

Schopenhauerian Optimism and an Alternative to Resignation?

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The pictures with which we are most familiar always show a figure displaying the same posture and attitude.¹ A hard and proper, old and worldly-wise man. Clear, piercing glance; wrinkled brow; drawn, tense lips; a large, broad forehead, framed by a bushy shock of white hair; all of which squeeze out from the confines of a high, white collar, seated within a stiff, black frock coat. The name we associate with the picture is "Arthur Schopenhauer." If we study the picture for a moment, we immediately understand why Ira Gershwin would quip in song, "My nights were sour, spent with Schopenhauer."² A night spent contemplating this figure would be sour. It would become bitter with despair and dread, moreover, if this figure were to speak his truth.² We can imagine him metamorphosing into Nietzsche's Silenus, revealing not a Satyr's truth, but a philosopher's; "What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not *to be* to be nothing. But the second best for you is to die soon."³ This figure, the representation of Arthur Schopenhauer, becomes the paradigm of the pessimist as his philosophy becomes the model of philosophical pessimism.⁴ And as he so readily philosophized, the will manifests its character corporally in its representations, which, in turn, mirrors its nature; Schopenhauer's physiognomy manifests his will, and his philosophy mirrors his nature. He looks and speaks pessimism.

Despite the councils of both his appearance and theories, nevertheless, there have been those who have said that Schopenhauer was not really a pessimist. Nietzsche even constructed a partial set of conditions under which Schopenhauer would have become a pessimist;

"... if deprived of his enemies, of Hegel, of women, of sensuality, and the whole will to persistence. Without these, Schopenhauer would *not* have persisted, one may wager on that; he would run away; but his enemies held him fast, his enemies seduced him ever again to existence; his anger was, just as in the case of the Cynics of antiquity, his balm, his refreshment, his reward, his specific against disgust, his happiness."⁵

Besides having his enemies, Nietzsche adds, he believed in morality and played the flute. As Nietzsche asks rhetorically, "What? is that really a pessimist?"⁶ Kierkegaard concurred that is not a pessimist. Imagine his joy as his rudeness stormed and thundered down on the heads of the German professors of philosophy. Look at his desire for fame and renown. If Schopenhauer was a pessimist, Kierkegaard argues, he would have scorned fame as he would have scorned pleasure. But he did not. Even his pessimism and ascetic ideal is flaunted and locked within a system, as if they were some donishly-dry, hair-splitting

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truth. One finds that, "Not without great self-satisfaction he says, he is the first who has designated a place for asceticism in a system. Yes, that is completely the talk of a professor, I am *the first*..."⁷

We can recognize other aspects of Schopenhauer's personality which seem to be incompatible with pessimism, e. g., his belief that the truth will ultimately win out.⁸ It would seem that a true pessimist ascribes to just the opposite belief, i. e., the false ultimately wins out. We might also note that in his later life, after the publication of *Parerga and Paralipomena*, he obtained his longed for fame and renown. He also had his circle of admirers and disciples. Caroline Luise Marquet was dead, and this saved him sixty talers a year.⁹ In Frankfurt he had his comfortable lodgings on the Schöne Aussicht, his dinners at the Englische Hof, his gilded Buddha, his daily, two hour walks, the theatre, his flute and poodle. Schopenhauer's life style, behavior, and some of his beliefs may display some form of *Joie de Vivre*. Even if he believed that life was in vain, and that it would be better if the world did not exist, he had, at least, the consolations of knowing that he uncovered both the reasons for this vanity and a way out of this misery. Max Scheler even attributes an element of sadistic glee to Schopenhauer's personality, which "... comes out at times in his letters, where he can hardly conceal his elation at hearing from friends who wrote to him as well-wishers in their toils and troubles; he does not answer them with help or consolation, but merely observes that they now obtain firsthand confirmation of the soundness of his teachings."¹⁰

One may even note this element of Schopenhauer's personality in his beautiful, yet horrifying, descriptions of existence. There probably has not been a philosopher before or since Schopenhauer who drew with such fatal and beautiful strokes the terrors of existence. As Nietzsche remarks, these expressions are both "ravishing and delightful."¹¹ When one reads Schopenhauer, one is not only ravished by the gruesome tale he has to tell, but also delighted by how well he tells it. Patrick Gardiner makes the same observation when he quotes, with approval, Thomas Mann's contention that with these ghastly tales, Schopenhauer's literary genius reached "... the most brilliant and icy peak of perfection; ... his detailed analysis of human vice and folly and the misery that inexorably from these have heightened, obsessional, almost sadistic quality, as if he were partly luxuriating in the frightfulness of the story he had to tell."¹²

One can imagine that Schopenhauer might have been like a wide-eyed boy telling ghost stories around a campfire. Scared at the sound of his own story, but delighting in his fear, so that both his joy and fear drive him to greater heights of eloquence and terror. The world, according to Schopenhauer, is ultimately the metaphysical will. The manifestation in space and time of a single, blind, insatiable, striving force which imprints its nature in each and everything. The multiplicity of our phenomenal world, the world as representation, a world populated by the mundane things of human experience — including ourselves and other sentient beings — was viewed by Schopenhauer as a world in tension, conflict, pain, and misery:

The phenomenon, the objectivity of the one will to live; is a world in all the plurality of its parts and forms. Existence itself, and the kind of

existence, in the totality as well as in every part, is only from the will. . . The will appears in everything, precisely as it determines itself in itself and outside time. The world is only the mirror of the willing; and all finiteness, all suffering, all misery that it contains, belongs to the expression of what the will wills, are as they are because the will so wills.¹³

To be, for Schopenhauer, is to be will. And to be will entails constant desire, want, striving, and wishing. Since all beings are will by their very nature, and “all *willing* springs from lack, from deficiency, and thus from suffering,” all beings suffer from their essential nature.¹⁴ The idea that to be is to suffer signified for Schopenhauer that it is best not to be.

To exist as a human being, Schopenhauer argues, is the unkindest fate of all. Human beings suffer not only the pains and miseries of the present, these are augmented by their faculty of reason, which recalls past misery and anticipates future pain, “. . . tormenting thoughts, from which the animal is completely free, living as it does in the present, and thus in enviable ease and unconcern.”¹⁵ Even when we are able to satisfy some of our desires, fulfill some of our needs, quiet some of our miseries, Schopenhauer believes that we never experience any positive pleasure and joy. Pleasure, joy, and happiness do not exist within a Schopenhauerian world. They lack the same status and tone as pain, misery, and sorrow. The former are merely the negation of the latter, i. e., not pain, not misery, and not sorrow; “. . . pain is something *positive* that automatically makes itself known; satisfaction and pleasures are something *negative*, the mere elimination of the former.”¹⁶ Thus Schopenhauer compares life to a walk over a circular path of red hot coals.¹⁷ Sure, there are a few cool spots, but we are compelled to continue walking. These cool spots, further, are merely places in which we do not burn. Even if we could remain on these cool spots, he would continue, we would move on because of boredom. Our life is seen by Schopenhauer as being “tossed backwards and forwards between pain and boredom.”¹⁸ When we satisfy some desire or want, the attendant moment of peace is never satisfying, never has any positive content itself. Our desires drive us ever forward with wishes and hopes which never deliver what they promise. Each person is “. . . constantly lying on the revolving wheel of Ixion, is always drawing water in the sieve of the Danaids, and is the eternally thirsty Tantalus.”¹⁹ In most cases, “. . . we are like Phineus, all of whose food was contaminated and rendered unfit to eat by the harpies.”²⁰ Like Phineus, life leaves us just enough sustenance to get by, but not enough to really alter our condition. We still remain hungry. We still hurt.

As Arthur Hübscher points out, “Schopenhauer’s pessimism is not based on the accidental, isolated, unimportant things which can make us disgusted with life, [this] philosophical pessimist wants to give an explanation of the universal and essential, for the unchanging primary essence of the world, which is based on the will-to-live.”²¹ Schopenhauer’s pessimism is not based on any observations concerning those things which may accidentally — every once in a while — frustrate us. It is based on his analysis of our fundamental condition. To live is to desire; to desire is to suffer. To suffer, however, is not worthwhile. This meant

for Schopenhauer that our life was not worthwhile. Although Schopenhauer describes the human situation in some of the most melancholy terms found within the history of Western philosophy, he does suggest that we can find brief moments of reprieve from the mad striving of our will, and that there is an escape from this misery. We can obtain moments of repose, he argues, via the contemplation of great works of art. In aesthetic contemplation we become "pure, will-less, painless, timeless, subjects of knowledge."²² We are momentarily delivered from the fierce striving-after-our-desires by losing ourselves in our perception of the work of art. The object is no longer viewed from a practical perspective, as either a possible end of a desire, or as a means for satisfying some other want, it is viewed disinterestedly, i. e., without reference to our needs, desires, wishes, and hopes. Because the great work of art absorbs us, removing us from the complicated matrix of our constant desires, we become free from suffering. The wheel of Ixion stands still, but only momentarily. For this state is also terminated by boredom. Ultimately, Schopenhauer claims, the wheel must spin again.

While aesthetic contemplation of great works of art provides us with momentary relief, resignation or denial of the will offers the possibility of lasting repose. Instead of playing the distressing and painful game of the will, one seeks those things which are distressing to the will. This leads, Schopenhauer argues, to the eventual deliverance from the will, which is to say, the misery of existence. One does this by becoming an ascetic, "By the expression *asceticism* . . . I understand in the narrower sense this deliberate breaking of the will by refusing the agreeable and looking for the disagreeable, the voluntarily chosen way of life of penance and self-chastisement, for the constant mortification of the will."²³ By practicing self-mortification, one eventually frustrates one's own willing. This practice, further, is self-perpetuating. By seeking the undesirable, by fasting, poverty, denial of any allegedly innocent pleasure, the ascetic experiences ever clearer the vanity of existence. The final result of resignation, the denial and quieting of the will, is calm, tranquility, peace of mind, and indifference towards the affairs of one's life. The ascetic reaches a state in which "He now looks back calmly and with a smile on the phantasmagoria of this world which was once able to move and agonize even his mind, but now stands before him as indifferently as chessmen at the end of a game, or as fancy dress cast off in the morning, the form and figure which taunted and disquieted us on the carnival night."²⁴

Thus Schopenhauer believes that asceticism is a "path of salvation."²⁵ This has led A. Phillips Griffiths to remark that his infinite admiration for Schopenhauer was bounded; "my admiration for Arthur [Schopenhauer] is fired by the fact that I feel he got things nearly right, I cannot stomach his hideous optimism. He said there was 'a road to salvation'; and he was not being ironical."²⁶ Griffiths' point is vastly different from Nietzsche's and Kierkegaard's. While the latter attributes an optimistic dimension to Schopenhauer's personality, perhaps, in a spirit of irony, Griffiths points to an optimistic dimension to his philosophy. Perhaps Griffiths is also being ironical. In any case, his contention is more philosophically interesting than either Nietzsche's or Kierkegaard's. Although an analysis of Schopenhauer's personality would be

an interesting psychological study, from a philosophical point of view, the important question concerns Schopenhauer's theories, their truth, or any insights which they may suggest. Even if Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are correct in noting optimistic dimensions to Schopenhauer's personality, this only suggests that this was a conflict between his thinking and doing. It may even be the case that this conflict is manifest in his philosophy, exemplified at some level of his theorizing. But this does not, however, really tell us anything about his philosophy in general or particular. If Schopenhauer's philosophy is pessimistic, this is established by the content of his philosophy, not by his behavior. Nor does his behavior, the way he lived his life, have anything to do with the truth of his claims. Besides, Schopenhauer can easily defend himself from criticism like Nietzsche's and Kierkegaard's. As he remarked, "it is a strange demand on a moralist that he should command no other virtue than that which he himself possesses," it is also a strange demand of a philosopher to recognize no other ways of living than that which he lives.²⁷ After all, Schopenhauer could always point out that like any other person he is subject to all the temptations and seductions offered by life, or that he just was not cut out of the right stuff for asceticism or resignation. This does not mean, he might continue, that he does not recognize the truth or value of pessimism in a world as miserable as ours.

Griffiths deplors Schopenhauer's belief that there is a way to salvation. Why does he consider this hideous optimism? It is difficult to say. Perhaps he believes that anything which expresses optimism is hideous because it is wrong, or that the prescription of any method for salvation is hideous because it misleads and deceives — there is no salvation. Griffiths may have been happier with Schopenhauer if he had said there is no salvation. After all, he said that he believed Schopenhauer got things nearly right. Perhaps he would have thought that Schopenhauer had gotten things right if he denied salvation. In any case, Griffiths seems to suggest that Schopenhauer could have been more pessimistic than he was. He could have argued that neither aesthetic contemplation nor asceticism provide any repose or reprieve from the misery of existence; that there is never any respite from suffering.

While Griffiths is correct in noting an optimistic dimension to Schopenhauer's philosophy, this point is misleading. Although Schopenhauer maintains that we can escape misery, reach some favorable outcome of one of our own projects, by emphasizing this aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy, one misses the heart of his thought. His philosophy, even though there could be more pessimistic ones, is still extremely pessimistic. Indeed, Schopenhauer held that even though there was the possibility of salvation from the will, this was the worst of all possible worlds. Thus we find that he adopts just the opposite position of Leibniz:

"... against the palpably sophistical proofs of Leibniz that this is the best of all possible worlds, we may even oppose seriously and honestly the proof that it is the *worst* of all possible worlds. For possible means not what we may picture in our imagination, but what can actually exist and last. Now this world is arranged as it had to be if it were capable of continuing without great difficulty to exist; if it were a little

worse, it would be no longer capable of continuing to exist. Consequently, since a worse world could not continue to exist, it is absolutely impossible and so this world itself is the worst of all possible worlds."²⁸

Even though Schopenhauer believes that there is salvation, this world as it is, is still considered to be the worst world which could exist and endure. Schopenhauer might even point out to Griffiths that the path to salvation is a long, painful trip; one which includes the denial of all those things we usually desire. It is also one, he might add, which is only travelled by very few individuals. The majority of human beings just do not have the right sort of constitution to make this venture. And when someone reaches salvation, instead of obtaining some highly enjoyable, pleasurable situation, what one obtains is some Buddhistic absorption into the selflessness of oblivion. Seen in this light, what Schopenhauer has to say about the road to salvation, the means of travel, the number of travellers, and the final result of the trip, one finds that this entire venture is not some happy affair.

And our world may be just the worse from the fact that this salvation of dubious worth is open to a scant few. The "hideous optimism" which Griffiths finds so difficult to stomach, may simply serve as another element in Schopenhauer's pessimistic world view.

II

I would now like to consider what appears to be a path to salvation, one that looks like an alternative to resignation and denial of the will. It is also a path which is not strewn with the ghastly rigors of self-denial and self-mortification, and, at whose end, something other than a Buddhistic absorption into nothingness is suggested. Although the possibility of yet another way to escape the bonds of misery may be judged by Griffiths to make Schopenhauer's philosophy just that more hideous, it is worth exploring. To this end it is worthwhile to quote a lengthy passage from Schopenhauer's *On the Basis of Morality*, where he contrasts a morally good with a morally bad character.

"The bad man everywhere feels a thick partition between himself and everything outside him. The world to him is *absolute non-ego* and his relation to it is primarily hostile; thus the keynote of his disposition is hatred, spitefulness, suspicion, envy, and delight at the sight of another's distress. The good character, on the other hand, lives in an external world that is homogeneous with his own true being. The others are not non-ego for him, but are "I once more." His fundamental relation to everyone is, therefore, friendly; he feels himself intimately akin to all beings, takes an immediate interest in their weal and woe, and confidently assumes the same sympathy in them. The results of this are his deep inward peace and that confident, calm, and contented mood by virtue of which everyone is happy when he is near at hand. When in trouble, the bad character has no confidence in the assistance of others; if he appeals for help, he does so without any

assurance; when he obtains it, he accepts it without gratitude, since he can hardly understand it except as the effect of other people's folly . . . The moral situation in which the bad character essentially and inevitably finds itself can easily drive him to despair. The good character will appeal to the assistance of others with just as much assurance as the consciousness he has of his readiness to give them his help."²⁹

This contrast between good and bad characters reveals an aspect of his ethical theory which has been overlooked. For it seems that a morally good person, a person who has compassion for other suffering beings, is a person who lacks good reasons to deny his or her will and to resign.

Schopenhauer argues that the essential difference between the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of good and bad characters is epistemically based. Morally bad individuals function under the delusion of what Schopenhauer calls the *principium individuationis* (space and time), which makes possible the plurality of the phenomenal world, and which teaches that there is an absolute separation and difference between all things. Under this delusion, bad characters view this world and everything in it as foreign and other, as non-ego. Morally good individuals, he argues, transcend this delusion and realize the metaphysical truth that "Individuation is mere phenomenon or appearance and originates through space and time. There are nothing but the forms of all the objects of my cerebral cognitive faculty and are conditioned by them. And so even plurality and diversity of individuals are mere phenomenon, that is, exist only in *my representation*. My true inner being exists in every living thing as directly as it makes itself known in my self-consciousness. In Sanskrit *tat tvam asi* (this art thou) is the formula, the standing expression, for this knowledge."³⁰ Morally good persons penetrate the veil of *maya*, the delusion of the *principium individuationis*, via an intuitive insight into the unity of being. This intuition stems from just that quality which confers moral goodness to their characters, namely, compassion. In compassionating another's distress, Schopenhauer claims, these characters participate immediately in another's misery. They feel the other's pain in the other's person just like they feel their own pain. They recognize their true inner nature, then, in others. Unlike bad characters, who feel alienated and estranged from others and the world, good characters feel at home in a world which is homogeneous with their true nature. They realize that the true nature of the world and others is their true nature.

These feelings of estrangement and kinship play a vital role in how morally good and morally bad individuals relate to their fellow creatures. Bad individuals view others as either means to satisfy their own desires, or as obstacles to, and competitors for, those things they need and want. Their attitudes towards others are primarily hostile, defined in terms of hatred, spite, malice, and delight in other's miseries and misfortunes. When these types of characters are in trouble, and need the help of others, they believe that others will not help — unless they realize that they could receive some pay-off. They think that others never help simply out of some altruistic nature. This leads them to despair. Good characters, on the other hand, are friendly towards others because of their feelings of kinship. When others need help, they help simply because of the other's distress.

They, thus, take an immediate interest in the other's welfare. They also assume that others take an interest in their well-being. When good characters need help, they feel assured that they will receive help, just as they know they would help others needing help. The results of these beliefs and attitudes are the good person's deep inward peace, confidence, calm, and contentment.

Given Schopenhauer's description of the demeanor and attitudes of a morally good person, it would seem that he should have advocated the cultivation of moral goodness as a way to salvation. After all, being at peace, calm, content, feeling akin and friendly towards others, having confidence in oneself and others, and feeling at home in the world are all natural tonics to the misery of existence. Indeed, his description of the being of the resigned ascetic is made employing most of these terms. In addition, the development of moral goodness seems a preferable path to salvation than the gruesome and ghastly road of self-mortification and denial of the will. Why did Schopenhauer not offer the development of a morally good character as an alternative to resignation? Schopenhauer did not offer this as an alternative because he believed that the moral worth of our character is something over which we have no control and something that we are unable to change. Our characters, he claimed, are innate and incapable of change — something which is settled, once and for all, at birth — "... the difference of character is innate and ineradicable. The wicked man is born with his wickedness as much as the serpent is with its poisonous fangs and glands; and he is as little able to change his character as the serpent its fangs."³¹ In other words, Schopenhauer thought that unless one was born with a disposition for a morally good character, one could not develop one. Since nothing can change our fundamental ethical orientation, which is "certainly much more impossible than changing lead into gold," Schopenhauer never considers this possibility a viable alternative to resignation.³²

If Schopenhauer's belief in the unalterable nature of our character explains why he does not present moral goodness as an alternative to resignation, it does not explain why he did not attribute the same status to a morally good person and a resigned ascetic. As we have noted, both types of individuals seem to have escaped the sting of existence, i. e., they are calm, at peace, and content. Indeed, it seems that a morally good person has transcended the misery of existence, and, as such, does not have any good reason to resign. Why does Schopenhauer not assign the same status to a good character which he describes to the ascetic? Both have overcome misery and misfortune. The reason he does not attribute the same status to these types of individuals is because he does not view moral goodness as a state independent of resignation. Rather, he believed that moral goodness naturally led to resignation. Resignation is the natural outgrowth of moral goodness, Schopenhauer thought, since "... from the same source from which all goodness, affection, virtue, and nobility of character spring, there ultimately arises also what I call denial of the will-to-live."³³ The source from which moral goodness arises is compassion, which involves the experience of the suffering of others and an attendant desire to promote the well-being of sufferers. Just as excessive personal suffering leads to resignation, the knowledge of the suffering of others, which is revealed in compassion, is viewed by Schopenhauer as a second incentive for resignation.³⁴ Even though a morally good person may be

free from personal misery, it is the experience of the suffering of others which leads him or her to resign. Thus Schopenhauer notes that, "... all suffering is a mortification and a call to resignation."³⁵ For the ascetic, it is immaterial whose suffering serves as this call.

A person with a morally good character, Schopenhauer argues, is necessarily a compassionate person. Compassion, which is an immediate participation in another's suffering, provides the good person with a deep taste of the universality of suffering. This type of person, thus, experiences the suffering of others like his or her own; "Wherever he [a compassionate agent] looks, he sees suffering humanity and the suffering animal world ... Now all that lies just as near to him as only his own person lies to the egoist."³⁶ In this way, even if the compassionate agent does not suffer personally, the sufferings of others assume the same status as his or her own misery. In other words, all suffering is viewed as personal suffering. The good person resigns because he or she realizes, "... it is no longer enough for him to love others like himself, but there arises in him a strong aversion to the inner nature whose expression is his own phenomenon, to the will-to-live, the kernel and essence of the world recognized as full of misery."³⁷ The good character eventually realizes that relieving other's misery is in vain; that he or she is merely pouring water into the sieve of the Danaids. Helping others can effect no fundamental change in a world which is essentially will and doomed to misery. Even if the good character is able to help some individuals, he or she discovers that there is, and always will be, a multitude of beings whom she or he is unable to help. The morally good person finds that this fact makes his or her help seem insignificant. But there is something worse. This person also recognizes that those individuals who received help will necessarily need help in the future. For, like any existing being, they are bound to suffer anew: they stand in constant need and misery. All the succor doled out by the good character, thus, only postpones the inevitable misery which is life. Since the good character also understands that the root cause of the misery of the world is its essential nature, and that the essential nature of the world is his or her essential nature, the good character feels a strong aversion to his or her essential nature, the cause of all the suffering and pain he or she hates. This leads the good person to deny his or her will — the world will or the will-to-live. In this way, then, moral goodness leads to resignation or the denial of the will. Only by attacking the fundamental cause of all misery, the metaphysical will, is it possible for the good character to eliminate the suffering he or she loathes. To do otherwise, Schopenhauer argues, is contrary to the entire drive and disposition of the good character. The good character both desires to eliminate all misery and woe and knows the cause of all misery and woe. He or she resigns, denies his or her will, because it is this will which is the metaphysical will, and the cause of suffering and pain in general. Because Schopenhauer views moral goodness as a higher level stimulus to resignation instead of some independent and final state of being, he did not view moral goodness as an alternative to resignation. Although these characters may not suffer personally, and display personality traits which suggest calm, peace, and confidence, all suffering becomes personal to them. It is this suffering which is a call to resignation and denial of the will, something a morally sensitive person cannot avoid.³⁸

NOTES

¹ For example, see the cover photographs of E. F. J. Payne's two-volume translation of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, Dover Publications, New York, Inc., 1966; Dewitt H. Parker's *Schopenhauer Selections*, Schribner's Sons, New York, 1956; Patrick Gardiner's *Schopenhauer*, Penguin Books, Baltimore, Inc., 1963; and the flyleaf of V. J. McGill's *Schopenhauer, Pessimist and Pagan* Haskell House Publishers, New York, Ltd., 1931. The painting of the young Schopenhauer which graces R. J. Hollingdale's *Arthur Schopenhauer: Essays and Aphorisms*, Penguin Books, Baltimore, Inc., 1970, and the cover on *Schopenhauer: His Philosophical Achievement*, edited by Michael Fox, Barnes Nobles Books, Totowa, New Jersey, 1980 are refreshing changes from the photographs of Schopenhauer in his old age.

² Helen Zimmern, in her *Schopenhauer: His Life and Philosophy*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1932, pp. 28ff., relates Schopenhauer's mother's contention that a serious conversation with her young son could produce the most terrible thoughts and nightmares. If the young Schopenhauer could produce these results in his audience, just think of what the more experienced, older philosopher could affect in his.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy* (trans. Walter Kaufmann) Random House, New York, Inc., 1967, p. 42. The quote is from Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus*, lines 1224ff. It is interesting to note that the subtitle of Nietzsche's work is *Hellenism and Pessimism*, and that like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer also recognized the deeply pessimistic strains which underlaid the thoughts of the "cheerful Greeks." Schopenhauer even quotes the same passage from Sophocles to help "embellish" his own pessimistic *Weltanschauung* in the second volume of his *The World*, op. cit., pp. 585—87.

⁴ In his "Pessimism and Optimism," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 6, editor in chief Paul Edwards New York Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., and The Free Press, 1967, p. 118, L. E. Loemker writes, as to substantiate my point, "The greatest philosophical protagonist of the pessimistic tradition is, of course, Arthur Schopenhauer." — *of course!*

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morals* (trans. Walter Kaufmann) Random House, New York, Inc., 1967, p. 106.

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*. (trans. Walter Kaufmann) Random House, New York, Inc., 1966, p. 99.

⁷ Søren Kierkegaard: *Tagebuch*, quoted in *Über Arthur Schopenhauer*, edited by Gerd Haffmans (Diogenes Verlag, Zürich, 1977), p. 209 (my translation).

⁸ Although this is a stock point raised concerning Schopenhauer, (see, for example, Bryan Magee's *The Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983, p. 25) it is not clear that this is an optimistic claim. That is, whether it is optimistic or pessimistic might very well hinge upon the nature of the truth. For if it is a horrid truth, we might prefer the bliss of ignorance. Indeed, Schopenhauer's "truth" may well be the very same as that revealed to the youth in Schiller's *Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais*:

Weh dem, der zu der Wahrheit geht durch Schuld!

Sie wird ihm nimmermehr erfreulich sein.

⁹ Caroline Luise Marquet was a seamstress Schopenhauer was alleged to have beat because she was intruding on his privacy. After three trials, the first of which Schopenhauer defended himself and won, he was ordered to pay Marquet 60 talers a year for life, which turned out to be for 26 years (1826—1852). For an account of the Marquet affair see McGill's *Schopenhauer*, op. cit., pp. 210—215.

¹⁰ Max Scheler: *The Nature of Sympathy* (trans. Peter Heath) The Shoe-String, Press, Camden, 1973), p. 53.

¹¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, p. 106.

¹² Gardiner, *Schopenhauer*, op. cit., p. 181.

¹³ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 351.

- ¹⁴ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 196.
- ¹⁵ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 298.
- ¹⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer: *On the Basis of Morality* (trans. E. J. Payne) The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis, Inc., 1965, p. 146.
- ¹⁷ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 379.
- ¹⁸ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 315.
- ¹⁹ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 196.
- ²⁰ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. II, p. 573. If Schopenhauer would have followed up on this simile, he may have observed that after the Sons of Boreas freed Phineus from the harpies, all he wanted was "for death to take me soon." Cf. Apollonius of Rhodes: *The Voyage of Argo* (trans. E. V. Rieu) Penguin Books, Baltimore, Inc., 1959, p. 85. For the story of Phineus and the harpies, see *Argo*, pp. 75—85.
- ²¹ Arthur Hübscher: *Denker gegen den Strom*. Bouvier Verlag Bonn, 1973, p. 297 (my translation).
- ²² Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 179.
- ²³ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 392.
- ²⁴ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 390.
- ²⁵ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 397.
- ²⁶ A. Phillips Griffiths: "Wittgenstein and the Four-Fold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason," In: Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 50 (1976), p. 3.
- ²⁷ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 387.
- ²⁸ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. II, p. 583.
- ²⁹ Schopenhauer, *Basis*, pp. 211—212.
- ³⁰ Schopenhauer, *Basis*, p. 210.
- ³¹ Schopenhauer, *Basis*, p. 187.
- ³² Schopenhauer, *Basis*, p. 193. This, naturally, raises questions concerning his theory of resignation. That is, is Schopenhauer advocating resignation as a path to salvation, or merely describing how salvation is obtained? I tend to believe that his task is essentially descriptive rather than being prescriptive and that the reason for this has to do with his theory of the unalterable nature of our characters. Just as some individuals have the potential for developing a morally good character, some individuals have the potential for resignation and salvation. Others, however, have neither potential. If this is true, and, I am really not sure about the matter, the question why Schopenhauer does not advocate moral goodness as an alternative to resignation is beside the point. Just as he does not advocate or prescribe ethical precepts, because they have no affect on one's character, he does not advocate or prescribe resignation. Rather, our question should simply concern Schopenhauer's failure to ascribe the same status to morally good characters and the resigned ascetic.
- ³³ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 378.
- ³⁴ Schopenhauer considers extreme personal suffering to be the most common incentive for resignation. See *The World*, Vol. I, pp. 393—395.
- ³⁵ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 395.
- ³⁶ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 379.
- ³⁷ Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. I, p. 380.
- ³⁸ Given Schopenhauer's description of resignation, it would seem that there has not been a successful ascetic. To be successful, the ascetic must completely abolish his or her will. If the ascetic's will is the world will, and the world will is the basis of the world as representation, abolition of the ascetic's will is also abolition of the world as representation. Since, at least at the time of this writing, the world as representation exists, the world will has not been abolished. Therefore, at the time of this writing, there has not been a successful ascetic. I think that Griffiths has a similar point in mind when he writes, "If the eternal ground of the world were going to annul itself, it would have already done so,

leaving — nothing. It would be going to abolish not only its future, but the past, and that means our present. But here we are: ripples, ticks in the face of reality, unique or repeatable, but undoubtedly *here* here and now.” (“Wittgenstein,” op. cit., p. 20).

This interpretation of the result of the successful ascetic — abolition of the world as representation, and, consequently all suffering — favors my analysis of the intent of the resigning good character. Schopenhauer, however, is not clear at this point. He believes that there has been successful ascetics and that the world as representation survived their denial. He also writes about our interests in their denial as a path to our salvation, e. g., “Sacrifice signifies resignation generally, and the rest of nature has to expect its salvation from man who is at the same time priest and sacrifice;” (*The World*, Vol. I, p. 381) and “Sinful works and their consequences must be annulled and annihilated at some time either by the pardon of another, or by the appearance of our own better knowledge . . .” (*The World*, Vol. II, p. 608). Now Schopenhauer may have chosen these ways of expressing himself not to be taken literally, but as a way of trying to communicate some special insight using some well-known religion metaphors, e. g., Jesus Christ as sacrifice and savior, the Bodhisattva ideal of Mahāyāna Buddhism etc., but these passages do suggest that our salvation (from suffering) can be the produce of another’s efforts. On the other hand, Schopenhauer also writes as if there has been successful ascetics, individuals who have completely denied their will, and still we suffer and are not saved, e. g., “. . . we now turn our glance from our own needy and perplexed natures to those who have overcome the world, in whom the will, having reached complete self-knowledge, has found itself in everything, then freely denied itself, and then merely wait to see the last trace of the will vanish with the body that is animated by that trace” (*The World*, Vol. I, p. 411). Although that last trace flickers out of existence at death, we do not find that the same is true of the phenomenal world, even though “Denial, abolition, turning of the will are also abolition and disappearance of the world, of its mirror” (*The World*, Vol. I, p. 410). In other words, we have successful ascetics who are not saviors.

Tensions like the above abound in the higher stages of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. It is difficult to see how they can be resolved without Schopenhauer giving up some of his theses. At this stage in his philosophy, what he says about religion in general is applicable to his own insights; “[their] highest point end is mysticism and mysteries, that is to say, in darkness and veiled obscurity” (*The World*, Vol. I, p. 610). Perhaps this is why it is so fitting that the final reference in the first volume of *The World* is to the *Prajna Paramita*, an equally perplexing Buddhist text.