ‘materialism, fatalism and atheism’,²⁹ Lange was perturbed by the existential implications of materialism, its threat to religion and morality.

Lange’s solution to the problem consisted in a return to Kant’s idealism together with his doctrine of the unknowability of the ‘thing in itself’. Science can and must explore the world of material nature, but, in the final analysis, this is a merely ‘phenomenal’ or ‘apparent’ world. It follows that the question of the character of ultimate reality lies beyond its competence.

Lange’s original contribution to the Kantian position is to show that metaphysical materialism is self-undermining; that science itself leads to the
conclusion that all it can speak is an apparent world: fully thought out, a ‘consistent materialistic view . . . changes around . . . into a consistently idealistic view’.30 Thus science itself, in particular the physiology of perception, holds that our consciousness of, for instance, colour, is not consciousness of something ‘out there’ in the world but is merely the brain’s subjective response to light waves impinging on the retina. Science itself holds that the noisy, colourful, tasty entities of human experience are simply our own invention. But if that is so then, equally, the entities of science, the human brain, retinas, light waves and the like, must be human inventions too. Science thus demonstrates its own ignorance of ultimate reality. Space for example, says Lange, for all science knows, might have four dimensions.31 The moral then is that by quite properly showing that the mind constructs its world, science itself limits its competence to the world of appearances. To human beings, laymen and scientists alike, ultimate reality is an ‘inconceivable order of things’.32

Nietzsche writes to von Gersdorff recommending Lange as ‘the best account’ of ‘the materialist movement of our times, of natural science and its Darwinian theories’. Yet in fact, he continues, it contains ‘infinitely more than its title promises’.33 It does so since, far from being himself a materialist, Lange is actually, Nietzsche correctly observes, a ‘highly enlightened Kantian’.34

Lange’s own position, he continues (here he actually quotes Lange’s own summary of his conclusions35 without making it clear that that is what he is doing), can be reduced to the following three propositions:

(1) The sensible world is the product of our own faculty of organization.

(2) Our visible [bodily] organs are, like all other parts of the world of appearance, only pictures of an unknown object.

(3) What our faculty of organization really is, is therefore just as unknown as the real outer object. In both case we experience only their products. So, Nietzsche concludes, using his own words, now, to express his own conviction, ‘the true essence of things, the thing in itself, is . . . unknown to us’.36

Criticising Schopenhauer

Some time in late 1867 or early 1868, about a year after penning the above synopsis, Nietzsche applies Lange’s ‘enlightened Kantianism’ to Schopenhauer’s philosophy in an extended critique of the latter. The focus of his critique is Schopenhauer’s claim, a claim made more than thirty times in Book II of the first edition of The World as Will, to have cracked the problem of the nature of the thing in itself, to have discovered it to be ‘will’.
The attempt to explain the world according to a single factor, Nietzsche writes in his notebooks, ‘is a failure’:

The question all metaphysicians yearn to answer . . . as to whether nature can finally be fathomed, is answered by Schopenhauer with a definite ‘Yes’ . . . The solution to the last and most important riddle of the world is . . . the groundless, knowledge-less will . . . But this is a dubious discovery. The first objection . . . is that the concept of a thing in itself is merely a hidden category. In the place of the Kantian X he places the will, but only with the help of a poetic intuition, for the attempted logical proof can satisfy neither Schopenhauer nor us. In Schopenhauer’s favour, . . . there can be a thing in itself though only in the sense that everything that can be thought up by a philosophical head is possible in the domain of the transcendent. And this possible thing in itself can be the will but . . . that is a mere guess . . . the world will not fit as comfortably into his system as Schopenhauer had hoped in the intoxication of first discovery. In his old age he complained that the most difficult problems of philosophy are not solved even by his own philosophy, by which he meant the question of the limits of individuation . . . His system is permeated by contradictions. Schopenhauer says that, as thing in itself, the will, is free of all the forms of its appearance . . . It is, he says, ‘never an object, since everything that is an object is mere appearance . . .’ But he demands that what is never an object can be objectively thought . . . he decorates it with predicates, like bright clothes, drawn from the world of appearances . . . thus the [real, Kantian] concept ‘thing in itself’ is quietly abandoned and another secretly substituted.37

In a word, then, Lange’s central impact on Nietzsche is to make him reject what appears to be the most central and distinctive of claim of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, its identification of ultimate reality as ‘will’. What is puzzling, however, is that this rejection diminishes Nietzsche’s dedication to the ‘master’ not a jot. On the contrary, it increases it: ‘You will see that from [Lange’s] strict, critical standpoint’, he concludes his letter to von Gersdorff, ‘our Schopenhauer remains to us, indeed becomes even more to us’.38 And that his spell did indeed did remain and increase, is proved by the intensely Schopenhauerian character of the friendship with Wagner and of Nietzsche’s first book, The Birth of Tragedy, which grew out of it. But how on earth could it have happened that the reading of Lange and consequent critique of Schopenhauer intensified rather than diminished Nietzsche’s devotion to ‘the master’?

Reconstructing Schopenhauer

Nietzsche’s observation that The World as Will is ‘permeated by contradictions’ is entirely just. The most fundamental contradiction is the following.
Schopenhauer’s doctrine of ‘salvation’, as we have noted, is really the provision of a ‘consolation’ for death. Its foundation lies in the evident consequence of idealism that the true self, the dreamer of the ‘dream’ of life, is untouched by death. The question, though, is whether this doctrine is really consoling at all. For if the claim, repeatedly made in Book II, that the thing in itself is the ‘will’ is true, than the real self has to be the will, the one and only ultimately real entity. But, Schopenhauer holds, the will is both the ‘bearer’ of all the world’s pains, past, present and future, and also their source: as the only reality, it has to be the source of everything and is therefore responsible for the fact that life is suffering, for the fact that the world is the ‘worst of all possible worlds’ since it possesses the character of a concentration camp. The Will is, therefore, fundamentally evil: at bottom, Schopenhauer says, ‘nature is not divine but demonic’, ‘devilish’. There is therefore, an ‘eternal justice’ in the world; an exact balance between the wickedness of its essence and the wretchedness of its fate.

But if that is what our true self is then, far from receiving ‘consolation’ in the face of death, to realise the character of one’s true self is to descend into a realm of cosmic self-disgust. Acceptance of Schopenhauer’s philosophy then becomes a descent into a terrible kind of madness. Life is suffering and so not worth living. But suicide is not worth contemplating either, since death merely transforms personal into cosmic suffering—which one thoroughly deserves on account of being fundamentally evil. So one’s choice is between hell and hell. In a word, if the will is the thing in itself then there can be no doctrine of ‘salvation’ in Schopenhauer’s philosophy.

But, of course, there is such a doctrine. The mystics, as we have seen (p. 312 above), know about it, know that the reality beyond the ‘dream’ is ‘divine’, the object of ecstatic, ‘pantheistic consciousness’. So Nietzsche is absolutely right: at the heart of *The World as Will* is a crippling contradiction, a contradiction between the conclusion of Book II and the conclusion of Book IV. At the end of Book II reality is at bottom ‘demonic’. At the end of Book IV it is at bottom ‘divine’. Only the fact that several hundred pages separate the two conclusions makes it possible to miss this contradiction.

Nietzsche, as we saw, reports that in old age Schopenhauer admitted that his philosophy had not solved ‘the most difficult problems of philosophy’ (p. 316 above). This is correct. What Nietzsche is referring to is the fact that in the later, expanded, 1844 edition of the masterwork Schopenhauer begins to severely qualify the earlier, bald assertion, made in the ‘intoxication’ of youth, that the will is the thing in itself: he now begins to pepper the work’s new, second volume with remarks like ‘the question of what that will which manifests itself in the world and as the world is ultimately and absolutely in itself ... can never be answered’. But given the avidity with which Nietzsche and his fellow disciples pounced upon any scrap of information they could discover about ‘the master’, he may also have known of a letter Schopenhauer wrote to his literary executor, Julius Frauenstädt, eight years before his death, in which he says that his philosophy only seeks to describe the thing in itself ‘in relation to [i.e. as] appearance’. ‘What the thing in itself is apart from that relation’ Schopenhauer
continues, he does not say ‘because I do not know what it is’. The effect of this is to withdraw ‘will’ to the appearance side of the appearance/reality dichotomy. Though ‘will’ provides a deeper account of the world than its description in terms of material bodies, the world it describes remains in the realm of appearance. ‘Will’ is, then, as one might loosely put it, a description of penultimate rather than of ultimate reality. In the final analysis, the will—as will—belongs to the ‘dream’.

In the end, then, Schopenhauer reaffirms Kant’s position that the thing in itself is, to philosophy at least, unknowable. And this resolves the contradiction in his thinking, makes genuine room for the doctrine of salvation. (It is, perhaps, not without significance that he did this towards the end of his life; at a time, that is, when he himself would have been in increasing need of ‘consolation’ in the face of death.) And it is this position which, under Lange’s influence, Nietzsche endorsed; happily endorsed, since, it allowed him to find in Schopenhauer, after all, the satisfaction of his ‘metaphysical need’ for comfort in the face of death, a comfort he could no longer find in Christianity.

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Of course, to say with Kant, Lange, the older Schopenhauer and the younger Nietzsche that the reality that stands behind the world of appearance transcends the limits of rational, philosophical thought, cuts two ways. On the one hand, it renders illegitimate the claim to know ultimate reality to be the ‘demonic’ will. Equally, however, it disqualifies the claim that it is ‘divine’. If reality in itself is simply terra incognita, philosophy can no more know it to be divine than it can know it to be demonic, and so the doctrine of salvation gets no purchase. The question still remains to be answered, therefore, as to why Nietzsche should find Lange’s ‘strict, critical standpoint’ actually intensifying his devotion to Schopenhauer’s ‘fundamental teaching’ (p. 316 above).

In trying to find an answer to this question, a good starting-point is Kant, and in particular his famous remark that the task of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to ‘deny [rational] knowledge in order to make room for [religious] faith’. Returning to the older (and wiser) Schopenhauer, we see him, while agreeing with Kant in denying rational knowledge of the transcendent, offering, in a positive assessment of the knowledge-claims of mysticism, something more than mere ‘faith’ that transcendence is salvation. Philosophy, he says, being essentially ‘rationalism’, runs up against its limits as against the walls of a prison when it tries to discuss the transcendent. It can point to a domain of ‘illuminism’ or ‘higher consciousness’ but cannot ‘set even one foot thereon’. Hence, his own philosophy, he says, at its highest point, is forced to assume a ‘negative character’. It can speak of what is abandoned in ‘denial of the will’ but not of what is gained. Where philosophy comes to an end, however, mysticism ‘proceeds positively’. And when we reflect that all mystics, even though they come from widely different ages and cultures, report the same experience, the
merging of oneself with the divine, we can reasonably conclude that whatever it is they ‘see’ is both wonderful and real.\textsuperscript{51} As we saw, this conclusion is reinforced, according to Schopenhauer, by great art’s ‘stamp of truth’:\textsuperscript{52} to see ‘the peace that is higher than all reason, that ocean-like calmness of the spirit, that deep tranquillity, that unshakeable confidence and serenity, as depicted by Raphael or Correggio, is to receive ‘a complete and certain gospel: only knowledge remains, the will has vanished’\textsuperscript{53}.

The colon in this last remark (missing in Payne’s translation) indicates that in order to validate mystical beatitude, Schopenhauer is appealing to the doctrine of aesthetic veracity expounded in Book III of \textit{The World as Will}: since it is the will—practical interest—which manipulates, distorts, perception, it follows that when we escape the will—as do authentic mystics—we become a ‘clear mirror’ of reality, completely ‘objective’.\textsuperscript{54} On a mind that is pure receptivity, reality impresses itself just as, in itself, it is. This is the doctrine followed by the youthful Nietzsche in his attempt to validate the reality of Schopenhauerian salvation. Commenting on his reading of Lange, he writes to von Gersdorff that the consequence of the inaccessibility of ultimate reality to the rational mind is that ‘art is free’. What he means here is that intimations of the transcendent in art are free of the possibility of assessment, and so of contradiction, by reason: ‘Who’, he asks rhetorically, after assimilated Lange’s Kantianism, ‘would seek to refute a work of Beethoven or to find an error in Raphael’s Madonna?\textsuperscript{55}

Under what I call ‘intimations of the transcendent’ Nietzsche has in mind, first and foremost, I think, what one (or he, at least) ‘grasps’ through music. For him, as for Schopenhauer (both of them themselves musicians), music is always the highest art, the only art of which he says that without it ‘life would be an error’.\textsuperscript{56} Schubert’s famous 1817 hymn ‘To Music’ reads: ‘Oh blessed art, in how many grey hours, when life’s fierce orbit encompasses me, hast thou . . . transported me to a better world’.\textsuperscript{57} Expressed here is what one might call ‘salvation through music’, a notion towards which, from earliest youth, Nietzsche was always strongly disposed. As a pious, precocious—and somewhat puritanical—fourteen-year-old he condemned all non-religious music on the grounds that the point of music is ‘to lead us heavenwards’. Five years later, although having by now abandoned Christianity, he still holds great music to be an ‘intimation of the divine. . . . a feeling from out of which heaven suddenly gleams’.\textsuperscript{58} (One might think here, of Gustav Mahler’s \textit{Resurrection Symphony}, a work, like that of a great deal of Mahler, strongly influenced by Nietzsche.)

The question, though, that needs to be asked about this doctrine of ‘salvation through music’, or through art in general, is whether Nietzsche takes himself to be adopting a Kantian or a Schopenhauerian position. If he is following Kant, aesthetic intimations of transcendent salvation can only have the status of ‘faith’, can only provide subjective conviction with respect to the objectively unknowable. If he follows Schopenhauer, on the other hand, aesthetic intimations are accorded the status of (non-rational) knowledge of the transcendent.

Two factors support the view that, in fact, the youthful Nietzsche follows Schopenhauer rather than Kant. The first is a letter of October 1868 to Paul
Deussen in which he says that the latter’s call for a ‘critique of [Schopenhauer’s] system’ is, he supposes, acceptable if it means pointing out the various ‘failed proofs and cases of tactical clumsiness’ it contains—he had, after all, produced his own Schopenhauer-critique a year earlier. But, he continues, such a critique is entirely unacceptable if it means criticism of Schopenhauer’s ‘worldview’. The latter is beyond criticism since (and he is here implicitly accusing the often-patronized Deussen of spiritually denseness) it is,

... something one either grasps or does not. A third standpoint is inconceivable. Someone who does not smell a rose cannot truly criticise it. And if he does smell it then—à la bonheur! After that he loses the desire to criticise. (*KGB* 1.2 595)

What he must be referring to here, under the rubric ‘worldview’ is the ultimate goal and final point of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, the ‘happiness (*bonheur*)’-creating doctrine of transcendent salvation. It is this, together with our need for it, which is beyond criticism. And what he seems to be doing is setting up intimations of the transcendent through art—or through philosophy considered, as he now thinks it should be, as art—as analogues of the physical senses, in other words as modes of seeing, of, in the language of German Idealism, ‘intellectual intuition’.

A second reason for taking Nietzsche to be treating art as a mode of transcendent cognition is the character of the self-criticism that follows, a decade later, during his ‘positivist’ period. People suffering from ‘religious after-pains’, he says in *Human, All-too-Human*, speak of ‘the complete and certain gospel in the glance of Raphael’s Madonna’. Or at a certain point in the last movement of Beethoven’s ninth symphony such a person is liable to ‘feel he is hovering above the earth in a dome of stars with the dream of *immortality* in his heart: all the stars seem to flitter around him and the earth seems to sink further and further away’. But by now, of course, Nietzsche is bent on debunking such ‘deification’ of art as indulged in by both Schopenhauer and his own former self. We have, he says, ‘profound feelings’ which seem to take us ‘deep into the interior, close to the heart of nature’. ‘But such feelings’, he adds, in a passage of insightful self-deconstruction,

... are profound only insofar as when they occur certain complex groups of thoughts which we call profound are, scarcely perceptibly, regularly aroused with them; a feeling is profound because we regard the thoughts that accompany it as profound. But a profound thought can nonetheless be very distant from the truth ...: if one deducts from the profound feeling the element of thought ... what remains is the *strong* feeling, and this has nothing to do with knowledge. (*HH* 15)

Thoughts such as these, however, lay far in the future. In 1868 Nietzsche possessed both a religious devotion to Schopenhauer that reduced into insignificance his various criticisms of ‘the master’ and a conviction that great music provides us with genuine knowledge of final salvation. Since Richard
Wagner was equally besotted with both Schopenhauer and the idea of ‘salvation through music’, the two were thus fated to experience the immediate bonding that would occur at their first meeting in November of that year in the Leipzig drawing room of Wagner’s sister, Ottolie Brockhaus, a meeting at which, almost immediately, they plunged into a long discussion of Schopenhauer.62

Postscript

Christopher Janaway argues63 that Nietzsche’s 1868 critique of Schopenhauer shows that already in that year he sees the identification of the thing in itself as ‘will’ as a ‘flaw . . . wholly vitiating Schopenhauer’s metaphysics’. It will be clear from the foregoing that I disagree with this. For Nietzsche, on my account, the realisation that ‘will’ cannot legitimately be predicated of the thing in itself precisely rescues ‘Schopenhauer’s [mature] metaphysics’. Referring in particular to The Birth of Tragedy of 1872, Janaway goes on to suggest that ‘it is open to serious doubt whether Nietzsche ever seriously adhered to Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of the will’. While I agree that The Birth’s occasional references to the thing in itself as ‘will’ are not to be taken as metaphysically serious, its ostensible affirmation of the ‘appearance’-‘thing in itself’ dichotomy is, it seems to me, to be taken absolutely at face value. If the framework of Schopenhauerian idealism had not been seriously intended the systematic deconstruction of ‘metaphysics’ in Human, All-too-Human (the work in which ‘I liberated myself from that in my nature which did not belong to me’)64 would not have been necessary.

NOTES

1 Hadot 1995.
2 This claim may seem to be refuted by Schopenhauer’s assertion that philosophy is ‘always theoretical’ and can never ‘become practical’ (WWR I 271). In my Schopenhauer (Young 2005: 158–168), however, I argue at some length that this is a confused self-misrepresentation on Schopenhauer’s part. Notice that to understand his guiding conception of philosophy to be that of the ancient world is to disclose his ‘Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life’, and the contents of Parerga and Paralipomena in general, as continuous with The World as Will. To understand him in this way is to reject the idea of a radical divide between the ‘systematic philosophy’ of ‘the main work’, on the one hand, and ‘light entertainments’ on the other—which I take to be something which, if at all possible, we should want to do.
3 WWR II 463; see too 161.
4 WWR I 411–2.
5 WWR II 160.
6 WWR II 463. This is the basis of his critique of Stoicism, (and by implication Hellenistic philosophy in general). In its doctrine of ‘detachment’ from desires that are both unnecessary and uncertain of satisfaction it offers merely a this-worldly Lebensweisheit. Lacking any account of a ‘transcendent end’ (WWR I 380) it evades the main thing, the task of overcoming the summum malum.
The bringing of comfort in the face of the *sumnum malum* is also, of course, a requirement of his ethics of compassion.  

Denial of the will’ consists, says Schopenhauer, in the ‘abolition’ of the will (WWR I 285). Such a state, he appears to suggest, can be inhabited either in the aesthetic or ascetic state. So it can be, it seems, a state of mind inhabited by the living. Yet, closely examined, Schopenhauer actually makes a consistent distinction between partial and ‘complete’ (WWR I 411) abolition of the will. Partial abolition is escape from the will, for brief moments in aesthetic experience, more permanently in ascetic experience. Yet even the ascetic retains enough will to raise the crust of bread to his lips. This is why the apotheosis of asceticism is the voluntary self-starvation of the ‘completely resigned ascetic [who] ceases to live ... because he has completely ceased to will’ (WWR I 401; my emphases). That only death, and not will-less knowing, represents complete abolition—i.e. denial—of the will is indicated at the very end of the main work: ‘what remains after the complete abolition of the will is [not pure knowledge of the essence of the world but] assuredly nothing’ (WWR I 411–12)—nothing at least that makes any sense to the human ‘knowing subject.’
One response to this difficulty might be to read ‘salvation’ as an entirely this-worldly council of ascetic detachment from the life of willing. But that would be to reduce salvation to Stoic ataraxia, a notion which, as we have seen, Schopenhauer rejects. For Schopenhauer, salvation has to possess an ultimately ‘transcendent’ character (see note 6 above).

Nietzsche’s thoughts, here, are somewhat muddled so that the following is the product of a certain amount of tidying up. It needs to be remembered that at this stage of his life Nietzsche was, while a professional philologist, only an amateur philosopher.

In full, Franz von Schober’s words are:

Du holde Kunst, in wieviel grauen Stunden,
Wo mich des Lebens wilder Kreis umstrickt,
Hast du mein Herz zu warmer Lieb’ entzunden,
Hast mich in eine bessere Welt entruckt!
In eine bessere Welt entruckt!
Oft hat ein Seufzer, deiner Harf’ entflossen,
Ein süßer, heiliger Akkord von dir
Den Himmel bessrer Zeiten mir erschlossen,
Du holde Kunst, ich danke dir dafür!

Nietzsche almost always quotes from memory. Here he has Schopenhauer’s remark word-perfect, save for the addition of ‘in the glance of’.

Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Death and Salvation
REFERENCES

Nietzsche’s Works


Schopenhauer’s Works


Other Works

Schopenhauer’s Ethics, Jurisprudence and the State

Neil Jordan

Schopenhauer’s ethics presents a view of the individual as determined in his actions and capable (or otherwise) of virtue depending on his individual character. Of course, if virtue cannot be imparted or taught, then it follows that universal morality is never to be expected. Indeed, it is this idea that appears to form the foundation of Schopenhauer’s account of the state’s purpose, for in the absence of perfect morality, one must at least have the means to curb the worst excesses of man’s natural egoism. My primary concern here is the connection between Schopenhauer’s political theory and his ethics, for in spite of the fairly sharp distinction that Schopenhauer seeks to draw between considerations of ethics and considerations of politics, it appears that even within his own thought, the relationship between the two is rather more complex and intimate than he acknowledges. I will begin by outlining Schopenhauer’s account of the key political concepts of right and wrong, following which I will examine the distinction that he draws between political and moral thinking. Following this, it will be possible to investigate the real relationship between the two as they appear in Schopenhauer’s thought, by reflecting on his account of the foundation and role of the state, as well as his theories of punishment and jurisprudence. Finally, I will offer some thoughts on the question of the value of the state.

**Right and Wrong**

The will’s natural selfishness and man’s resulting failure to consider the interests of others lie at the heart of what Schopenhauer takes to be the primary and positive notion of wrong:

Now since the will manifests that self-affirmation of one’s own body in innumerable individuals beside one another, in one individual, by virtue of the egoism peculiar to all, it very easily goes beyond this affirmation to the denial of that same will appearing in another individual. The will of the first breaks through the boundary of another’s affirmation of will, since the individual either destroys or injures this body itself, or compels the powers of that other body to serve his will, instead of serving the will
that appears in that other body... This breaking through the boundary of another’s self-affirmation of will has at all times been distinctly recognized, and its concept has been denoted by the word wrong (Unrecht). (WWR I: 334)

Wrong, then, is the denial of the will’s expression in another, causing him direct harm, or compelling him to serve our own ends. However, it is important to realize that wrong or injury does not result solely from physical violence or force. It can also be the result of cunning, the most common form of which is the lie, which involves presenting the other’s intellect with false motives, so that he obeys our will. Thus, believing himself to be pursuing his own good, he is tricked into undertaking a course of action that he would otherwise have left undone.7

As Jacquette has pointed out, in Schopenhauer’s account, acts of wrong generally seem to involve taking away from others something that belongs most personally to them; namely, the powers of their own body.8 However, Schopenhauer offers no real explanation of what is actually wrong with this. There are, it appears, two possible reasons for Schopenhauer’s failure to identify the nature of wrong. The first is perhaps that there is no need for such an explanation, for we all carry an implicit recognition of wrong within ourselves. What leads us to denounce certain types of act as ‘wrong’, irrespective of whether we desist from them ourselves, might be a realization on our own part that we ourselves should not wish to be subjected to such treatment. The second possible reason for Schopenhauer’s failure to explain what makes the suppression of will in others wrong is connected with the fact that, as Jacquette reminds us,9 Schopenhauer’s approach to ethics is descriptive.10 As such, he is under no obligation to offer an explanation of the nature of wrong, and needs only to catalogue the sorts of actions that people do in fact perform and the descriptions that are commonly made of them. Actions which deprive others of their bodily powers, then, just are recognized as ‘wrong’.

If wrong involves the suppression of will in the person of another, right, on the other hand, is a secondary or derivative term and as such, is the mere negation of wrong. Indeed, as Jacquette has noted, the realization that we should not wish to be subjected to certain types of conduct perhaps lies at the root of this conception of moral right, as we extend to others our expectation that we should not be subjected to certain forms of treatment.11 Consequently, we might say that those actions are right which do not of themselves cause direct harm: ‘Accordingly, injustice or wrong always consists in injuring another. The concept of wrong is, therefore, positive and antecedent to that of right. The concept of right is negative, and denotes merely those actions that can be done without injury to others, that is, without wrong being done’ (BM: 152).

This stance is related to Schopenhauer’s claims about the negative nature of happiness, and his view that we are never conscious of well-being, but only of suffering.12 Similarly, if we are only immediately conscious of being wronged, but never of non-molestation, then ‘wrong’, as that which imposes itself most forcefully on consciousness, naturally becomes the primary concept. The notion
of right, therefore, exists only as its opposite. Indeed, as Schopenhauer points out, were it not for the fact that we are sometimes wronged, we should have no concept of right at all.13

Following this account of these two concepts, Schopenhauer mentions certain concrete rights that individuals do have. Rejecting as without moral foundation the Kantian account based on first occupation or seizure,14 Schopenhauer follows Locke15 in grounding our right to property in cultivation or improvement. Once rightfully acquired, property can legitimately be exchanged, sold or inherited, but to dispossess a man of his rightful property, by cunning or by force, is to wrong him, depriving him of the fruits of his labour and forcing his will to serve the interests of another.16

Our right to self-defence, on the other hand, is founded on the idea that we are under no obligation to endure wrongs at the hands of others, such that we are entitled to use force or cunning in order to repel any attempt to wrong us, without committing wrong ourselves. Thus, we can trick burglars into entering cellars into which we can lock them, use loaded dice against gamblers who have cheated against us or fight off attackers, even killing them if necessary:

Thus, if the will of another denies my will, as this appears in my body and in the use of its powers for its preservation without denying anyone else’s will that observes a like limitation, then I can compel it without wrong to desist from this denial, in other words, I have to this extent a right of compulsion. In all cases in which I have a right of compulsion, a perfect right to use violence against others, I can, according to the circumstances, just as well oppose another’s violence with cunning without doing wrong, and consequently I have an actual right to lie precisely to the extent that I have a right to compulsion. (WWR I: 340)

It is important to realize at this stage, though, that right and wrong are moral concepts. They apply to the movements and affections of the will in relation to the well-being and woe of others, and as such, they are really the subject matter of ethics; ethics being concerned with this, the real, inner significance of actions.17 Nevertheless, these moral concepts are allocated a political purpose, as Schopenhauer goes on to distinguish sharply between ethics and politics.

**Ethics and Legislation**

Of course, the fact that both political and moral thinking make use of notions of right and wrong does not mean that the two are closely related. Indeed, much of what Schopenhauer says conveys precisely this impression; that politics and ethics are separate areas of thought and practice, linked only by shared concepts which, it transpires, are actually applied differently in moral contexts from political ones. Schopenhauer understands moral thinking to be anterior to political theory and we have seen that he considers the notion of right to exist as a moral concept independently of political thought.18 However, he also believes
that ethics can inform political thought. ‘The pure doctrine of right’, Schopenhauer takes to be a chapter of morality, the purpose of which is to define precisely what the moral limits of human action are; that is, to disclose exactly what humans may do without committing wrong. This purely moral delimitation of the extent of right can illuminate our political thinking in a number of ways, but in spite of this, Schopenhauer is clear that a distinction between ethics and politics can be drawn. Indeed, this much is shown by the manner in which legislation appropriates and applies this doctrine. As a chapter of morality, the pure doctrine of right ‘is directly related merely to doing, not to suffering; for the former alone is manifestation of the will, and only this is considered by ethics’ (WWR I: 342). Legislation, however, concerns itself with the ‘suffering’ that the pure doctrine of right does not. Instead of tracing the exact limits of right and wrong in order to establish rules for our own conduct, legislation inverts the pure doctrine of right, thus discovering what it is that we should not be prepared to tolerate:

Political science or legislation will borrow for this purpose from morality that chapter which is the doctrine of right, and which, besides the inner significance of right and wrong, determines the exact limit between the two, yet simply and solely in order to use the reverse side of it, and to consider from that other side all the limits which morality states are not to be transgressed, if we wish to do no wrong, as the limits we must not allow others to transgress, if we wish to suffer no wrong, and from which we therefore have a right to drive others back. (WWR I: 344)

So, legislation is a matter of moral doctrine applied from the reverse side, which seeks to guarantee not that we do not commit wrong, but that we should not suffer it. Rather than delineating what can be done, then, it defines what is to be prohibited, or what we should have the right to repulse.

In light of this, a further important difference between morality and legislation presents itself, for in consequence of their differing approaches to the experience of wrong, it seems that legislation and ethics must also concern themselves with different objects. Morality is concerned with not doing wrong, and so interests itself with the will behind an action, morality being a question of disposition and intention. By contrast, legislation is concerned with the suffering of wrong and in its attempt to prohibit wrong, it considers the action itself rather than the intention behind it:

Further, since in morality the will, the disposition, is the object of consideration and the only real thing, the firm will to commit wrong, restrained and rendered ineffective only by external force, and the actually committed wrong, are for it exactly the same . . . On the other hand, will and disposition, merely as such, do not concern the State at all; the deed alone does so (whether it be merely attempted or carried out), on account of its correlative, namely the suffering of the other party. Thus for the State the deed, the occurrence, is the only real thing; the disposition,
the intention, is investigated only in so far as from it the significance of
the deed becomes known. Therefore, the State will not forbid anyone
constantly carrying about in his head the thought of murder and poison
against another, so long as it knows for certain that the fear of sword and
wheel will always restrain the effects of that willing. (WWR I: 344)

The state, then, is interested in intentions only where intentions help to establish
what kind of act has been committed. Actions which are defined by the harm that
they cause to others will be prohibited, but of itself, the intention behind a specific
act is irrelevant. If, for example, I aim to rescue a drowning man and accidentally
injure him, that is no reason to render attempts to rescue others illegal, since of
itself, the action is not characterized by any attempt to wrong another. By contrast,
an action such as murder, which, by definition, involves the notion of harm (since
it encompasses an intention to kill) will be prohibited. Therefore, ethics and
politics may share certain concepts, legislation being based upon the pure doctrine
of right, but their objects and concerns are very different, intentions being relevant
to the latter only in so far as they define the nature of an action.

Morality and the State

This all sheds light on the difference between legislation and ethics, but it does
not, of course, explain to us what the need for legislation is. After all, if the pure
document of right grounds certain rights for us prior to the existence of any state,
then why is there any need for the inverted application of morality in legislation?
Schopenhauer’s response is that individual right needs safeguarding. Thanks to
the legislation enforced by the state:

The boundless egoism of almost everyone, the wickedness of many, and
the cruelty of not a few are then not able to make their appearance; compulsion and coercion have bridled and restrained everyone. The deception springing from this restraint is so great that when in isolated
cases where the power of the State cannot protect or is eluded and we
plainly see the insatiable greed, the famous cupidity and mania for
money, the deeply concealed perfidy and duplicity, and the spiteful,
wickedness of men and women, we often recoil with horror, raise an
outcry, imagine we have chanced upon a monster never before seen; yet
without the compulsion of laws and the necessity of civil honor, such
occurrences would certainly be the order of the day. We have to read
criminal narratives and descriptions of the conditions of anarchy if we
want to know what man really is from a moral point of view. The
thousands who throng before our eyes in peaceful intercourse are to be
regarded as just so many tigers and wolves whose teeth are secured by a
strong muzzle. Therefore, if one imagines the power of the State as
abolished, in other words, the muzzle as cast off, every thinking man will
recoil at the expected scene, and in this way, he will show us what little
confidence he really has in the efficacy of religion, conscience, or the natural foundation of morals, whatever this may be. (BM: 129)

Put simply, we need the state and legislation to protect us effectively from one another and defend individual private right, for in most cases, whatever moral regard we may have for the rights of others is too weak a motive to restrain our natural egoism and lead us to treat them with justice. 'If justice prevailed in the world, it would be enough for a man to have merely built his house, and there would be no need for any other protection than this obvious right of property. But since wrong is the order of the day, it is necessary for the man who has built a house to be also in a position to protect it; otherwise his right is de facto incomplete' (PP II: 242).

The weakness of morality as a restraining motive explains the need for some higher authority or power to keep us in check, but it does not fully account for the purpose of legislation, with its inversion of moral concepts. After all, if we require a state to protect individual right, then why should the state simply not impose morality itself, rather than some inverted version of it? Schopenhauer’s answer is very clear: the state has no moral role to play at all; a position suggested by his earlier assertion that legislation concerns deeds alone, rather than intentions:

Here the compulsory institution is the State, whose sole purpose is to protect individuals from one another and the whole from external foes. A few German philosophasters would like to distort the State into an institution for spreading morality and edifying instruction; but here lurks in the background the Jesuitical purpose of doing away with personal freedom and individual development, in order to make men into mere wheels of a Chinese machine of State and Religion. This is the path that once led to inquisitions, autos-da-fé, and religious wars. (BM: 153)

Schopenhauer’s reference to personal freedom and individual development is largely ineffective here, for though these may suffer at the hands of a state that concerned itself with the morality of its citizens, he has done nothing to establish their value; intrinsic or otherwise. As such, the threat posed in this sphere cannot be the only reason for refusing the state a moral role. This passage does leave some clues, however, as to what would be wrong with a political power that concerned itself with the moral integrity of the citizens. For one, it seems that for Schopenhauer, any state which pursued public morality might well contravene its protective role, inflicting all manner of wrong on its citizens; wrongs which it could no doubt justify to itself in terms of the ‘higher’ goal to be attained. Secondly, as far as Schopenhauer is concerned, the state simply has no moral mandate. It exists only to prevent wrong, and not to impose morality.

A further reason for this denial of any moral role to the state is bound to Schopenhauer’s metaphysics. His determinism and his theory of the innate and immutable individual moral character are important here. If one accepts that
the individual’s capacity for virtue lies beyond his control (rooted, perhaps, in some innate disposition or unalterable character), then one is led to wonder what it would mean for a state to pursue the goal of imposing moral virtue on the citizenry. This would surely amount to an attempt to alter the moral inclinations of those who were not already susceptible to the motive of compassion, which, Schopenhauer claims, is impossible. As we shall see later, the state certainly has a role to play in altering or ‘improving’ the behaviour of some individuals, but this does not consist of the inculcation of genuine virtue.

There is, however, an additional concern here, bound to the nature of virtue itself, which would surely prevent the state from ever being capable of enforcing it. Schopenhauer’s statement that legislation can be enforced to bring about a state of justice discloses the reason for which any attempt to impose morality must fail. In such a state of justice, everyone would act justly and would desist from harming others, but not from compassion or genuine personal virtue. Rather, they would respect the rights of others only from a self-interested fear of the punishments with which acts of wrong are met. As such, irrespective of appearances, even the most effective of states relies upon and perpetuates egoism. ‘If the State attains its object completely, it will produce the same phenomenon as if perfect justice of disposition everywhere prevailed; but the inner nature and origin of both phenomena will be the reverse. Thus in the latter case, it would be said that no one wished to do wrong, but in the former that no one wished to suffer wrong’ (WWRI: 346). Since, for Schopenhauer, real virtue is a matter of disposition and is characterized by selflessness, there is surely something paradoxical in the idea that it could be enforced under threat of punishment. As such, the nature of virtue itself means that ethics can never be imposed by the state, whose only means of motivation is appeal to self-interest.

It seems, then, that the state can have no moral role at all, for to attribute such to it would not only be contrary to the purpose of its existence, but also dangerous and futile. Schopenhauer appears to have drawn a very sharp distinction between the spheres of legislation and ethics, whereupon the former, in the face of the weakness of natural morality as a motive, simply makes a very particular use of ethical doctrine in order to act as ‘an institution of protection, rendered necessary by the manifold attacks to which man is exposed’ (WWR II: 594). However, the very fact that the state is concerned with the suffering of wrong (even if not so much with the doing of wrong) surely suggests some kind of moral purpose. What, after all, would be wrong with the suffering of wrong were it not wrong? However, Schopenhauer’s view of the state’s foundation reveals that he does not consider the state’s protective function to be moral in character at all.

The Origin, Foundation and Purpose of the State

As far as Schopenhauer is concerned, the state is a ‘masterpiece of the rational and accumulated egoism of all which understands itself,’ and therefore, ‘has put
the protection of everyone’s rights into the hands of a power infinitely superior to that of the individual and compels him to respect the rights of everyone else’ (BM: 129). Fundamentally, the state exists as the result of human selfishness, established by way of agreement between individual citizens, with a view to providing protection. Regardless of how much we may wish to be unrestrained personally, humans recognize the menace posed by the egoism of others and have agreed to prohibit wrong in the interests of personal security. Our abstract realisation that existence in the state of nature would be too risky, renders some form of collectively agreed protection desirable:

However agreeable wrongdoing is to the egoism of the individual in particular cases, it still has a necessary correlative in another individual’s suffering of wrong, for whom this is a great pain. Now since the faculty of reason, surveying the whole in thought, left the one-sided standpoint of the individual to which it belongs, and for the moment freed itself from attachment thereto, it saw the pleasure of wrongdoing in an individual always outweighed by a relatively greater pain in the other’s suffering of wrong. This faculty of reason also found that, because everything was here left to chance, everyone was bound to fear that the pleasures of occasional wrongdoing would much more rarely fall to his lot than would the pain of suffering wrong. Reason recognized from this that, to diminish the suffering spread over all, as well as to distribute it as uniformly as possible, the best and only means was to spare all men the pain of suffering wrong by all men’s renouncing the pleasure to be obtained from doing wrong. This means the State contract or the law. It is readily devised and gradually perfected by egoism which, by using the faculty of reason, proceeds methodically, and forsakes its one-sided point of view. (WWR I: 343)

The state’s foundation in rational egoism grounds Schopenhauer’s view of its purely protective function. It exists to defend individuals from wrong at the hands of other individuals or states, and to afford some protection against harm caused by nature. Through a constitutional division of powers, as opposed to reliance on the state’s capacity for self-restraint, the state, once developed, even affords protection against itself. Having considered the origin and foundation of this institution, it is possible to understand Schopenhauer’s denial that its protective role should be conceived of as moral in any way. In its prevention of the bellum omnium contra omnes, the state does not set out to prohibit wrong purely because it is wrong. Rather, the protection it offers is based entirely upon the collective self-interest of the people, such that the state ‘is by no means directed against egoism, but only against the injurious consequences of egoism arising out of the plurality of egoistic individuals, reciprocally affecting them, and disturbing their well-being’ (WWR I: 345). Legislation may have no moral purpose, then, but as will shortly become apparent, Schopenhauer’s grounding
of the state in a social contract effectively contributes a moral dimension to his theory of political obligation.

**Political Obligation and the Social Contract**

Schopenhauer’s theory of political obligation, as founded on the social contract,\(^{29}\) is based on a ‘tacit’ rather than an explicit form of agreement between state and citizen, whereby residing within the state and enjoying the benefits of so doing amount to entering into an agreement with the state, part of which involves an undertaking to obey the law. In addition to thus rendering the social contract the *logical*, rather than the *historical* foundation of the State (Copleston 1946: 168), Schopenhauer also offers an ‘evolutionary’ view of the social contract, in which rule, originally established by might, became rule by right, as rulers developed their constitutional roles and status.\(^{30}\) The extent to which this particular formulation of the social contract theory either suffers from, or convincingly meets, the challenges commonly faced by social contract approaches, is not my concern here.\(^{31}\) My purpose is rather to explore what the elements of his social contract theory suggest about the relationship between political and moral considerations in his political thought more generally.

We have already seen that wrong, for Schopenhauer, can be inflicted by violence or by cunning, the most common form of the latter being the lie. The broken contract, he claims, is the ‘most complete lie’, because a contract is a statement of what each party to it may expect of the other(s); if we have no intention of adhering to our own obligations under the terms of the agreement, then, we provide the other with a false motive for acting in accordance with our wishes:

> The most complete lie, however, is the *broken contract*, since all the stipulations mentioned here are found completely and clearly together. For, by my entering into a contract, the promised performance of the other person is immediately and admittedly the motive for my performance now taking place. The promises are deliberately and formally exchanged; it is assumed that the truth of the statement made in the contract is in the power of each of the parties. If the other breaks the contract, he has deceived me, and, by substituting merely fictitious motives in my knowledge, he has directed my will in accordance with his intention, has extended the authority of his will to another individual, and has thus committed a distinct and complete wrong. On this are based the moral legality and validity of contracts. (WWR I: 338)\(^{32}\)

So, the contract is not merely an arrangement of convenience. It is also a moral institution, the deliberate breach of which is the most complete lie and an infliction of wrong on the other party.

This, of course, adds an interesting moral dimension to Schopenhauer’s political theory, for if the state is founded on a contract, then it seems that though
it has no moral remit, it nonetheless has a moral foundation. Therefore it is fair to say that in spite of its basis in egoism, by virtue of the type of institution the state is, its laws and decrees possess a certain moral legitimacy. Moreover, obedience to it, that is, fulfilling one’s duties as a citizen, constitutes a moral obligation. After all, a contract based on egoism is still morally binding and any violation of it remains wrong. Failure to faithfully execute one’s civic duty, then, constitutes a breach of contract, which amounts to the imposition of wrong on all members of the state. The moral foundation of the state certainly informs Schopenhauer’s thought on the subject of how breaches of the social contract ought to be dealt with; his account of jurisprudence and his theory of punishment being areas of his thought where moral concerns exercise considerable influence.

The Theory of Punishment

It is in the light of this moral obligation to fulfil one’s obligations under the social contract that Schopenhauer is able to derive a right to punish offenders. Any failure to obey the law constitutes a breach of the social contract, thus wronging all of the state’s members; a violation that the state has both a moral right and a moral duty to punish:

apart from the State, there is no right to punish. All right to punish is established by positive law alone, which has determined before the offence a punishment therefore, and the threat of such punishment should, as a countermotive, outweigh all possible motives for that offence. This positive law is to be regarded as sanctioned and acknowledged by all the citizens of the State. Thus it is based on a common contract that the members of the State are duty bound to fulfil in all circumstances, and hence to inflict the punishment on the one hand, and to endure it on the other; therefore the endurance is with right enforceable. Consequently, the immediate object of punishment in the particular case is fulfilment of the law as a contract; but the sole object of the law is to deter from encroachment on the rights of others. For, in order that each may be protected from suffering wrong, all have combined into the State, renounced wrongdoing, and taken upon themselves the burdens of maintaining the State. (WWR I: 347)

It is important that the state has the duty as well as the right to punish offences. To leave crime unpunished would be as wrong as the crime itself, for both involve a breach of the social contract. Since the purpose of the state is the protection of right, this contract must involve the obligation both of the citizens to accept the law and endure its punishments on the one hand, and of the state to enforce the law and carry out these punishments on the other. What, though, is the purpose of punishment?

The punishment of offenders, though a moral obligation for the state, does not itself have a moral purpose. That is to say, it contributes to the fulfilment of the
state’s obligation under the social contract, but serves no direct moral role itself. Schopenhauer is clear that the main function of punishment as a practice or institution is to act as a deterrent to crime, the idea being that punishment will dissuade people from committing acts that cause others to suffer wrong: ‘Yet man has the right to provide for the safety of society; but this can be done only by interdicting all those actions denoted by the word “criminal,” in order to prevent them by means of countermotives, which are the threatened punishments. This threat can be effective only by carrying out the punishments where the case occurs in spite of it’ (WWR I: 348). Considered as an institution or practice, then, the purpose of punishment is deterrence. However, the purpose of punishment in the particular case of any particular instance of punishment is ‘fulfilment of the law as a contract’ (WWR I: 347). Schopenhauer’s thought here anticipates H.L.A. Hart’s distinction between the question of the “general justifying aim” of punishment, which he answers in forward-looking, utilitarian, terms, and the question of the distribution of punishment, which he answers in backward-looking, retributivist, terms.\(^{33}\)

This conception of punishment coheres with Schopenhauer’s insistence that the state’s only role is that of protecting right. It has no moral purpose to fulfil and so the state ought not to aspire to any more through punishment than the prevention of wrong. Accordingly, punishment aims only at affecting behaviour; not at real moral improvement. This is why Schopenhauer describes legislation as a ‘complete a register as possible of countermotives to all criminal actions that can possibly be imagined’ (WWR I: 344). Along with ethics, the law recognizes both that the human will is not free, and that a man’s moral character is unalterable. Since a man’s disposition cannot be changed, to attribute to punishment the task of achieving the moral transformation of offenders would be futile. As such, punishment acts only as a countermotive to crime: ‘For laws start from the correct assumption that the will is not morally free, for otherwise it could not be directed, but that it is subject to compulsion by motives. Accordingly, the object of laws is to oppose all possible motives to crime by stronger countermotives in the form of threatened penalties, and a penal code is nothing but a catalog of countermotives to criminal actions’ (FW: 90). Through punishment, then, ‘real moral reform is not at all possible, but only determent from the deed.’ All that we can hope to achieve as a result of punishment is the ‘correction of knowledge and the awakening of a desire to work’ (WWR II, 597); the convicted wrongdoer coming to see how his ends might better be achieved. Indeed, Schopenhauer praises the American penitentiary system for following precisely these principles.\(^{34}\)

With this in mind, it becomes clear that there is more to punishment than is suggested by Schopenhauer’s insistence on its purpose as a deterrent to crime and a means of fulfilling the social contract. It seems that punishment also plays a corrective role of an instructional nature. It may be the case that punishment cannot alter the individual’s character or moral disposition, but it is not limited to discouraging recidivism and deterring potential offenders. By correcting the offender’s knowledge, punishment can direct a man along a more socially
acceptable path in life, as he comes to realize that there are better ways for him to pursue his ends. As Schopenhauer remarks, ‘all that we can do is clear the head, correct the insight, bring the man to a better comprehension of what objectively exists, of the true circumstances of life’ (BM: 193–4). Of course, that the state undertakes to ‘re-educate’ offenders in this way should not be understood as a moral function of some kind. As with any punishment, it is carried out in accordance with the moral obligations imposed upon the state by the social contract, but is ultimately rooted in collective egoism. Nevertheless, in so far as the ‘re-education’ of offenders serves to prevent wrong, this is surely a corrective role that the state can and should play. In spite of the fact that the state has no moral purpose of its own, then, the punishment and ‘re-education’ of criminals constitutes a moral obligation, which enable it to grant the security that it exists to provide.

**Jurisprudence**

Having identified deterrence as the primary aim of punishment *qua* institution (fulfilment of the law being its justification in the particular case), one might expect Schopenhauer’s approach to jurisprudence to be a somewhat simple matter of establishing harsh punishments for their deterrent effects. However, his actual approach is more sophisticated and morally-guided. Drawing our attention to its deterrent aim, Schopenhauer clearly distinguishes punishment from revenge; a thoroughly immoral and unjustifiable response to crime with which punishment is often confused:

Thus the law and its fulfilment, namely punishment, are directed essentially to the *future*, not to the *past*. This distinguishes *punishment* from *revenge*, for revenge is motivated simply by what has happened, and hence by the past as such. All retaliation for wrong by inflicting a pain without any object for the future is revenge, and can have no other purpose than consolation for the suffering one has endured by the sight of the suffering one has caused in another. Such a thing is wickedness and cruelty, and cannot be ethically justified. Wrong inflicted on me by someone does not in any way entitle me to inflict wrong on him. Retaliation of evil for evil without any further purpose cannot be justified, either morally or otherwise. (WWR I: 347–8)

In seeking to deter individuals from certain courses of action, punishment looks to the future in its object. Retribution, by contrast, considers only the past, aiming to impose evil on someone as personal consolation for the wrong we have suffered at his hands. This is motivated by malice, the incentive that has as its goal the woe of others; something Schopenhauer identifies as morally abhorrent and unjustifiable.

For this reason, when outlining the principles of jurisprudence, Schopenhauer rejects the idea of the *jus talionis*, stating that there are a number of
factors to take into account when determining a suitable punishment. Generally speaking, the injury that a law seeks to prevent is a reasonable measure of the degree of severity demanded in the punishment of that offence, but the harshness of a punishment is not given by the moral worthlessness of the forbidden action’ (WWR II: 598). As such, we do not establish the severity of a punishment solely in terms of the amount of wrong we consider the offender to have inflicted and so deserve in return. After all, endurance of suffering on the part of the condemned does not constitute the expiation of his crime, whilst the purpose of punishment is to deter rather than to simply repay wrong with an equal amount of evil.

Moreover, when discussing the law, Schopenhauer adds that, ‘In determining the measure of the punishment along with the magnitude of the injury to be prevented, we take into consideration the strength of the motives prompting us to the forbidden action ... Each of these counter-motives must therefore decidedly outweigh the motives that lead to these actions’ (WWR II: 598). By bearing in mind the strength of the motive that causes the criminal to offend in the first place, we ensure that the punishment should appear severe enough to deter the crime too risky, thus outweighing the motive to offend and setting the criminal’s will on a different course. Since it is wrong to exact revenge punitively, however, Schopenhauer does not adopt the obvious course of recommending severe penalties. After all, where the aim of punishment is to deter, it is important not that sentences actually are unpleasant, but only that they should appear so: ‘where possible, the apparent suffering of the punishment should exceed the actual’ (WWR II: 597).

A good initial measure for the appropriate severity of a punishment, then, is the amount of wrong that the offender inflicted, but alongside the ability to deter the criminal, what we should really look for is a punishment that demands from him something of equal value to that which he takes from another in his crime. Each person, upon entering into the contract, demands protection of his life, liberty and property. As security against this he pledges his own, so that if he offends and breaches this contract, his pledge is forfeit. As Schopenhauer states, ‘the pledge must be appropriate to the value of that for which it answers. Therefore everyone is justified in demanding as a pledge the life of another, as a guarantee for the security of his own, but not for the security of his property, for which the freedom and so forth of another is sufficient pledge’ (WWR II: 597–8). For this reason, he argues that capital punishment is necessary for the punishment of murder. Schopenhauer’s approach to jurisprudence is therefore more subtle than the principle of the jus talionis. On Schopenhauer’s model, punishment is characterized not by vengeance but by a deterrent purpose and a concern for justice, such that punishments take from an offender only that which is judged to be his pledge in the contract as security against his crime. This may or may not be identical to what he imposed upon or took from his victim, but it should be of equal worth. Any punishment should be harsh enough to deter a man from offending, demanding as payment for his crime something equal in value to what he has taken, but it
must *not* impose pointless, excessively harsh and ineffectual torment on him simply for the sake of making him suffer.

What is remarkable in all of this is the degree to which moral considerations influence Schopenhauer’s thought on matters of punishment. He not only opposes as unjustifiable any vengeful tendencies that might influence jurisprudential proceedings, but also advocates the consideration of moral concerns in the state’s attempt to deter crime. In addition to his rejection of cruel or unnecessarily harsh punishments, Schopenhauer insists, most strikingly of all, that we have only the *right* to demand from the offender something equal to his pledge against it in the social contract. Convicted criminals might be dealt with severely by the state, but they are not reduced to the status of objects. They can expect consistency in their treatment and to receive only those punishments which accord with the severity of their crimes; penalties which the law has set out in advance and which are not subject to arbitrary alteration.

Indeed, these considerations of justice become more apparent in the appendix to the *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, where Schopenhauer argues that any suspension of a man’s intellectual freedom means that he cannot be held responsible for his deeds. If the intellect, through derangement, intoxication or passion, is unable to present all relevant motives to the will, then the will is unable to pursue a course of action according to its usual disposition. In such cases, a man either does not know what he is doing, or is incapable of being swayed by certain motives that might normally affect him, such as his fear of the law’s punishment. As a result, the action is not his own and he cannot justly be punished for it. Here, we see again Schopenhauer’s concern to maintain justice, even if it means that a wrong should go unpunished. Though the law is meant to be concerned with actions only, in such cases motives become increasingly relevant, to the degree that their revelation grants an understanding of the action, in light of which the state serves the interests of justice by foregoing its right and duty to punish. To ignore the agent’s motives here would be to misconstrue the action and punish it wrongly. This seems to be less a consideration of the effectiveness of such a punishment than one of justice. After all, the unjust punishment of a man who was not ‘in control of himself’ would surely still deter others of sound mind from committing the same offence. However, what seems to count here is that it is simply not *fair* to punish a man whose intellectual freedom was lost, and though the state has an obligation to punish wrong, the principles of justice are of greater moment.

As a result, it is fair to say that Schopenhauer’s theory of punishment is deeply influenced by his moral thought. With the state founded in the social contract, the citizens have a *moral* duty to obey the law and to endure the state’s punishment when they this law is breached. Though punishment itself aims only at deterrence in order to ensure that the state fulfils its purpose as a protector of right, the state’s basis in the social contract renders punishment a *moral* obligation. Moreover, Schopenhauer’s approach to jurisprudence is clearly guided by concerns of justice, consistency, the ‘humane’ treatment of criminals and the fairness of any sentence handed down.
The Value of the State

So what, in Schopenhauer’s thought, is the value of the state? It is clear that as a public body, it can never have the kind of transformative value possessed by those worthwhile states that can be achieved in life, such as the resignation of the will or aesthetic contemplation, for instance. Perhaps the answer to this question really consists in identifying the value of the social conditions brought about by a successful and efficient state. Of course, since the state does not bring the individual to the kinds of conditions associated with genius or sainthood, for instance, whatever value attaches to the state of affairs that it does achieve will evidently be ‘this-worldly’ in nature.

We have seen that the ‘state of justice’ realized by the successful state is a semblance of virtue only and not the real thing. As such, it cannot have the kind of value that we might associate with virtue itself, so in what does the value of such an amoral state of affairs consist? It seems that the value of such a situation amounts to little more than the fact that the citizens will it, for it allows each person to pursue his livelihood and well-being as he sees fit, provided that he does not wilfully harm others. It may be the case that an atmosphere of relative peace and security permits other achievements, such as the development of science and the arts, but these are valuable only because people desire their practice and preservation. Indeed, such an environment may well render possible the flourishing of genius, for where man does not have to defend himself at all times, he can engage in the arts. Where one has arts and education, there exist conditions in which the natural genius might manifest itself. Nevertheless, this fact does not contribute much to the value of the state, for the cultivation of genius is not the purpose of the state. Moreover, the directly felt benefits of genius are limited: they do not touch all of humanity in the same way. In consequence, whatever other benefits might emerge from the existence of the state, its actual value has its foundation largely in collective egoism. Therefore, the state is valuable only in so far as it upholds certain minimum standards of behaviour, thus fulfilling its obligations under the social contract. As such, it seems that the value of any state is largely dependent upon its success and is ultimately derived from the value of the conditions that success yields.

However, the state’s value is not entirely dependent on its capacity to serve the popular will. Indeed, in some instances, the state may be of moral worth precisely because it resists the popular will, particularly in those cases where this will is driven by a sense of public outrage. When faced with the more vengeful tendencies of the population, for instance, the well-constituted state is guided by considerations of justice. It does not capitulate to the popular desire for retribution, but adheres to the demands of procedural justice and passes down only those penalties set out in law for the crimes in question; ensuring that those convicted of offences are fairly sentenced, that mitigating factors are considered in the course of sentencing, and that arbitrary or cruel punishments are avoided. Moreover, as an institution founded on a contract, the state has a certain value
in its own right: our obedience to it is a moral obligation and in fulfilling its role according to the social contract, it performs a moral duty.

Conclusion

It has been shown here that Schopenhauer’s political thought is more closely linked to his ethics than it might at first appear. Schopenhauer’s own claims suggest that apart from the moral foundation of the state in the social contract and the inverted application of certain moral concepts on the part of legislation, the two areas of thought are distinct. The state appears to be an amoral institution founded on a collective rational egoism, serving a purpose that removes it from the moral sphere. In this light, the state seems to have value solely as a necessary instrument of order and protection in a world where virtue cannot be guaranteed. However irrespective of its basis in egoism, by grounding the state in the social contract, Schopenhauer effectively renders obedience to the law a moral obligation for the citizens, whilst conferring upon the state a moral obligation to punish offenders. Furthermore, in accordance with Schopenhauer’s approach to jurisprudence, the state must be guided in both its legislative and its juridical duty by moral considerations of fairness and the correct treatment of the condemned; considerations that reach beyond his broader claim that the only real aim of punishment is to deter.

NOTES

1 See FW: 35–40 and WWR I: 286–93.
2 See BM: 139.
3 See WWR I: 294–5 and BM: 120–1.
4 See WWR I: 332 and BM: 131.
5 See WWR II: 215.
6 See WWR I: 332.
7 See BM: 158.
8 See Jacquette 2005: 225.
9 See Jacquette 2005: 225.
10 See BM: 52.
11 See Jacquette 2005: 226: ‘We extend the same right not to have pain and suffering imposed on others by our actions that we believe ourselves to deserve as a result of what we find objectionable about surrendering any part of our needs or wants in order for others to enhance their own will to life at our expense.’
12 See WWR I: 319 and WWR II: 575.
13 See WWR I: 339: ‘Indeed, there would be no talk of right if there were no wrong. The concept of right contains merely the negation of wrong, and under it is subsumed every action which is not an overstepping of the boundary above described, in other words, is not a denial of another’s will for the stronger affirmation of one’s own.’
14 See WWR I: 336: ‘how could the mere declaration of my will to exclude others from the use of a thing give me at once a right to it? Obviously the declaration itself requires a
foundation of right, instead of Kant’s assumption that it is one . . . For it is so clear and easy to see that there can be absolutely no *just and lawful seizure* of a thing, but only a lawful *appropriation or acquired possession* of it, through originally applying our own powers to it.’

15 See Locke 1960: 287–8: ‘Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every man has a *Property* in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by the *labour something annexed to it*, that excludes the common right of other Men. For this Labour being the unquestionable Property of the Labourer, no man but he can have a right to what it is once joyned to, at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others.’

16 See WWR I: 335–6.
17 See WWR I: 341.
18 Indeed, Schopenhauer rejects the idea that only those rights really exist which are granted by the state, arguing that such a contention effectively conflates the means of enforcing rights with the actual origin and meaning of the term ‘right’ itself. See WWR II: 594.

19 See WWR I: 346–7.
20 See WWR I: 369.
21 The distinction between manslaughter and murder might still be maintained along these lines. Though both involve a notion of deliberate harm, they do so to different degrees and so whilst both remain criminal, the latter is the more serious offence.

24 See WWR II: 597.
25 For a definition of justice, see BM: 148–9.
26 See BM: 139–45.
27 See WWR II: 595.
29 See WWR I: 347 and 349.
30 See PP II: 248–9.
32 See also BM: 158.
33 See Hart 1968: 230–7 and 158–61. I am grateful to Alex Neill for drawing my attention to this.
34 See FW: 45.
36 See WWR II: 598.
37 Of course, any punishment must still be unpleasant enough to prevent recidivism amongst those who suffer it.
38 Note that Schopenhauer fails to provide any measures or formulae that would serve to establish the worth of particular securities and the nature of the pledges that they would therefore require.
39 See WWR II: 598. Indeed, Schopenhauer adds that since the law punished rather than avenges the deed, death should be the penalty for attempted murder too. The deterrent role of punishment emerges clearly here, for in terms of motivation there is no
distinction between murder and attempted murder. Attempts at murder may not always fail, so the deed, successful or otherwise, must be strongly discouraged.

So, murder, successful or otherwise, may be punishable by death, but poaching, for instance, is not, for a citizen does not pledge his life as security against the livestock of another. For Schopenhauer’s examples, see WWR II: 598.

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