

Schopenhauer as Moral Philosopher — Towards the Actuality of his Ethics

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I am greatly honored to be given the opportunity to address this congress assembled to note the bicentennial of Arthur Schopenhauer's birth. I view Schopenhauer as one of my constant teachers since I have gained a number of insights from his philosophy and I anticipate gleaning future visions. Thus Schopenhauer has played, and continues to play, a vital role in my philosophic education. Perhaps one day I will become wise. If this were to be the case, again, it would further increase my debt to Schopenhauer. I say increase my debt since I can assure you now that I already stand in this debt. And as there is a particular satisfaction in publicly recognizing such an intellectual debt, I am pleased to acknowledge my debt to Schopenhauer. Homage to a benefactor, however, is also dangerous since it serves to increase one's sense of debt when one becomes aware of the need to recognize it in the first place. Thus I address this congress with a double sense of my debt to Schopenhauer. I wonder with which sort of coin does one repay such debts? Certainly repayment must be made with coin the creditor would value. So I will try to repay some of my tremendous debt to Schopenhauer with coin he would value. I will attempt to do this by being honest about his philosophy. I will try to tell the truth.

I

The aim of my talk is twofold. I want to argue that Schopenhauer was first and foremost a moral philosopher. By arguing this I do not wish to simply claim that his ethics is the most significant aspect of his philosophy, although I do believe that this is the case. Rather, I will argue that to understand Schopenhauer as a philosopher one must realize that the defining drives of his will to philosophize were moral and that these moral concerns permeate most levels of his theorizing. If this is the case, to properly appreciate Schopenhauer's philosophy we must put it in a context, a moral context. I also will develop that element of his moral philosophy which accounts for its actuality — its meaning for us today. I want, however, to state this in a properly Schopenhauerian spirit. That is, I will not emphasize or highlight the particular, isolated, or accidental correspondence between our current problems and elements of his moral philosophy. I wish to isolate the universal and always applicable dimensions of his moral philosophy, that which applies today because it applies to all ages.

I know that my contention that Schopenhauer was first and foremost a moral philosopher is controversial. In some of the better known English commentaries on his philosophy just the opposite is sometimes suggested. For example, Frederic Copleston claimed that Schopenhauer's world had "no moral significance at all," and Patrick Gardiner wrote that Schopenhauer should not be "... accused of neglecting the claims of moral thought and conduct..." as if a careful reader might mount such an accusation.¹ I also realize that in the past as well as in the present his metaphysics and aesthetics seem to speak in more lively terms to the

artist, writer, philosopher, and the learned than the ethical dimensions of his philosophy. Moreover, after the publication of *Parerga und Paralipomena*, when Schopenhauer enjoyed some of the recognition which he so desperately desired, his fame was for his “worldly wisdom,” something he viewed as of secondary value compared to the unconditional value found in philosophy proper, truth. With his popularity, however, we also find that beginning of the cultural picture of Schopenhauer as the nihilistic pessimist, the misanthropist and misogynist, atheist, the brooding and cantankerous philosopher of the dark and irrational will. Now the very image of Schopenhauer as philosopher arises in the popular mind as the antithesis to any moral theorist. If he is imagined as proclaiming any moral values, he is viewed as expressing negative values — hopelessness, failure, pessimism, bitterness, and irrationality. Thus Schopenhauer stands outside the seamless mainstream of Western moral thought. A thinker not simply against the tide, but outside the tide of popular and academic tradition. In the United States, if we even bother to include Schopenhauer in our anthologies on ethics, he appears as an oddity, a nineteenth century misfit not worthy of serious philosophical consideration, wedged uncomfortably between Hegel and Mill. And so Schopenhauer stands, ignored; a curiosity at best, a philosophical rogue at worst. Recognizing the moral and humanistic bases that define Schopenhauer’s philosophical project should help defuse such unfair attitudes towards his philosophy.

Schopenhauer’s basic stance as a moral philosopher is pronounced in numerous dimensions of his writings. Even the most elementary details suggest his moral posture. The fourth book of *The World as Will and Representation*, which he called the “ethical book [ethisches Buch]” (W I, 272/II, 320),² is the longest — as is its supplementary set of essays in the second volume. His writings on ethics are augmented by the two essays which compose *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik*, chapters 8 and 9 of the second volume of *Parerga und Paralipomena*, and the penultimate chapter of *Ueber den Willen in der Natur*, “Hinweisung auf die Ethik”. The core of the writings he defined as ethical surpassed in sheer number of pages those devoted separately to epistemology, metaphysics, and aesthetics. The proportion of his writings on ethics increases substantially if we take seriously, which we should, claims advanced later in his philosophical career, i. e., his philosophy leads to a “higher metaphysical ethical standpoint” (P I, 313/V, 333) and that he “... had a greater right than Spinoza to call my metaphysics ‘ethics’.” (WN, 141) This “right” is based, he tells us, on the fact that his metaphysics is itself primarily ethical and is “... constructed out of the material of ethics [aus dem Stoffe der Ethik ... konstruiert ist].” (WN, 141) Schopenhauer’s basic idea here is that the will is the proper object of moral evaluation and since the world is essentially will, the world itself is subject to moral evaluation. This synthesis of his metaphysics and ethics not only substantially and dramatically expands the length of his writings on ethical themes, this synthesis allows him to avoid what he called the fundamental error of any philosophical system, “... the greatest and most pernicious, the real perversity of the mind,” the belief “... that the world has only a physical and not a moral significance [moralische Bedeutung].” (P II, 201/VI, 214) His metaphysical-ethical standpoint allows him to claim that he had demonstrated that “... the supreme point at which the meaning of existence generally arrives is undoubtedly ethical.” (B, 200/ IV, 261) Thus he avoided the pernicious belief that the world has no moral significance.

As the core of writings Schopenhauer regarded as ethical shows, he had a broader conception of moral philosophy than that which functions in the Anglo-American, analytical tradition. Whereas we tend to view his essays *On the Freedom of the Will* and *On the Basis of Morality* as discussing traditional topics in ethics, e.g., freedom and determinism, moral responsibility, metaethics, the virtues, the foundation of morality, philosophy of right, Schopenhauer referred to these essays as dealing with “morality in the narrower sense,” (W II, 589/III, 676) thereby indicating that he employed a broader conception of ethics, one which includes discussions of eternal justice, thanatology, the metaphysics of sexual love, asceticism and salvation.³ Schopenhauer’s broader conception of moral philosophy deals with any phenomenon that expresses either the affirmation or denial of the will at the most basic existential level. He also attributed the utmost importance to moral investigation, calling them the “most serious”, (W I, 271/II, 319) and telling us that they are “... uncomparably more important than physical, and in general all others.” (W II, 589/III, 676) The same importance and priority of ethics is also mirrored in his discussion of human accomplishment. Schopenhauer, who cannot be accused of ignoring the importance of the artist, philosopher, and genius, ranked moral accomplishment higher than all others. So he told us that “moral excellence stands higher than all theoretical wisdom ... Whoever is morally noble reveals by his actions the deepest knowledge, the highest wisdom, however he may be lacking in intellectual excellence;” (B, 210/IV, 270) “What are wit and genius in comparison with this [goodness of heart]? What is Bacon?” (W II, 232/III, 262)

That Schopenhauer regarded moral investigation so seriously and valued moral accomplishment so highly should come as no surprise. Nor should his development of an ethical-metaphysical standpoint be unexpected. In his discussion of the human need for metaphysics, Schopenhauer derived the drive to philosophize from a type of existential astonishment which springs from the knowledge of death and suffering. He told us that “... undoubtedly it is the knowledge of death, and therewith the consideration of the suffering and misery of life, that give the strongest impulse to philosophical reflection and metaphysical explanations of the world.” (W II, 161/III, 177) If the drive to philosophize, to do metaphysics, two tasks which Schopenhauer conflates, begins with the problems of death and suffering, these drives are satisfied in his ethics only after he has elaborated his epistemology, metaphysics, and aesthetics, with the latter containing a description of the short-lived release from life realized through the aesthetic experience, but judged as only a propaedeutic to the more serious side of things. (W I, 267/II, 316) Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of the will also includes a pronouncement of the moral significance of its phenomenal existence; it is something that ought not be. The suffering of existence stems from its nature as represented willing, and since the world is something it ought not be, its inevitable suffering is eternally just. Thus his metaphysics is to console in an odd sort of way. We deserve what we get.

In Schopenhauer’s analysis of the drive to philosophize and the need for metaphysical comfort we confront his existential autobiography. Schopenhauer wrote that when he was 17 years old, like Buddha, he was seized by the “wretchedness of life [Jammer des Lebens],” when he observed sickness, old age, pain, and death.⁴ These phenomena signified for the young Schopenhauer that whatever is responsible for this world is a devil. As the great Schopenhauerian scholar Arthur

Hübscher pointed out, on these youthful broodings “rests the origin of his whole philosophical approach: at the outset we are confronted with the problem of ethics.”⁵ Although Schopenhauer wrote philosophy in the grand style where any topic is a proper subject of philosophical investigation, Schopenhauer’s style is to never forget what he perceived as the misery of the human condition, the need to understand everything in human experience, to explain this, and to seek the meaning for our existence. The meaning of life, he tells us, is “undoubtedly ethical”, (B, 200/IV, 261) and Schopenhauer closes his philosophy by discussing quietism and asceticism, since these themes are “... in substance identical with that of all metaphysics and ethics.” (W II, 615/III, 707)

Schopenhauer’s basic stance as a moral philosopher is exhibited in the extent of his writings on ethical themes, his identification of his philosophy as an ethical-metaphysical position, his analysis of the drive to philosophize, which mirrors Schopenhauer’s youthful ethical motivations to do philosophy, and the foremost importance he attributed to moral investigations and moral accomplishment. Although the question, “What is a good life?” ultimately employs an oxymoron according to his scheme of thinking (we can imagine him replying “ironwood” to the very conception of a “good life”), Schopenhauer’s philosophy is a struggle to answer this question in light of his understanding that “*all life is suffering*” (W I, 310/II, 366) and that suffering is evil. The *summum bonum* of his philosophy becomes the self-effacement of the will, its self-denial (cf. W I, 362/II, 428) and the conclusion of his philosophy is designed to communicate the most important of all truths, “... the need for salvation from an existence given up to suffering and death, and its attainability through the denial of the will ... by a decided opposition to nature.” (W II, 628/III, 723) Salvation by denying the will-to-live becomes the highest good within his metaphysical-ethical perspective.

II

For a theorist like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer’s “most important truth” signifies his nihilism and contempt for human existence.⁶ To a philosopher like Lukács, it suggests Schopenhauer’s immoralism and a release from “all social obligation and all responsibility.”⁷ To understand why Schopenhauer is neither a nihilist nor immoralist, we need to reexamine the basic motivation of his philosophy; how Schopenhauer struggled to understand the nature of reality in light of the all pervasive presence of suffering and destruction. The misery of the human condition becomes the cornerstone of his moral philosophy. I should say the misery of the sentient condition, really, since Schopenhauer was alive to the suffering of non-humans in a way seldom found in philosophers within the Western philosophical tradition. I emphasize suffering here, even though Schopenhauer often provides equal billing to death — sometimes he even assigns priority to the problem of death, e.g., “Death is the real inspiring genius or Musagetes of philosophy, and for this reason Socrates defined philosophy as θανάτου μελέτη [preparation for death].” (W II, 463/III, 528) His philosophy, however, is ultimately ambivalent towards the problem of death. I say this because the fear of death is exposed as a delusion by Schopenhauer. The truth is that it is best not to be. In other words, Schopenhauer’s advice to Hamlet would be unequivocal.⁸

Yet Schopenhauer would not recommend suicide since it does not lead to not being. "Aye, there's the rub." If we fear death because we believe that death annihilates our essential nature, we have no reason to fear it. Further, if we fear death because it deprives us of something valuable, then we are functioning under a delusion according to Schopenhauer. That is, the cunning of the will is revealed not only in our sexual urgings, it is also expressed in our belief that life is valuable. Hence death does not deprive us of something that is valuable. The fear of death is unwarranted in a Schopenhauerian perspective.

We can exploit Schopenhauer's ambivalent attitude towards the problem of death to reach the central insight of his moral philosophy. If death eliminates only the phenomenal expression of my Platonic idea, the suffering life of this representation is absent from this vale of tears; I have vanished from the stage of space and time. However, my essential nature as the will-to-live is not abolished with my phenomenal death according to Schopenhauer. It is expressed within the suffering lives of other sentient creatures and knowing intellects. The ground of suffering hence remains after my death. From a practical point of view, ignoring the highly problematic nature of Schopenhauer's position, Schopenhauer intimates that we should not be indifferent towards the suffering of others — that is even a concern that transcends our own death. While some theorists like Max Scheler claim that Schopenhauer's idealism renders human suffering unimportant, considerations like the above serve to illustrate the vacuity of this complaint.⁹ In this regard, Schopenhauer's monism serves to remind us that after our phenomenal death we still have a vital stake in the phenomenal lives of those who come after us. Suffering is an evil, according to Schopenhauer, an evil towards which we should never be indifferent. Although my finitude will remove my phenomenal suffering, suffering will still exist and with it evil. In this way both Schopenhauer's idealism and metaphysical monism provides an expression of deep concern with any subject of pain and misery.

There is nothing philosophically new in Schopenhauer's regarding suffering as an evil. What was unique, however, was the magnitude of evil he saw embodied in suffering. This comes to the forefront in his remarks later in the second volume of his main work where he argued that "... were the evil in the 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 ... that we have not to be pleased but rather sorry about the existence of the world; that its non-existence would be preferable to its existence" (W II, 576/III, 661) Although I believe that Schopenhauer's assessment of the magnitude of the evil of suffering can not be rationally defended, it graphically illustrates how profoundly he regarded the problem of suffering — the problem of evil. In fact, one of the many things Schopenhauer prided himself on was his treatment of the problem of evil. He tells us that, unlike others who were willing to hide from the problem and sought sophisms to absolve the *esse* of the world from the heavy responsibility of evil, he above was willing to hold the creator morally responsible for its creation of evil.

Indeed, Schopenhauer's will-to-live, the basis of reality, is evil. Thus his pessimism has a metaphysical grounding. Even if we are not convinced by his argumentation at this point, it is clear that Schopenhauer was deeply affected by the problem of suffering. Here he appears Buddhistic, something that delighted him considerably. Another striking parallel between Buddhism and Schopenhauer is

their high estimation of the moral significance of compassion. It is Schopenhauer's basis [*Urgrund*] of all actions which possess moral worth, the only incentive he recognized for morally good behaviour. It is easy to understand Schopenhauer's overestimation of the value of compassion. He detailed it as a naturally occurring disposition to refrain from harming or wronging others and as a disposition to relieve another's misery. As such he saw it as the conative source of the cardinal virtues of justice and philanthropy. He also attributed a humanizing function to compassion since it expresses the proper sort of ethical-ontological stance towards others. Through compassion we transcend our native egocentric attitude by cognizing the evil of another's suffering. Although Nicholas Rescher has a different perspective than Schopenhauer, he expresses a Schopenhauerian point when he wrote that "The vicarious affects come into operation when someone internalizes the welfare of another by way of prizing it on the basis of the relationship that subsists between them — a relationship that may be as tenuous as mere common humanity."¹⁰

The basis of the compassionate relationship, however, is nothing as tenuous as biological taxa or moral ideas in Schopenhauer's view. Nor does compassion serve simply as a means for populating the world with other beings, though Schopenhauer did regard the moral egoist as the practical correlate of the theoretical egoist, the solipsist. The truth of the former is apparent in his analysis of the devilish personality, the malicious character, who must live in a world with beings whose suffering must be there to be enjoyed. For the malicious person there must be others or the world loses its charm. The problem with the malicious character, Schopenhauer thought, is that the suffering of another is viewed as a good.¹¹ This is just the opposite perspective from that exemplified in the attitude and behaviour of the compassionate character who views the suffering of others as an evil to relieve. It is at this level that we now have a unity of interests and a consensus between phenomenally distinct individuals — suffering is an evil that must be abolished. This unity of interests, as we all know, is just the reflection of the ontological unity of all beings, according to Schopenhauer. It is his monism which grounds the possibility of compassion. On the level of representation, compassion involves the cognition of this unity between the agent and the sufferer and this leads to feelings of kinship in a world dominated by the struggle of the will-to-live. Our natural attitudes towards our own suffering, the almost involuntary impulse to relieve it, becomes extended towards that of an other. Thus what has some of the deepest roots in individuality, the recognition of my suffering as an evil, becomes the driving force of moral goodness. In compassionating another's distress, I recognize the evil of the other's suffering and treat it as my own. The practical result of this is to realize that for the truly compassionate agent, "There is no difference between suffering and seeing suffering."¹²

The moral significance of compassion, the evil of suffering, the concern for those who remain after our death, define the actuality of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy. This leads us to recognize what must figure centrally in any moral theory and what should be basic in any moral life, i.e., striving to eliminate evil is morally significant, any feeling, emotion, passion, disposition, attitude, or cognitive state that leads to this end is morally significant, and this includes behaviour we perform now that is designed to prevent the suffering of future sentient beings. It is clear that Schopenhauer overstated his case that compassion is the only basis

for morally valuable actions. It is also the case that many of his remarks concerning the metaphysical basis of compassion are unwarranted. The same can be said of his assessment of the magnitude of the evil of suffering. Suffering, and I should say unnecessary suffering for some of it is very useful and beneficial — think of the last time you put your hand on the stove —, is perhaps the evil par excellence, but its mere presence does not justify his assertion that it would have been better had the world never existed. But this point is academic. The world does exist, replete with the evil of unnecessary suffering. The lesson Schopenhauer teaches us today is not unique nor particularly profound. However, this may be the very reason it needs to be repeated. To a morally sensitive person, the suffering of another is never a matter of indifference — even if one does not detect it or could not detect it. Schopenhauer's pessimism may be warranted, unfortunately, by the simple realization that for the vast majority of us, the unnecessary suffering of others is a matter of indifference. It is that sort of world that ought not be, not the world itself.

III

The last statement would have provided a natural end to my talk. Concluding at that point, however, would have resulted in a failure to keep my promise to repay my debt to Schopenhauer in coin he would value. To close at that point would be less than honest, since what I isolated as the ever-actual dimensions of his moral philosophy are not consistent with the development of his thought. As a brute fact, what I have highlighted is not consistent with a number of his most highly regarded truths. The “truths” I emphasized forbid the transition from virtue to sainthood, to a “resigned saintliness.” I pull up short on this point. I must pull up short at this point. I confine his actuality to what he called morality in the “narrower sense,” ignoring his broader sense of morality reflected in asceticism and his theory of salvation. I find his morality expressed by the maxim “*Neminem laede, imo omnes, quantum potes, juva*”, and not in the tranquil eyes of the resigned saint.

To understand my point clearly it is necessary to say some things about Schopenhauer's hierarchy of moral character types. In Schopenhauer's axiological analysis of character, he detailed a range of moral character types which span from the very worst sort of character, the malicious character, to the very best sort of character, the saint. The morally good character ranks one stage below the saint.¹³ Schopenhauer argued that “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.” (W I, 378/II, 447) The “source” that accounts for the transition from “goodness” to “holiness” is the penetration of the *principium individuationis*, the ability to see past the forms of space and time, to see the other side of the veil of Maya. The ability to see through the *principium individuationis* is one of the functions Schopenhauer ascribed to compassion, an emotion that morally good characters are regularly disposed to have towards others' distress. Schopenhauer never provided an explanation of how the good character sees through the veil of Maya, calling the phenomenon “the great mystery of ethics” and “practical mysticism,” but we are told that the good character recognizes “... his own inner being-in-itself in the phenomenal appearance of another [... er

sein eigenes Wesen an sich in der fremden Erscheinung wiedererkenne].” (B, 212/IV, 273) The saint has the same sort of knowledge, but is said to perceive the unity of being with “a high degree of distinctness [in hohem Grade der Deutlichkeit].” (W I, 378/II, 447)

Unlike the good character, however, the saint refrains from helping others and turns inward to deny her inner nature, the will, which is the ground of the suffering world of representation. In addition to the grand paradox of his philosophy, the intellect’s final victory over the will, we face a number of subsequent problems. Schopenhauer accounted for the moral superiority of the good character over the egoist on two bases. First, unlike the egoist, the good character recognizes the reality of the other as a being whose welfare merits consideration. Thus he has a sense of a moral community. Second, the good character adjusts his behaviour accordingly. He refrains from harming and strives to help others. The saint, however, denies the reality of the other as a being whose welfare merits consideration and neither refrains from harming others, at least in the sense that not helping may harm, nor helps others. Now the saint resembles the egoist. Both are indifferent towards the suffering of others. And like the self-absorbed egoist the saint only concentrates on herself, her will as object-to-be-denied. It might be argued, moreover, that the saint is more worthy of censure than the egoist. The egoist has the excuse of never having transcended the natural and immature standpoint of self-interest. The saint knew what the egoist never knows, but seems to return to the level of the egoist. In spite of these considerations, Schopenhauer regards the saint as the crown of creation, as the highest development of representationalkind.

By noting these problems, I realize that I have not mentioned problems unrecognized by other scholars. I even have tried to develop an apparent trail out of these problems in other papers.¹⁴ However, I cannot see any consistent way of resolving Schopenhauer’s “narrower sense” of morality and his analysis of moral goodness and his theory of salvation. One could attribute an altruistic motivation to the saint, e.g., by denying his will he is attacking the root cause of all suffering; thus he is trying to do something for all sufferers. In this way we can see an important difference between the egoist and the saint. We can also appreciate a difference between the saint and the morally good character, one based on the better knowledge of the former, i.e., the saint clearly realizes that his essence, his will, is responsible for the suffering human and animal world and he attempts to relieve all suffering by denying that will. In contrast, the good character shares the saint’s concern for the suffering world but does not realize its root cause. Thus the good character shares the same concern as the saint, but tries to relieve individual expressions of suffering, a strategy which must fail. She can never eliminate all the suffering she wishes to succor; even a Mother Theresa or an Albert Schweitzer did little to diminish the magnitude of actual and future misery. In this way, however, the good person could be viewed as still serving the will by helping perpetuate this scene of misery; she manifests the cunning of the will by acting under the delusion that phenomenal behaviour can resolve the problem of the evil, that we can be happy in this world; that such help could make a difference in a world whose essence is the will-to-live.

We should also note that Schopenhauer attributed an altruistic motivation to some ascetics is clear on other grounds. Not only does he emphasize a connection

between moral virtue and the denial of the will which is based on the cognition of the unity of being, he viewed virtuous behaviour as expressing phenomenally and momentarily the same thing expressed by resignation, e.g., "... moral virtues spring from an awareness of that identity of all beings; this, however, lies not in the phenomenon, but in the thing-in-itself, in the root of all beings. If this is the case, then virtuous action is a momentary passing through the point, the permanent return to which is the denial of the will-to-live." (W II, 610/III, 700) Life is judged, moreover, as not worthwhile by the metaphysical saint, because of the universality of suffering, even in cases in which the potential saint enjoys a relatively good life. In contrast to the metaphysical saint Schopenhauer mentions other ascetics who are likewise moved to resign because of the cognition of suffering. We could call these deniers of the will individual ascetics since they deny their wills because of extreme personal suffering, because of their own misery. Using Stobaeus' Greek, he calls this second path to salvation δεύτερος πλοῦς, "the next, best course," (W II, 636/III, 731) indicating that even though it is the path followed by the vast majority of ascetics, it lacks the moral magnificance of the "best course."

Attributing altruistic motivations to the metaphysical saint does not solve the problem, however. This motivation and this saint's penetrating cognitions into the unity of being may begin to explain why the metaphysical saint receives the highest ranking in Schopenhauer's hierarchy of moral character types, but it does not make it clear why there is a moral difference between the saint and good person. To this we should add that from Schopenhauer's perspective, the metaphysical saint is the only person who purposely adopts a strategy designed to relieve all suffering by denying his will, which is viewed as the metaphysical will, the root cause of all misery. The problem with this is that Schopenhauer wrote as if there were successful metaphysical saints — individuals who denied their wills. Since there is still a world as representation, what they have denied can not be the metaphysical will. What such saints may accomplish is the silencing of their own will, but that seems to be all they accomplish.¹⁵ This is all that the individual saint ever accomplishes and this is just what we should expect. Although the individual saint lacks both the cognition into the unity of being and the altruistic motivation of the metaphysical saint, what the individual saint must deny is her will and this will is also the metaphysical will. Again, Schopenhauer writes as if there have been successful individual saints and we still exist and suffer. What they have denied, then, cannot be the metaphysical will, the root cause of all suffering and being. It can only be their individual will or character that is silenced. Thus there seems to be a distinction without any real difference between these two types of saints.

This analysis suggests that the metaphysical saint's highest ranking in Schopenhauer's moral hierarchy is due to the saint's knowledge of the unity of being and the universality of suffering and her altruistic disposition. It certainly can not be due to some accomplishment greater than that of the individual saint. Both seem to achieve the same thing when they successfully resign. In the same regard, what separates the metaphysical saint from the morally good character is not an altruistic disposition, but the saint's better knowledge of the unity of being and the universality of suffering. I say "better knowledge" here, since Schopenhauer does claim that the morally good character knows the unity of being. I am not sure how one can know this truth better than another who also knows the same

thing. Schopenhauer, who often resorts to visual metaphors, resorts to one here. He wrote of seeing “through the *principium individuationis* [dieses Durchschauen des *principii individuationis*]” (W I, 379/II, 447) and having the veil of Maya “lifted from the eyes [vor den Augen gelüftet].” (W I, 379/II, 447) This knowledge appears to be noninferential and nonpropositional. The difference may be akin to one person seeing the whole of something but in a fog, while another sees the whole without the fog. How one could perceive the unity of being, however, is beyond me. How do phenomenal beings become so vitreous? We could grant there is such a difference in perceptual intuition, but why would this be a moral difference?

Schopenhauer claims that the metaphysical saint also recognizes the universality of suffering and takes all this suffering as his own. If we assume that this better knowledge of the unity of being and universality of suffering leads to an enlarged altruistic disposition, we can understand the difference between the metaphysical saint and the morally good person – the metaphysical saint has a greater altruistic disposition, a greater and actual concern for all others. But if this is the case, the metaphysical saint makes a tremendous mistake by resigning. Resignation and denial of the will does not relieve anyone’s suffering but the saint’s. Even if we were inclined to ignore the consequences of behaviour and evaluate the moral worth of agents and actions by the intentions or motives of the agent, there are certain situations in which we must not discount the consequences. For example, in any case in which it is impossible to obtain the desired results of our intentions or motives, we should not attribute any moral worth to either the agent, insofar as this act is concerned, or the action itself. That is, if I believe that I can help others by causing them misery, even though my motive or intention to help is worthy of praise, how I try to do this is open to censure. The reason for this is that it is not just due to moral bad luck that I fail consistently. Rather, I fail because I employ means which will systematically guarantee that I fail.

Schopenhauer’s metaphysical saint stands in worse shape than the helpful sadist. Insofar as there are masochists, he will actually help people on occasion. So there is some moral luck involved here. Schopenhauer’s saint, however, is systematically doomed to failure since resignation will not relieve everyone’s suffering — not even once-in-a-while. No moral luck is ever involved here. Because this is the case, we should not attribute any moral worth to the behaviour of the metaphysical saint. He might attempt to relieve all suffering, but he can never do it by resigning. While it is true that compassionate involvement in the lives of others can not do this either, it can relieve some individual’s suffering some of the time. Doing this, moreover, is important — as Schopenhauer realized. This, after all, is what begins to separate moral from nonmoral behaviour in Schopenhauer’s own moral theory. It can not be a matter of indifference, moreover, to the child starving at the foot of the saint. Here a few crumbs of food does more than the saint’s quixotic resigned altruism. Insofar as there are genuine altruistic dispositions manifest in the metaphysical saint’s character, his altruism should tell him that the representational world should not be abandoned. While Schopenhauer emphasized that moral goodness and intelligence are distinct features of personalities, a morally good person should have sufficient intelligence to realize that there are more proper modes of expressing altruism than anything involved in resignation.

In conclusion, honesty compelled me to elucidate some of the conflicts between those dimensions of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy that are actual and some of his most highly valued doctrines. In particular they conflict with his moral hierarchy of character types and what he claimed was "the most important truth there can be," that salvation is obtained by the denial of the will. (W II, 628/III, 723) If we obtain salvation in this way, there is nothing morally significant about this act. It is something no morally sensitive person would select. The metaphysical saint, like the individual saint, is a self-saver and not a world-saver. Thus I can not understand why Schopenhauer goes past his "narrower sense" of morality which ends at the morally good character. Even on Schopenhauer's own criterion, the behaviour of the self-absorbed saint is morally indifferent, i.e., "the moral significance of an action can lie only in its reference to others. Only in respect to this can it have moral worth or worthlessness." (B, 142/IV, 206) So if the saint is morally sensitive to the universality of suffering, and even though individual acts do little to diminish universal suffering, this attempt to eliminate evil must take place. We must stick to Schopenhauer's "narrower sense" of morality and realize that we need to try to do that which can not be done — eliminate evil. Horkheimer captured the essence of this when he wrote, "To stand up for the temporal against merciless eternity is morality in Schopenhauer's sense."¹⁶

Notes

¹ See, Frederic J. Copleston, *Arthur Schopenhauer: Philosopher of Pessimism* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1946) and Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) p. 235.

² Unless otherwise noted, I shall employ the following key to Schopenhauer's writings:

B = *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1965).

W I or II = *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969) vol. I, II.

P I or II = *Parerga and Paralipomena*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) vol. I, II.

References following the citation from the English translation are to the volume and page number to the same work in the 3rd edition of Arthur Hübscher's *Schopenhauer: Sämtliche Werke* (Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1972; now 4th ed. 1988), 7 volumes. The only exception to this will be references to *Ueber den Willen in der Natur* which will be to the German text which I translated:

WN = *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 4.

³ Also see the preface to the first edition of *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik* (IV, E, v-vi) where the two prize essays which compose the work are said to "... mutually contribute to the completion of a system of the fundamental truths of ethics." (B 3)

⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Der Handschriftliche Nachlaß*, edited by Arthur Hübscher (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Waldemar Kramer, 1966-1975) Vol. IV (1), p. 96.

⁵ Arthur Hübscher, *Denker gegen den Strom* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1973; now 4th ed. 1988), p. 11, my translation.

⁶ See, for example, section 21, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man", in *Twilight of the Idols*.

⁷ Georg Lukács, "The Bourgeois Irrationalism of Schopenhauer's Metaphysics", in Michael Fox ed., *Schopenhauer: His Philosophical Achievement* (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980) p. 192. This essay was originally published in German in Lukács' *Werke* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1962) Vol. 9, pp. 172-219 as "Schopenhauer".

⁸ Schopenhauer's advice to Hamlet is found at W I, 324/II, 383.

⁹ See Max Scheler's *The Nature of Sympathy*, translated by Peter Heath (Hamden, Conn.: The Shoestring Press, 1970) p. 55. The original German is *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* (Bonn: Cohen, 1926), p. 63.

¹⁰ Nicholas Rescher, *Unselfishness: The Role of the Vicarious Affect in Moral Philosophy, and Social Theory* (London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975) p. 9

¹¹ See W I, 362-65/II, 428-31

¹² This remark comes from Calderón de la Barca's *No siempre el peor es cierto, Jornada II*, p. 229 and is quoted with approval by Schopenhauer at B, 165/IV, 229.

¹³ I have provisionally described his hierarchy of moral character types in my "Schopenhauer's Axiological Analysis of Character," in the forthcoming special volume of the *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* dedicated to Schopenhauer's 200th birthday.

¹⁴ See my "Schopenhauerian Optimism and an Alternative to Resignation?" in *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch*, Vol. 66 (1985) pp. 153-164.

¹⁵ This is, I take it, the upshot of his remark at W II, 609/III, 700 – that the individuality inherent in the will, character, is that which is abolished by denial of the will. This passage, then, emphasizes that only the saint is succored by his act of resignation – other's have their own metaphysical characters to tend. It also suggests that it is not the metaphysical will-to-live per se that is denied in resignation. This passage should be contrasted to those at W I, 368 which suggest an altruistic motivation to the metaphysical saint and that it is the metaphysical will which is the object of denial.

¹⁶ Max Horkheimer, "Schopenhauer Today," in Fox ed., *Schopenhauer: His Philosophical Achievement*, op. cit., p. 32, originally titled as "Die Aktualität Schopenhauers," in *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch*, Vol. 42 (1961) p. 25.