

Will and Flesh: Schopenhauer and Merleau-Ponty on Corporeality

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As I pondered the nature of that “I”, I was driven to the conclusion that the “I” in question corresponded precisely with the physical space that I occupied. What I was seeking, in short, was a language of the body.

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1. Introduction

In *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World: The Metaphysics of Will*, John E. Atwell characterizes Arthur Schopenhauer as follows:

It would not be an exaggeration to dub Schopenhauer *the* philosopher of the body. To a greater extent than anyone before his time [...] he makes the body – that is, one’s own body (*der eigene Leib*) – the primary focus and indispensable condition of all philosophical inquiry. If required to give a single answer to the philosophizing subject’s question, “What am I?” Schopenhauer would surely reply, “I am body,” though, he would just as surely add, “in more than one way.” He therefore deposes the mind from the throne of philosophical investigation and installs in its place – the place the mind has occupied since at least the time of Descartes – the body, which plays the crucial role in theory of knowledge [...], in ethics [...] and in metaphysics proper [...].¹

1 Atwell 1995: 81. Similar claims can be found in two excellent discussions of Schopenhauer’s analysis of embodiment. In ‘Der Leib als Schlüssel zur Welt. Zur Bedeutung und Funktion des Leibes in der Philosophie A. Schopenhauers’, Andreas Dörpinghaus states: “Der Leib spielt in der Philosophie Schopenhauers eine zentrale Rolle: Er ist der Schlüssel des Menschen zur Welt, und zwar zur Welt als Vorstellung und zur Welt als Wille.” (Dörpinghaus 2000: 16). [“The body (*der Leib*) plays a central role in the philosophy of Schopenhauer: it is the key human beings have to the world, both to the world as representation and to the world as Will.” – My translation.] Furthermore, Bernd Dörflinger’s ‘Schopenhauers Philosophie des Leibes’ starts with the statement that: “Die Philosophie Schopenhauers beinhaltet nicht bloß eine philosophische Reflexion des Leibes, was angesichts einer bis zu ihm weitestgehend leibvergessenen Tradition bemerkenswert genug wäre, sondern sie ist als ganze Philosophie des Leibes.” (Dörflinger 2002: 43). [“Schopenhauer’s philosophy does not just contain a philosophical reflection on the body, which, given the ignorance that the tradition before him displayed towards the body, would already be remarkable, but it is, as a whole, a philosophy of the body.” – My translation.]

In a footnote, Atwell adds that the two French existential phenomenologists Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) could both be characterized as ‘philosophers of the body’ as well.²

In his fascinating article ‘Schopenhauer und Merleau-Ponty – eine erste Annäherung’,³ Daniel Schmicking explores these claims by looking closer at the similarities between Schopenhauer’s observations on the body and those of the second philosopher Atwell mentions: Merleau-Ponty. He describes how several of Schopenhauer’s observations, as well as the underlying concerns of Schopenhauer’s approach to philosophy, perception and the human condition, return in Merleau-Ponty’s writings. This comparison is unique: as Schmicking himself observes, the similarities between these two authors have hitherto not yet been explored.⁴

In this paper, I seek to contribute several new insights to this comparison. My analysis will differ from Schmicking’s in two aspects: firstly, I want to draw attention to the similarities between Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of ‘Will’ (*der Wille*) and Merleau-Ponty’s metaphysics of ‘flesh’ (*la chair*). Whereas Schmicking mainly focuses on Merleau-Ponty’s chief work *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), he only once mentions his posthumously published *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), in which Merleau-Ponty sets out his metaphysics of ‘flesh’. Secondly, I want to develop a more critical and ‘problematizing’ approach to Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Adopting this approach will allow me to show that Merleau-Ponty’s thought provides us with fruitful ways to interpret several famously problematic aspects of Schopenhauer’s theory, especially those regarding the exact nature of his metaphysical notion of ‘Will’ and its close connection to embodiment.

This comparison will be developed in two parts, covering the two main phases of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical thinking and the two main ‘worlds’ around which Schopenhauer’s theory revolves. In the first part, I will compare Merleau-Ponty’s study *Phenomenology of Perception* with Schopenhauer’s theory on what he calls the ‘world-as-representation’. In the second part, I will compare Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible* with Schopenhauer’s analysis of the ‘world-as-will’. I will conclude that, like few authors before him, Schopenhauer focuses extensively on the somatic dimension of human existence, which makes him into a forerunner in debates concerning embodied perception and the moral and metaphysical dimensions of corporeality.

2 Since Schopenhauer, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the body and corporeality have become the central focus of many highly influential philosophical works and doctrines. We can think, for example, of works as diverse as Judith Butler’s 1991 *Bodies that Matter*, Antonio Damasio’s 1994 *Descartes’ Error*, Samuel Todes’ 2001 *Body and World*, but also of the many popular publications on corporeal empathy and animal behaviour, like Frans de Waal’s 2009 *The Age of Empathy*.

3 Schmicking 2012.

4 Ibid., 118–122.

2. *The World-as-Representation*

Schopenhauer opens his masterwork *The World as Will and Representation* with the following statement: “The world is my representation: this is a truth valid with reference to every living and knowing being.”⁵ He bases this claim on an analysis he developed in *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, his doctoral dissertation.⁶

The class of objects that the first ‘root’ of the principle of sufficient explanation refers to consists of ‘everyday and *individual* objects’, like stones or tables. Within the scope of this paper, only a discussion of this first class of objects is relevant, which I will briefly provide in the following to emphasize the role that embodiment plays in Schopenhauer’s epistemology, as well as to be able to show in paragraph four how this connects him to Merleau-Ponty.

Schopenhauer, who defines himself at several places as a transcendental idealist, follows Kant in arguing that these objects have two *formal properties* – temporality and spatiality – that are imposed upon them by the inner sense (time) and outer sense (space) of the perceiving subject.⁷ He refers to these properties as well as ‘a priori fundamental intuitions’.⁸ Unlike Kant, however, he bases this claim mainly on a rather phenomenological analysis of that which makes an object into an object as it *appears* to the subject, ignoring Kant’s transcendental arguments. What defines an object as a *real object*, in his analysis, is its *permanence* or *durability* as an individual ‘thing’. It does not suddenly disappear or come into existence ‘out of nowhere’. Time, he observes, therefore forms a necessary property of real objects. However, he argues, this permanence – its staying the same during a period of time – can ‘only be recognized by contrast with the changes going on in other objects coexistent with it’.⁹ And this ‘coexistence’, in turn, is perceived once Space is added as a necessary formal property, because: “in mere Time, all things *follow one another*, and in mere Space all things are *side by side*.”¹⁰ Hence, he claims, empirical representations – real objects – ‘grow out of’ the ‘intimate union’ of Space and Time.¹¹

These two formal properties, Schopenhauer *then* argues, are *in themselves* not enough to constitute the world we perceive: we would then only ‘have’ the *empty* forms of Time and Space. These forms, in other words, need to be ‘filled with

5 WWR I, 3.

6 In his introduction to the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer claims that without acquaintance with the *Fourfold Root*, it is ‘quite impossible’ to understand his chief work ‘properly’. (WWR I, xiv.)

7 See FR, 31.

8 FR, 83.

9 Ibid., 32.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

something', as F. C. White terms it in his insightful article on Schopenhauer's first book,¹² which happens when what Schopenhauer calls the *faculty of the Understanding* imposes the category of *causality* on the world. The faculty of the understanding 'understands' the data it receives as *caused* by objects in the empirical world and reconstructs these data, as it were, 'into' the material and particular objects it perceives. The law of causality, Schopenhauer therefore concludes, is the *necessary underlying principle* of the interconnectedness of objects in the world, forming the first 'root' of the principle of sufficient reason,¹³ which means that perceived objects are *subjective* in nature, that perception is 'intellectual in character,'¹⁴ and that empirical reality is 'ideal'.¹⁵

3. *The Paradox of Schopenhauer's Epistemology*

This briefly described chain of arguments contains several problematic aspects. In this paper, I want to focus on an inconsistency that originates in a problem that, as we will see below, Merleau-Ponty discusses as well: instead of limiting himself to the claim that the only thing we can say about the data the intellect receives is that they are not structured by time, space and causality, Schopenhauer infuses and at places even *bases* his analysis of perception on *naturalist observations*, which introduces the factor of *embodiment* in his epistemological theory.

Arguing within a naturalistic framework, namely, Schopenhauer often refers to the 'perceiving subject' as the *brain* of embodied creatures, claiming that the brain 'interprets' the sense data it 'receives' from the body's five senses, defining perception as "a function of the brain, which the brain no more learns by experience than the stomach to digest, or the liver to secrete bile."¹⁶ One of the examples he often provides to substantiate his above-cited claim that perception is subjective, consists of the observation that we have two eyes but only one visual field, concluding that the Understanding 'steps in' by imposing the law of causality, thereby 'reconstructing' the one object that is eventually perceived as the 'cause' of the two streams of data that the brain receives from the eyes.¹⁷

Another illustration of this 'naturalization' of the transcendental subject appears in Schopenhauer's analysis of the *development* of the ability to perceive a

12 See F. C. White 1999: 67.

13 FR, 37.

14 Ibid., 58.

15 See FR, 37.

16 FR, 65. Schopenhauer uses the metaphor of digestion to refer to intelligence or perceptions several times. This metaphor found its way to Nietzsche, who understands the body, as Blondel argues in his famous work on Nietzsche, as "a series of instincts (Instinkte) or drives (Triebe) that constitute reality as they interpret it." (Blondel 1991: 206).

17 See for example FR, 68.

world-as-representation within the context of a theory that comes close to Darwin's ideas on evolution:

[...] the higher we ascend in the scale of animals, the greater number and perfection of the senses we find, till at last we have all five; these are found in a small number of invertebrate animals, but they only become universal in the vertebrate. The brain and its function, the understanding, develop proportionately, and the object now gradually presents itself more and more distinctly and completely and even already in connection with other objects [...].¹⁸

Schopenhauer dismisses the Kantian idea that human animals perceive a structured and 'objective' world, not dependent on instincts or desires, and argues instead that both human and non-human animals perceive the *same* world because both are embodied creatures with bodily senses and a nervous system.

This introduction of a form of naturalism renders the basis of Schopenhauer's idealism highly problematic. Instead of understanding the world of objects, including the body and the brain, as dependent on and structured by the subject, Schopenhauer pulls this latter subject into the natural world and 'reduces' it to the status of an empirical entity: "man is concerned merely with his own representations, which as such are the work of his brain; therefore their conformity to law is merely the mode or manner in which the function of his brain alone can be carried out, in other words, the form of his representing."¹⁹ This results in paradoxical arguments like the following: "the existence of this whole world remains for ever dependent on that first eye that opened, were it even that of an insect. For such an eye necessarily brings about knowledge, for which and in which alone the whole world is, and without which it is not even conceivable."²⁰ Of course, this 'opening eye' *already* has to be in the world *as a material object* in order to perceive this world, and can thus not *at the same time* form the *condition* of its own existence *as a material object*. Volker Spierling defines this paradox in his introduction to Schopenhauer's lectures on the *Metaphysik der Sitten* as follows: "die Welt ist im Kopf, und der Kopf ist in der Welt."²¹

At places Schopenhauer seems to be aware of the paradox that is inherent to the form of idealism he develops, claiming: "the possibility of knowing the world of perception is to be found in two conditions,"²² the first being the experiencing self, the subject ("the world of perception exists only for it and through it"²³),

18 WN, 299. As an example, Schopenhauer mentions how his dog is able to 'understand' the causal relation between the pulling of a string and the moving of curtains attached to this string. (See FR, 89.)

19 WWR II, 46–47.

20 WWR I, 30.

21 Spierling 1985: 32. ['The world is in my head, and my head is in the world.' – My translation.]

22 WWR I, 19.

23 Ibid., 20.

the second being “the sensibility of animal bodies.”²⁴ However, he does not seem to find this paradox overly problematic, defining it as an ‘antinomy of our faculty of knowledge’ that ‘simply’ cannot be solved: “we see, on the one hand, the existence of the whole world necessarily dependent on the first knowing being, however imperfect it be; on the other hand, this first knowing animal just as necessarily wholly dependent on a long chain of causes and effects which has preceded it, and in which it itself appears as a small link.”²⁵



In an excellent discussion of the tension between idealism and naturalism in Schopenhauer’s philosophy, Julian Young points out that this paradox is more undermining than Schopenhauer seems to think:

Schopenhauer is confronted by the following dilemma: either he is committed to the propriety of his appeal to the physiology and biology of the brain [...] or else he preserves transcendental idealism but concedes that the attempt to support it by other than orthodox Kantian methods is an aberration.²⁶

Young insightfully argues that this paradox is partly caused by the fact that in the times in which Schopenhauer lived idealism was ‘uncontroversial,’²⁷ concluding that Schopenhauer develops a ‘bio-physiological’ version of Kantianism that could be defined as a form of ‘biological idealism’.²⁸ Schopenhauer, in other words, accepted the doctrine of transcendental idealism but *also* tried to do justice to medical and biological observations on the human being as a body, as a natural object not fundamentally different from non-human animals.²⁹

Christopher Janaway insightfully makes this same point in *Self and World in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy*:

[...] he [Schopenhauer] took on the structure of Kant’s powerful epistemology, with its [...] limitation of knowledge to what fell within the a priori conditions of appearance, and its ‘empty’ conception of the subject as the mere transcendental principle that unifies representations. [...] In addition he took on contemporary aspirations – which had been alien to Kant – to provide a physiological account of

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 30.

26 Young 1987: 10.

27 See *ibid.*, 3.

28 *Ibid.*, 12.

29 This also allows one to do justice to, in my view, crucial observations on people that are in some way or another physically handicapped or injured. These observations, namely, imply that there is a close connection between the manner in which we perceive the world, and the way the brain functions. Conclusions like these play a fundamental role in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy. Famous is his discussion of Schneider, a soldier wounded by a shell splinter in the back of the head, whose perception of the world and his own body was fundamentally altered. (See PhP, 147).

the workings of the mind, and to account for its existence and workings in a teleological way that would put it on a par with other life forms.³⁰

Janaway concludes that Schopenhauer defends a form of ‘correlativism’,³¹ arguing with reference to Thomas Nagel’s famous essay ‘What is It Like to Be a Bat?’, that even though Schopenhauer is unsuccessful in reconciling ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ points of view, he is not alone in this failure, which reflects an irreconcilable difference between the experience we have of the world as subjects on the one hand and our existence as objects in a natural world of objects on the other.³² The paradox underlying Schopenhauer’s discussion of the notion of a world-as-representation, in other words, reflects a certain *truth moment* about epistemology as a philosophical doctrine.

I believe Janaway is right, and want to embed this observation in a short discussion of several arguments developed by Merleau-Ponty.

4. *The Phenomenology of Perception*

In Merleau-Ponty’s magnum opus *Phenomenology of Perception*, we find a critique of traditional theories of perception that is based on the insight – shared by Schopenhauer as well – that Kant’s focus on the constitutive role of consciousness “caused him to overlook the phenomenon of the body and that of the thing.”³³ Merleau-Ponty tries to do justice to the two above-described ‘moments’ of Schopenhauer’s philosophy – bodily sensation and experiencing self – by seeking a middle ground between the two, developing a phenomenology revolving around the idea that body and consciousness are fundamentally entwined *within* our ‘lived experience’ of the world and ourselves. He thereby argues that the ideas both of pure empiricism and of pure idealism are based on abstractions that negate the truth moment of their ‘other’: neither can be postulated as a ‘first’.³⁴ In his essay ‘The Primacy of Perception’, an elaboration of the underlying ideas and thoughts of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that this

30 Janaway1999: 285–286.

31 Ibid., 181.

32 Ibid., 186–187.

33 Php, 353.

34 Merleau-Ponty, for example, argues that ‘space’ is not an *a priori* category, but can only be *understood* once we take our bodily existence into account: “our relationship to space is not that of a pure disembodied subject to a distant object but rather that of a being which dwells in space relating to its natural habitat.” (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 42.) This observation forms one of the main themes of the French tradition of existential phenomenology; we can find a lengthy discussion of this same problem in *Being and Nothingness* by Jean-Paul Sartre, the second author mentioned by Atwell: “Sensation supposes that man is already in the world since he is provided with sense organs, and it appears in him as the pure cessation of his relations with the world. At the same time this pure “subjectivity” is given as the necessary basis on which all these transcendent relations which its appearance has just caused to disappear will have to be reconstructed.” (Sartre 1984: 415).

approach forces him to embrace a paradox. In this paradox, Schopenhauer's observations return. Merleau-Ponty states: "there is a paradox of immanence and transcendence in perception. Immanence, because the perceived object cannot be foreign to him who perceives; transcendence, because it always contains something more than what is actually given."³⁵ We can put this paradox in Schopenhauer's terms: the world is dependent on the first eye that opens, but is on the other hand also *already* there when this eye opens – the eye itself is, after all, *already* part of this world that as such presents itself again *to* this eye.

Without trying to deemphasize the problematic nature of Schopenhauer's theory of perception, I want to conclude this very brief discussion of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* with the claim that the latter's 'paradox of immanence and transcendence' illustrates the idea that the paradox underlying Schopenhauer's world-as-representation points at a fundamental problem of epistemology *itself* that mainly arises if one seeks to take the role that the body plays in our perception of the world seriously, while at the same time refusing to 'reduce' this perception to a mechanical and materialistic process.

5. *The World-as-Will*

I now want to focus on Schopenhauer's metaphysics. Following the dualism between *phenomenon* and *noumenon* developed by Kant, but also referring to Plato's works and several Eastern scriptures that, in his eyes, all express the idea that 'whatever exists, exists only for the subject',³⁶ Schopenhauer famously claims that there is a world beyond the 'merely' *subjective* world that we perceive – the world-as-will – and bases this claim, again, on an analysis of the *somatic* dimension of human existence. This is where he introduces one of his most interesting arguments and therewith departs in a fundamental manner from Kant: whereas the body, as we have seen above, pulls his notion of the transcendental subject into the world-as-representation, it *also* plays a fundamental role in the world-as-will, forming "a key to the inner being of every phenomenon in nature."³⁷

This idea is based on the following argument: what we experience *inside* of our bodies is fundamentally different from the organized and structured world in which I am a body-as-object in a world-of-objects – the world-as-representation – since I have an *intimate* and *direct* experience of my body that is different from my body as an object. This inner experience is my body experienced *as Will*:

[...] 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

³⁵ PrP, 16.

³⁶ WWR I, 5.

³⁷ Ibid., 105.

is denoted by the word will. It is just this double knowledge of our own body which gives us information about that body itself [...], 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.³⁸

Schopenhauer uses the rather confusing concept of 'Will', since in his eyes it approaches the closest the experience he describes: "the concept of *will* is of all possible concepts the only one that has its origin *not* in the phenomenon, not in the mere representation of perception, but which comes from within, and proceeds from the most immediate consciousness of everyone."³⁹ In contrast to Kant, Schopenhauer thus claims that the corporeal dimension of our existence forms a 'loophole' out of this world and a *key* to another world.

This 'Will', this 'direct contact' I have with my body that is different from the contact I have with objects around me, refers for Schopenhauer to a wide range of experiences. On one level, 'Will' refers to the observation that I can move my body but that the nature of my bodily movements is not entirely clear to me. If I raise my arm, for example, this movement is different from someone else raising his or her arm since *I* raise *my* arm *as an agent*. However, the *exact* way in which I raise my arm remains unclear to me – I 'just raise it.' Willing to raise my arm and actually raising my arm is, within a certain understanding of 'willing', the same: "actual willing is inseparable from doing, and, in the narrowest sense, that alone is an act of will which is stamped as such by the deed."⁴⁰ In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty makes the same observation regarding this 'relation': "the relationships between my decision and my body are, in movement, magic ones."⁴¹ It is this 'magical' aspect of physical actions, their underlying unexplainable 'force' or 'energy', that Schopenhauer refers to with 'Will'.

On another level, Schopenhauer refers with 'Will' to the impulses, desires and urges we experience as existing 'inside' of our bodies. Most famously, he refers here to the drive for self-preservation and to desires of a sexual nature, portraying living creatures as consisting of a form of striving, of a need to survive, an *ungraspable* but powerful 'force of life' that he often refers to as 'will-to-live': "if we consider the will where no one denies it, namely in knowing beings, we find everywhere, as its fundamental effort, the *self-preservation* of every being: *Omnis natura vult esse conservatrix sui*."⁴²

Schopenhauer thus takes an enormously complex range of bodily and instinctive experiences and groups them together under the concept of 'Will'. The first aspect that unites these experiences is the idea that they, *as experiences*, cannot be

38 Ibid., 103.

39 Ibid., 112.

40 WWR II, 248.

41 PhP, 108.

42 WWR II, 298.

perceived from an external point of view or, in Schopenhauer's terms: they cannot be perceived in the world-as-representation we perceive around us. Another characteristic that unites them is the idea that the body-as-will is to a certain extent 'the other' of me and that we are not able to fundamentally *explain* or *understand* our bodily desires, nor to entirely *control* them.



This brings us to Schopenhauer's metaphysics: the Will is understood as being so fundamentally 'other' *and* at times so fundamentally overpowering that Schopenhauer *extrapolates* our experience of it to a notion of what the world *essentially* is. In other words: we do not only, in Schopenhauer's eyes, *experience* ourselves as striving beings, he goes further and claims that our bodies *are* 'objectifications' or 'manifestations' of this striving and thus manifestations of something *transcending* us. As we will see below, this argument returns, in an altered form, in Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*. Schopenhauer writes:

The double knowledge which we have of the nature and action of our own body, and which is given in two completely different ways, has now been clearly brought out. Accordingly, we shall use it further as a key to the inner being of every phenomenon in nature. We shall judge all objects which are not our own body, and therefore are given to our consciousness not in a double way, but only as representations, according to the analogy of this body. We shall therefore assume that as, on the one hand, they are representation, just like our body, and are in this respect homogeneous with it, 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.⁴³

The *microcosm* that human beings are – experiencing themselves in two different ways – thus forms the basis for a metaphysical notion of the *macrocosm* that we, as microcosms, are part of. In Schopenhauer's words: "everyone in this twofold regard is the whole world in itself, the microcosm; he finds its two sides whole and complete within himself"⁴⁴ and: "every knowing individual is therefore in truth, and finds himself as, the whole will-to-live, [...] and also as the complementary condition of the world as representation, consequently as a microcosm to be valued equally with the macrocosm."⁴⁵

This latter world – the world 'beyond' or 'below' the world-as-representation – is characterized by Schopenhauer as 'one', as not consisting of different objects or bodies, but as a blind drive, a force that underlies all that exists, forming the 'inner' or 'true' core of the world we *perceive* as existing of separate phenomena.

43 WWR I, 104–105.

44 Ibid., 162. Schopenhauer uses the terms 'microcosm' and 'macrocosm' as well in his essay on morality; see BM, 133.

45 WWR I, 332.

There are no individual things, objects or human beings ‘in’ the world-as-will; there is no *principium individuationis*, there is no time, space or causality since these are forms by which the subject perceives the world.

It is here that Schopenhauer arrives at his most mystical observations, inspired by Buddhism and Hinduism:

The will as thing-in-itself is entire and undivided in every being, just as the centre is an integral part of every radius; whereas the peripheral end of this radius is in the most rapid revolution with the surface that represents time and its content, the other end at the centre where eternity lies, remains in profoundest peace, because the centre is the point whose rising half is no different from the sinking half. [...] Here, of course, we fall into mystical and metaphorical language, but it is the only language in which anything can be said about the wholly transcendent theme.⁴⁶

6. *The Paradox of Schopenhauer’s Metaphysics*

This ‘broadening’ or ‘extrapolating’ of the experience of a certain *otherness* of bodily experiences to the claim that there is a metaphysical world that is, to a certain extent, *like* these experiences within ourselves; this “Sprung”, as Spierling calls it, “vom psychologischen Willen zum Ding an sich, vom empirischen Standpunkt zum metaphysischen Standpunkt [...]”⁴⁷ is highly problematic and has been subject to several forms of critique. In his famous essay ‘The Bourgeois Irrationalism of Schopenhauer’s Metaphysics’, for example, Georg Lukács observes: “Schopenhauer anthropologizes the whole of Nature with the help of plain analogy, which he loftily declares to be myth, and hence truth [...]”⁴⁸ Lukács therefore deems Schopenhauer’s philosophy to be based on pure ‘sophistry’.⁴⁹ In his introduction to the philosophy of Schopenhauer, Christopher Janaway furthermore concludes that Schopenhauer’s metaphysics is not ‘credible

46 WWR II, 325–326. Indeed, in the *Upanishads* we can find the following passage, reflecting Schopenhauer’s extrapolation from microcosm to macrocosm from within the experience of the body: “In the centre of the castle of Brahman, our own body, there is a small shrine in the form of a lotus-flower, and within can be found a small space. We should find who dwells there, and we should want to know him. / And if anyone asks, ‘Who is he who dwells in a small shrine in the form of a lotus-flower in the centre of the castle of Brahman? Whom should we want to find and to know?’ we can answer: / ‘The little space within the heart is as great as this vast universe. The heavens and the earth are there, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars; fire and lightning and winds are there; and all that now is and all that is not: for the whole universe is in Him and He dwells within our heart.” (*Upanishads*, 120).

47 Spierling 1985: 35. [“This leap from psychological willing to thing-in-itself, from an empirical to a metaphysical point of view [...]” – My translation.]

48 Lukács 1980: 189.

49 *Ibid.*, 188.

as a system⁵⁰ and ‘obviously flawed’:⁵¹ “If knowledge of our acts of will is the nearest we get to the thing in itself, and if even here we do not know it directly, what grounds do we really have for claiming to know what it is?”⁵²

What most of his critics point out is that the range of experiences Schopenhauer refers to is too broad to be translated into a clear and compelling metaphysical notion and forces his readers either to focus on its human aspects *or* on its metaphysical and more ‘anonymous’ dimension.

In the following, I therefore want to develop a reading of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics that only focuses on *certain aspects* of his discussion of ‘Will’, which means that it is not able to do justice to *all* dimensions of his metaphysical observations. However, it *does* highlight, in my eyes, one of its most unique characteristics: its implications for the notion of *intercorporeity*, which, as we will see below, brings him close to the thought of Merleau-Ponty.

I will develop this reading by focusing on three concepts that play a key role in Schopenhauer’s philosophy as a whole, but especially in his moral theory: ‘matter’, ‘suffering’ and ‘*Mitleid*’ or ‘compassion’. This idea – using observations on morality as a starting point of an interpretation of his metaphysics – follows from Schopenhauer’s claim in the chapter ‘Reference to Ethics’ in *On the Will in Nature* that “the only Metaphysics which really and immediately supports Ethics, is that one which is itself primarily ethical and constituted out of the material of Ethics.”⁵³ As I will show, this means that his analysis of the phenomenon of *Mitleid* actually forms one of the main *arguments for* and *illustrations of* Schopenhauer’s understanding of the world-as-will.



My reading of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics originates in a metaphor that Spierling develops in his introduction to Schopenhauer’s lectures on the *Metaphysik der Sitten*. This metaphor revolves around an “Unendlichfüßler” or “infinipede” and goes as follows:

Der Wille zum Leben läßt sich vergleichen mit dem “Körper” eines “Gesamtlebewesens”, sagen wir mit einem “Unendlichfüßler”. Jeder einzelne “Fuß” stellt ein ganzes Lebewesen dar, wie wir es aus unserer Vorstellungswelt kennen: eine Maus, eine Spinne. Die einzelnen Füße des Unendlichfüßlers sterben nach einiger Zeit ab und wachsen ähnlich wieder nach. [...]

Einige Füße unserer seltsamen Metapher vom Unendlichfüßler sind besonders merkwürdig ausgestattet. Sie verfügen über ein äußerst komplexes Gehirn, das nicht nur für die unmittelbare Lebensbewältigung geeignet ist, sondern sich dar-

50 Janaway 1997: 107.

51 Ibid., 33.

52 Ibid.

53 WN, 373.

über hinaus über alles mögliche verwundern und Überlegungen über die eigene Herkunft anstellen kann. Jedem einzelnen Gehirn aber sind aufgrund vorgegebener Funktionsweisen enge unüberschreitbare Erkenntnisgrenzen gezogen. Es kann nicht anders, es muß unwillkürlich alle ihm zufließenden Daten in etwas verwandeln, was sie ursprünglich selbst gar nicht sind, nämlich in *Vorstellungen*, die zeitlich, räumlich und kausal strukturiert sind.⁵⁴

This metaphor powerfully illustrates several characteristics of the ‘Will’. To start: it is crucial to notice that Spierling does not choose a lifeless entity as metaphor, but an animal, a *body*, an entity made of *flesh*. This implies that Schopenhauer does not refer to an overly vague metaphysical entity or ‘force’ that would in some way or other have to be understood as connecting every object in the world – alive or lifeless. He refers to a level of ‘flesh’ that is both ‘me’ *and* to a certain extent a material reality *preceding* my individualism.

This latter claim brings us to two concepts that play a key role in Schopenhauer’s metaphysics: *matter* and *suffering*. Schopenhauer namely develops an interesting notion of *matter* – watering down the transcendental nature of his idealism – as forming the ‘building stuff’ of living creatures. This matter is *vibrant* and *alive*: “matter is the will itself, yet no longer in itself, but in so far as it is perceived, that is to say, assumes the form of the objective representation; thus what objectively is matter, subjectively is will. Wholly in keeping with this [...], our body is only the visibility, the objectivity of our will [...].”⁵⁵ ‘Matter’, in other words, forms an elementary *in-between*: between Will and representation and between individual and world.

Here our discussion of the world-as-representation in the third paragraph becomes relevant again: as we have seen, Schopenhauer struggles with embedding the body within an idealist framework, defending a paradoxical form of empirical idealism according to which the perceived world is subjective in nature, but in which the claim that our ‘animal sensitivity’ *has to* play some sort of role within our perception of the world pulls the body ‘into’ the notion of the perceiving subject and into the world dependent on that same subject, thereby blurring the boundaries between world-as-representation and world-as-will. This same blur-

54 Spierling 1985: 28–29. [“The Will to life can be compared to the ‘body’ of a ‘total-creature’, like an ‘infinipede’. Every single ‘foot’ represents a creature as we know it in the world-as-representation: a mouse or a spider. Each foot of the infinipede dies after a while, and then grows back like it was before. [...] Several of the feet of our peculiar metaphor of the infinipede are equipped in a particularly strange way. They have a very complex brain, that is not only suited for an immediate coping with life, but that can also, over and above that, wonder about everything possible and think about its own origin. Every single brain, however, is given specific limits of cognition, beyond which it cannot go. It can do nothing else but instinctively transform all data it receives into something that these data originally were not, namely into *representations*, structured by space, time and causality.” – My translation.]

55 WWR II, 308.

ring now *returns* in his definition of *matter*: matter is the crossing point of both worlds, the line where a certain metaphysical ungraspability ‘shows itself’ in the world we perceive.

This brings us to the concept of *suffering*, which Schopenhauer points at as follows: “everything that obstructs, crosses or opposes our will, and thus everything unpleasant and painful, is felt by us immediately, at once, and very plainly.”⁵⁶ The claim that the phenomena of suffering and pain play a key role in understanding the Will becomes apparent once we take Schopenhauer’s following observation into account: “pain concerns the *will* alone and consists in checking, hindering, or thwarting this [...]”⁵⁷.

I am now in a position to argue why Schopenhauer’s often overlooked definition of *matter* is fundamental regarding the development of an interpretation of ‘Will’: if we combine it with his understanding of *suffering*, we arrive at the observation that human as well as non-human animals consist of ‘matter’, of vibrant and manifested striving that is, *as striving*, vulnerable to pain and suffering because any ‘thwarting’ of this striving is pain. The element that makes us into the bodies that we are – matter – thus *also* makes us into creatures *vulnerable to pain*.⁵⁸

This brings us to the last concept that forms part of my interpretation of Will: *Mitleid*, which E. F. J. Payne, in his standard translation of Schopenhauer’s chief work, translates with ‘sympathy’ or ‘compassion’. Schopenhauer urges us to understand the occurrence of *Mitleid* as being ‘spontaneous’, as bearing traces of a pre-individualistic connectedness between creatures. It contains an *instinctive* element, a corporeal identification with the suffering other. Schopenhauer provides the following phenomenological characterization of *Mitleid*:

I no longer look at him as if he were something given to me by empirical intuitive perception, as something strange and foreign, as a matter of indifference, as something entirely different from me. On the contrary, I share the suffering *in him*, in spite of the fact that his skin does not enclose my nerves. Only in this way can *his* woe, *his* distress, become a motive *for me*; otherwise it can be absolutely my own. I repeat that this *occurrence is mysterious*, for it is something our faculty of reason can give no direct account of, and its grounds cannot be discovered on the path of experience.⁵⁹

We have to look at the supplement to *On the Basis of Morality* to link this discussion of empathy with the interpretation of ‘Will’ that I have hitherto developed with the notions of ‘matter’ and ‘suffering’. In this supplement, Schopen-

56 PP II, 291.

57 Ibid., 297.

58 This is a central idea of Horkheimer’s understanding of materialism. See for example Horkheimer’s discussion of the position of needs and suffering within the doctrine of materialism in Horkheimer 1972: 44. See for an in-depth discussion of this idea Schmidt 2004:144 ff.

59 BM, 166.

hauer describes the ‘metaphysical foundation’ of this ‘mysterious’ occurrence of *Mitleid*. This foundation, again, lies in the double knowledge we have of our bodies:⁶⁰

[I]f plurality and separateness belong only to the *phenomenon*, and if it is one and the same essence manifests itself in all living things, then that conception that abolishes the difference between ego and non-ego is not erroneous; but on the contrary, the opposite conception must be. [...] Accordingly, it would be the metaphysical basis of ethics and consists in *one* individual’s again recognizing in *another* his own true self, his own true inner nature.⁶¹

The phenomenon of *Mitleid* is understood as recognizing something of ourselves ‘in the other’ and therefore as the ‘proper expression’⁶² of the metaphysical claim that we are on a fundamental level ‘connected’ to other creatures. Furthermore, its occurrence, which is not entirely bound to the sphere of reflection, implies that this ‘recognizing’ takes place on a corporeal level and to a certain extent precedes the world of distinctive objects and individuals that we perceive – the world-as-representation, which he understands as an illustration of his claim that “beyond all plurality and diversity of individuals presented to us by the *principium individuationis*, there is to be found their unity.”⁶³

The pre-individualistic nature of this metaphysical substance shows itself even clearer when Schopenhauer claims that it transcends any difference between human and non-human animals. Both have bodies, and both are therefore vulnerable to suffering and pain. This is, in turn, why human animals, in his eyes, are able to experience instinctive moments of *Mitleid* with suffering non-human animals and why animals express feelings of *Mitleid* with other animals.⁶⁴

The moral incentive advanced by me as the genuine, is further confirmed by the fact that the animals are also taken under its protection. In other European systems of morality they are badly provided for, which is most inexcusable. [...] In philosophy it rests, despite all evidence to the contrary, on the assumed total difference between man and animal.⁶⁵

60 See BM, 205.

61 BM, 209.

62 See BM, 209.

63 BM, 211.

64 Many examples of empathy occurring between human and non-human animals can be found in the works of Frans De Waal. For example, he mentions experiments with rhesus monkeys who ‘literally starve themselves to death to avoid inflicting pain on others.’ (See De Waal 2006: 29).

65 BM, 175.

7. *The Visible and the Invisible*

This brings us to the metaphysical observations of Merleau-Ponty. Certain parallels can be drawn between Schopenhauer's understanding of 'Will', matter and corporeity, and Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'the flesh' (*la chair*) or 'the flesh of the world' (*la chair du monde*) as developed in his posthumously published work *The Visible and the Invisible*.

In order to understand why this is the case, it is helpful to look briefly at the difference in approaches between the *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible*. As discussed above, the first book is based on an existentialist phenomenological approach to experience and on the idea that we should be as true to our experience as possible by evading abstract knowledge that could 'influence' the analysis of our experience, and thereby to understand how the body inhibits a structure that to a high extent defines our perception of the world. As Merleau-Ponty famously stated: "the world is not what I think, but what I live through."⁶⁶

In the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty criticizes *Phenomenology of Perception* for still originating within a dichotomy between experiencing self and experienced world and, furthermore, a dichotomy between a world we consciously perceive *as experiencing self* and the way in which our body 'silently' structures this world, writing: "The problems posed in Ph. P. are insoluble because I start there from the "consciousness"—"object" distinction."⁶⁷ In a sense, he hereby criticizes his magnum opus for unsuccessfully meandering between the two poles of Schopenhauer's epistemology – our 'animal sensitivity' and our 'experiencing consciousness'.

Merleau-Ponty seeks to transcend this dichotomy in *The Visible and the Invisible* by returning to a certain underlying and transcending form of what he calls "brute or wild being"⁶⁸ that is, in his words, 'ontologically primary'.⁶⁹ I want to argue that the shift in approaches between these two works resembles the difference between Schopenhauer's descriptions of world-as-representation and world-as-will.

Schopenhauer's characterization of 'Will' as transcending the dichotomy between subject and object echoes through Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, in which the latter seeks to overcome this dichotomy and focus on what lies beneath it.⁷⁰ As Renaud Barbaras, one of Merleau-Ponty's most important commentators, observes:

⁶⁶ PhP, xviii.

⁶⁷ VI, 200.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ See VI, 22–23.

The great progress made in *The Visible and the Invisible* was the realization that the specificity of the perceived being, well described in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, ushers in a new meaning of Being. Consequently, in order to account for the perceived world it becomes necessary to accomplish an ontological reform.⁷¹

This difference in approach becomes apparent in the example of touching hands that Merleau-Ponty develops, following Husserl: in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, he claims that one cannot at the same time experience one's hand as touching and as being touched, again pointing at two different approaches to the body that resemble Schopenhauer's world-as-representation, in which the body is an object like any other object, and the world-as-will, in which I have an intimate and 'direct' experience of my body:

[...] if I can, with my left hand, feel my right hand as it touches an object, the right hand as an object is not the right hand as it touches: the first is a system of bones, muscles and flesh brought down at a point of space, the second shoots through space like a rocket to reveal the external object in its place.⁷²

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty bridges this dualism by referring to what, in his view, *underlies* this experience:

Between the exploration and what it will teach me, between my movements and what I touch, there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship, according to which they are not only, like the pseudopods of the amoeba, vague and ephemeral deformations of the corporeal space, but the initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world. This can happen only if my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being *of which it is also a part*. Through this crisscrossing within it of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it; the two systems are applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange.⁷³

Since the touching is also the tangible, and since the tangible is also the touching, a world opens up, Merleau-Ponty argues, *beneath* these touching and tangible objects that, at the same time, are subjects; an *underlying reality* that forms the possibility of 'being touched' and 'being tangible'.

This double aspect of perception leads to what Merleau-Ponty calls an 'encroaching' of one world onto the other. The observation that the body, as a thing, as an object, is able to perceive itself *as such*, makes us focus, in his own words, on "the cohesion of the obverse and the reverse of my body which is responsible for the fact that my body – which is visible, tangible like a thing –

71 Barbaras 2000: 84.

72 PhP, 105.

73 VI, 133, italics added by the author.

acquires this view upon itself, this contact with itself, where it doubles itself up, unifies itself, in such a way that the objective body and the phenomenal body turn about one another or encroach upon one another.”⁷⁴ He furthermore observes:

[B]etween my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is an overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things.⁷⁵

This results in the rather Schopenhauerian conclusion that we experience our bodies in two different ways, but that these two experiences are part of the *same* entity, of the *same* being:

We say therefore that our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them; we say, because it is evident, that it unites these two properties within itself, and its double belongingness to the order of the “object” and to the order of the “subject” reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders.⁷⁶

In other words: like Schopenhauer, Merleau-Ponty argues that our bodies form a *key to the world*; they provide us with an experience of what this world is made of, what enables us as embodied creatures to know it, to sense it, to perceive it, and to be part of it:

[...] all we must do is situate ourselves within the being we are dealing with, instead of looking at it from the outside – or, *what amounts to the same thing*, what we have to do is put it back into the fabric of our life, attend from within the dehiscence (analogous to that of my own body) which opens it to itself and opens us upon it, and which, in the case of the essence, is the dehiscence of the speaking and the thinking.⁷⁷

In a move quite analogous to the one Schopenhauer makes, the body is understood as the *microcosm* that provides the key to an understanding of the *macrocosm*.

Merleau-Ponty calls the nature of this macrocosm ‘flesh’. Like Schopenhauer’s ‘matter’, this ‘flesh’ is not dead or lifeless, but vibrant and alive. Merleau-Ponty uses the phrase ‘ultimate notion’,⁷⁸ as well as the concept of ‘element’, to define what ‘flesh’ is. As ‘element’, flesh is ‘the concrete emblem of a general manner of being’:⁷⁹

74 Ibid., 117.

75 Ibid., 123.

76 Ibid., 137.

77 Ibid., 117–118.

78 See VI, 140.

79 VI, 147.

The flesh is not matter, in the sense that of corpuscles of being which would add up or continue on one another to form beings. Nor is the visible (the things as well as my own body) some “psychic” material that would be – God knows how – brought into being by the things factually existing and acting on my factual body. In general, it is not a fact or a sum of facts “material” or “spiritual.” Nor is it a representation for a mind: a mind could not be captured by its own representations [...]. The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term “element,” in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being.⁸⁰

Merleau-Ponty provides different descriptions of the flesh, many bordering on the poetic, all hinting at a space opened up by the idea that the body is both touching and tangible.

Again like Schopenhauer, Merleau-Ponty hereby comes close to several Eastern forms of mystical thinking. In the essay ‘Facing Levinas’, for example, Glen Mazis insightfully refers to several aspects of Buddhism in relation to the ‘flesh’:

[...] the overlapping of our felt experience [...] (accessible in the common insertion into the depths of flesh), may lead to a more ethical world. [...] This insertion in the flesh of the world, a prolongation of perception with vertical depths of feeling, imagining, memory, and the like, leads to a different sense of kinship, one more akin to the Buddhist sense of compassion and one that speaks to us in our animality as embodied creatures capable of spontaneous acts of graceful connection.⁸¹

In his article ‘Flesh and Blood’, Drew Leder furthermore points at another Eastern concept to shed light on Merleau-Ponty’s metaphysics: the neo-Confucian understanding of the concept of ‘ch’i’. Both neo-Confucians and Merleau-Ponty claim, Leder observes in a rather Schopenhauerian fashion, that there is no word in the West to describe ‘ch’i’ or ‘flesh’. Both also state that this elementary but partly ungraspable notion binds us as corporeal creatures. Leder quotes the following citation from Tu Wei:

The idea of forming one body with the universe is predicated on the assumption that since all modalities of being are made of *ch’i*, all things cosmologically share the same consanguinity with us and are thus our companions.⁸²

80 Ibid., 139.

81 Mazis 2006: 203.

82 As quoted in Leder 1999: 206.

8. Intercorporeity

What further unites Merleau-Ponty with Schopenhauer, is that these metaphysical observations are based on a similar, not unproblematic extrapolation from a specific, individual experience of the body to claims about the nature of the world as a whole: from *microcosm* to *macrocosm*. As with Schopenhauer's 'Will', I want to argue in this paragraph, the key to understanding 'flesh' can be found in Merleau-Ponty's observations on intercorporeity and the phenomenon of compassion.

Merleau-Ponty develops the concept of 'intercorporeity' by analysing the double aspect of touch in the case of *bodies* touching each other, a moment in which the chiasm between perceiver and perceived in his eyes *folds back upon itself* and is thereby broadened to the body of the other. Since both my hands can touch the same thing and since I experience this thing as one object but, still, also experience the sensation of both hands in a kind of in-between, a certain synergy originates between my hands, he argues. Merleau-Ponty transposes this synergy to the notion of intercorporeity in the following passage, in which Spierling's Schopenhauerian metaphor, in a sense, returns:

The handshake too is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well as touching, and surely there does not exist some huge animal whose organs our bodies would be, as, for each of our bodies, our hands, our eyes are the organs. Why would not the synergy exist among different organisms, if it is possible within each? Their landscapes interweave, their actions and their passions fit together exactly [...].⁸³

The flesh is understood as forming a region found in the *intercorporeal*. Whereas Schopenhauer, as observed above, is less reluctant to point explicitly at the metaphysical nature of 'Will' and *does* describe us as being part of this 'huge animal', of Spierling's "*Unendlichfüßler*", Merleau-Ponty is more careful and merely *hints* at a certain transcending experience of our individual bodies that lies in the experience of compassion.

However, in his famous essay on Husserl and phenomenology, 'The Philosopher and His Shadow', Merleau-Ponty discusses the concept of *Einfühlung* and, in fact, comes very close to Schopenhauer, describing the idea that the two persons who touch each other's hands are "like organs of one single intercorporeality."⁸⁴ He herewith hints at what Schopenhauer explicitly claims: we are, as fleshy creatures, part of a world of flesh transcending our individual nature. We are not minds responding to minds, but "flesh responding to flesh."⁸⁵ And this 'flesh' forms a corporeal space in which sensible being is – and here Schopenhauer's observations echo through those of Merleau-Ponty: "announced to me in

⁸³ VI, 142.

⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty 1964: 168.

⁸⁵ VI, 262.

my most strictly private life, summons up with that life all other corporeality. It is the being which reaches me in my most secret parts, but which I also reach in its brute or untamed state, in an absolute of presence which holds the secret of the world, others, and what is true.”⁸⁶

9. Conclusion

I have shown that certain parallels can be drawn between the observations on embodiment by Schopenhauer and Merleau-Ponty. Even though they are products of highly different historical times and philosophical traditions, both authors develop an epistemology that revolves around the role that the body plays in perception, and both feel that they are forced to embrace a paradox that consists, on the one hand, of the Kantian intuition that the subject forms – in some way or another – the basis of the world we perceive, but on the other hand of the naturalistic observation that as embodied subjects with sense organs we are always already part of this same world.

I have also shown that Schopenhauer and Merleau-Ponty develop rather mystical metaphysical notions of ‘Will’ and ‘flesh’, taking refuge in descriptions that border on the poetic, speaking of ‘hidden secrets’ and ungraspable ‘brute being’. Both thereby seek to refer to a level of the body that, on the one hand, is *materialistic* and *anonymous* – it is the matter that we all ‘are’ as embodied animals – but that, on the other hand, is not reducible to nature as ‘dead’ matter since it *strives* and *lives*, even though it does this ‘blindly’. For both Schopenhauer and Merleau-Ponty, furthermore, compassion plays a key role in their definition of what ‘flesh’ is; whereas Schopenhauer defines *Mitleid* as the ‘proper expression’ of the view that I am connected to other corporeal beings as manifested Will,⁸⁷ Merleau-Ponty defines *Einfühlung* as ‘an echo of my incarnation’.⁸⁸

It is important to notice in this concluding paragraph, however, that there are crucial differences between the two authors: whereas Schopenhauer, for example, analyses an antinomy between the world that we perceive and a metaphysical underlying world, Merleau-Ponty seeks to undo any antinomy between self and world by replacing it with the idea of a *chiasm*; an *encroaching*; an *overlapping*. Even though, as I have shown, Schopenhauer at places argues that both ‘worlds’ touch each other – for example when he argues that the world-as-will manifests itself ‘in’ matter – he still points at the experience of an overwhelming corporeal *otherness* that constitutes metaphysical transcendence.

Another main difference between the German pessimist and the French existential phenomenologist is that the concepts of ‘suffering’ and *Mitleid* are crucial

⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty 1964: 171.

⁸⁷ See BM, 209.

⁸⁸ Merleau-Ponty 1964: 175.

for the interpretation of Schopenhauer's 'Will' developed above. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty's claim that the flesh 'reaches me in my most secret parts' originates in a rather positive analysis of the manner in which we are embedded in the world. Schopenhauer's observations on Will revolve around a negative diagnosis of human existence and on the overpowering nature of pain and suffering caused by our essence as blindly striving creatures. In contrast to Merleau-Ponty, in other words, Schopenhauer points at a *tragic dimension* of the human condition.

In spite of these differences, however, several of the observations and of the used methodologies of both philosophers are remarkably similar. Especially their attempts to philosophically grasp the metaphysical dimension of embodiment – a dimension that both *defines* our corporeality and *transcends* our individual bodies – follow from a shared insight that is unique in the history of philosophy. It is, therefore, their attempt to do justice to the fundamental role that our embodiment plays in our existence in the world that makes both authors still relevant and their thought highly valuable for anyone who seeks to unravel the complexities of the human, corporeal condition.

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Abbreviations

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| BM | Schopenhauer, Arthur, <i>On the Basis of Morality</i> , Indianapolis 1995. |
| FR | Schopenhauer, Arthur: <i>On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason</i> , New York: 2007. |
| PhP | Merleau-Ponty, Maurice: <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> , London 1958. |
| PP II | Schopenhauer, Arthur: <i>Parerga and Paralipomena</i> , vol. II, Oxford 2000. |
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| VI | Merleau-Ponty, Maurice: <i>The Visible and the Invisible</i> , Evanston 1968. |
| WN | Schopenhauer, Arthur: <i>On the Will in Nature</i> , New York 2007. |
| WWR I | Schopenhauer, Arthur: <i>The World as Will and Representation</i> , Vol. I, New York 1969. |
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