

Metaphysical Ethics Reconsidered: Schopenhauer, Compassion and World Religions

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Introduction

In the history of philosophies and religions, mercy and compassion have been major factors in an individual's moral life and in the process of self-fulfilment. Arthur Schopenhauer was a great advocate of compassion, developing in the fourth part of *The World as Will and Representation* a metaphysical and soteriologic ethics of compassion, relating it to concepts from the history of Christianity and of Indian religions. He was one of the first European philosophers seriously to study Indian religions and philosophies. Within these traditions, he was particularly interested in the Upaniṣads, late Vedic writings, which he read in Anquetil-Duperron's indirect translation into Latin, published in 1801/02. He also familiarised himself early with Buddhism. Knowing that in the final sentence of his book *On the Will in Nature* Schopenhauer says that his own ethics is consistent with Upaniṣadic, Buddhist and Christian themes,¹ we face the question of why he did not also include in his philosophical-ethical system earlier Vedic hymns that, together with the Upaniṣads, make up the Vedic "canon", or Judaism as the predecessor of the New Testament Christianity (which he, in common with religious science of the 19th century, derived from India and related to "Oriental" origins). A major reason for his steadfast refusal to grant any import to early Vedic hymns is that he found the selections and translations from them that were available to him to be too inconsistent with the picture of Hinduism or Indian Brahmanic thought he had irrevocably formed on the basis of Anquetil-Duperron's Latin translation of the Upaniṣads. Among the reasons for his rejection of the Old Testament Judaism, the most prominent one seems to be the theistic and "optimistic" nature of this religiosity, as well as what Schopenhauer saw as its conspicuous lack of compassion.²

¹ See *Über den Willen in der Natur*, in: A. Schopenhauer, *Kleinere Schriften, Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. III, bearb. und hrsg. von Frhr. von Löhneysen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994).

² Undoubtedly the most notorious designation in his writings is "foetor Iudaicus." About Schopenhauer's attitude to Judaism cf. H. W. Brann, *Schopenhauer und das Judentum* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1975). Above all, his negative view of this religiosity can be understood as dismay at theism itself (and with creation as "optimism" – cf. Gen 1:25; because of that Schopenhauer heavily leaned towards Marcionism – cf. H. Ohly, "Der Christ liest Schopenhauer", *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* 64 (1983), 92-100, although he places Christ and the *New Testament* at the very

Another interesting point concerning Schopenhauer's view of ethics is what he says at the end of his book *On the Basis of Morality*:

With these allusions to the metaphysics of ethics I must rest content, although an important step remains to be taken. But this presupposes that a further step be taken in *ethics* itself, which I could not do, because the highest aim of ethics is limited to jurisprudence and moral philosophy in Europe, and here no one knows, or indeed will admit, what is beyond these.⁵

Since Schopenhauer's ethics is descriptive in comparison to Kant's (Schopenhauer believes there are facts manifesting the existence of compassionate acts), it should be possible to contribute to what Schopenhauer suggested in the above quotation precisely by looking, from a religious-anthropological perspective, into the history of *expressions* of human morality (Indian Vedic hymns, ancient Near Eastern laments, and *Psalms* of the *Old Testament*) that Schopenhauer either – due to a lack of information – was not familiarized with or viewed negatively, and from the other end, by looking into the positive but not yet fully explored encounters of Schopenhauer's philosophy with Buddhist views of the grounds of the ethics of compassion.

1. Conscience, Secret Presentiment and Compassion in Schopenhauer's Ethics

In the fourth part of his major work (*The World as Will and Representation I*), Schopenhauer argues that, ultimately, human beings could be liberated from suffering if they denied their will: we can overcome our tragic state of being captured in our own existence by a *quietening* of the will. The subject of the treatise is human acts, and its framework is “practical philosophy.”⁴ Here

summit of his ethical analogies. Although he does mention the *Kabbalah* and *Talmud*, his knowledge of those works was scarce, and it was mainly due to this lack of information that he never came to change his negative view. Nevertheless there are passages in Schopenhauer's writings in which value has been attributed to Judaism – especially to *Job*, which for him is like the ‘hors d'oeuvre’ of the *Old Testament*, and of course to *Ecclesiastes*. He mentions *Psalms* only indirectly in his *Aphorisms on Practical Wisdom* (Ps 54:8 and 90:10) and in *On Religion* (Ps 147:9 and 104:14 – only in relation to their citations in a book published by the Munich Society for Animal Protection). It seems that it was this negative view of Judaism that prevented Schopenhauer from discovering in the *Old Testament* any ethical elements relevant for his own metaphysical ethics. This can also be inferred from a note that he made in his edition of the *Old Testament* (*Vetus testamentum ex versione septuaginta interpretum*. Ed. Joannes Jacobus *Breitingerus*): “*Philosophia moralis Judaeorum, οὐδὲ μὴ ἐλεῆσις*” (Brann, *Schopenhauer und das Judentum*, 33).

³ A. Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, tr. by E. F. J. Payne (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 214.

⁴ Cf. Schopenhauer's lectures (*Philosophische Vorlesungen IV*) – *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Aus dem handschriftlichen Nachlaß, hrsg. und eing. von V. Spierling (München: Piper, 1988), Ch. I.

Schopenhauer is interested only in what actually exists and can be demonstrated within acts actually performed, while his philosophical method in this constantly makes use of concepts from the history of religions and theology.

According to Schopenhauer, each act we perform, either for our own preservation or for any other purpose, is an expression of the will-to-live. Our own preservation is what concerns us most and most directly, and it can be described as the care we take in, and the effort we make for our self-preservation. This egoism of the will is inherent to each human being.⁵ However, our acts affect other people as well. In philosophy and religion, this has traditionally been the area of morals. In discussing ethical issues, Schopenhauer stressed Seneca's thought that willing cannot be taught: *velle non discitur*. What one wants is an expression of the will that is primarily expressed in the intelligible character defining the essence of our individuality. On the other hand, the phenomenon of an individual in time and space – the empirical character – always acts according to the motives defining his actions. We do make choices, but our relative freedom is only in finding different ways of achieving the one goal defined by our intelligible character, which in turn is a direct expression of the will as the thing-in-itself. Thus an egoist pursuing his ends may once take something from somebody and the next time give him something, but his domain (egoism) has not changed: "In both cases his *willing* is quite the same, no matter how dissimilar its manifestations, i. e. his *acts*, may be."⁶

The will on which all human acts depend has no goal and no beginning. In itself, it is blind craving inherent to all objectifications, each satisfaction being but brief. As we live, we feel this as "some sort of ceaseless progression into *death*, some sort of ceaseless *dying* [...]"⁷ Thus human suffering can well become so great that one breaks down and wishes only to be dead, even contemplates suicide. For Schopenhauer, though, suicide is only an extreme case of the will having been asserted – it is its last stage in the phenomenon of an individual, a final assertion of the will through self-elimination. In response to the fact that the will exists, Schopenhauer now proposes a theory of soteriology or human desire to be liberated from such life, showing how our consciousness can actually deny the will defining all our acts.

With the belief that will can be either asserted or denied, Schopenhauer's philosophy comes to encompass morality and the related spheres of temporal (i. e. the areas of law and punishment) and the eternal (i. e. the area of theology) jus-

⁵ Cf. A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, tr. by E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publ., 1969), §§ 61–62.

⁶ Schopenhauer, *Philosophische Vorlesungen IV*, 89. Schopenhauer speaks of the promised reward for good deeds that motivates individuals to be "charitable".

⁷ Schopenhauer, *Philosophische Vorlesungen IV*, 113.

tice. What is vital here for our argumentation is the so called “sting of conscience” (*Gewissensbiß*) or feeling that we have wronged another human being. Through the sting of conscience, justice, in addition to the legal-moral meaning, also and above all acquires an ethical one. “Bad conscience” occurs in those who have wronged someone – it occurs as an “obscure feeling” (*dunkles Gefühl*; cf. also *geheime[s] Bewußtseyn*)⁸ that we have done wrong. By conceiving conscience (*Gewissen*) as what we feel *inside*, Schopenhauer suggests that human beings possess an intrinsic ethical awareness, due to which we can overcome suffering by knowing, and can attain salvation. Within temporal justice, state law regulates interpersonal relations and thus human acts, while human beings are the subject of ethics as human beings and not as citizens. Conscience implies an eternal justice that is active in the world.

Conscience stinging a person who has wronged someone else results from their awareness that the other, as a phenomenon, is original and different from them, but as a human being as such (i. e. a manifestation of a one and indivisible will) is identical to them:

Pangs of conscience (*Gewissensangst*) over past deeds are anything but repentance; they are pain at the knowledge of oneself in one’s own nature, in other words, as will.⁹

Pangs of conscience – the pain we feel after having wronged someone –, and the “secret presentiment (*geheime Ahnung*) [...]”¹⁰ – that the world as well as being a phenomenon is nevertheless different in itself – occur in someone who already suspects that will in itself is one, indivisible and inherent to all individuals: that the one who has done wrong is at the same time also the one who has been wronged. So conscience manifests itself firstly as intrinsic, bodily *feeling* (i. e. secret presentiment) of the wrong that has been suffered. *Ex post facto*, conscience can exist precisely because I am in myself, as an intelligible character, free from every definition of space and time; because I am not just a phenomenon (the empirical character) of the will, but rather the will itself. If my acts were felt only in time, I would never have a bad conscience about anything. Conscience is the contact within me with the will as the thing-in-itself, and thus with all people and other living beings. The argument on the will as the thing-in-itself is clearly a metaphysical one. But conscience, as pointed out in our reading of the §§ 55 and 65, is originally inner – bodily – *feeling* of the wrong. Through conscience, our will to live has already been denied: the evidence of conscience lies precisely

⁸ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 335; *Philosophische Vorlesungen IV*, 161.

⁹ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, § 55, 297.

¹⁰ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, § 65, 365.

in the pangs remaining in me, although the act I have committed is long past. Furthermore, conscience reflecting the will as the thing-in-itself thus has an extra-temporal structure. Although I may have been justly punished for my wrongdoing by legal means, this still does not lessen my feelings of guilt, it does not alleviate the pangs upsetting and haunting my conscience. Conscience and self-knowledge of the will thus transcends one as a moral being within a legal system of justice, and opens up the realm of ethics based on eternal justice.

In the course of *The World as Will and Representation*, compassion is the third – final – stage of an ethical path towards an ultimate total denial of the will. Inherent to compassion is the realisation “that our true self exists not only in our own person, in this particular phenomenon, but in everything that lives”.¹¹ Identification of the self with everything living brings forth true compassion and true love. In Schopenhauer’s view, compassion is an age-old ethical phenomenon that alone (apart from the *deuteros plous*) can lead to a complete denial of the will, and is thus natural, original, and inherent to human beings. Compassion is the awareness that beyond the phenomena of the will, all living beings are essentially the same: that one will is active in everything. Schopenhauer several times quotes an Indian sentence on the identity of Bráhman and Ātman from Vedānta: “tat tvam asi”.¹² Therefore compassion – although it can be triggered by any event or suffering of a human being or an animal before me – does not arise exclusively from seeing or feeling concrete suffering in another living creature, but is already present in one as “part” of one’s intelligible character, and it reaches another through one’s metaphysical awareness of the identity between oneself and others. Also love, inasmuch as it is fulfilled and realised, originates in awareness of the all-the-sameness of beings in suffering that is inherent to compassion: “It follows from this, however, that pure affection (ἀγάπη, *caritas*) is of its own nature sympathy or compassion [...]”¹³ – which is essentially metaphysical and non-phenomenal. He calls this *equation* “paradoxical” precisely because of the difference between deeds of love and the metaphysical nature of compassion. The equation is not paradoxical only due to love having entered compassion, but also due to compassion having thus gained a practical orientation. However, as already mentioned, the source and workings of compassion are *not* primarily and necessarily in the contact with another’s suffering: when I realise that others are the same as I am, I already share their pain. This suffering is “wholly direct and even instinctive (*instinktartig*) [...]”.¹⁴ Schopenhauer therefore develops his eth-

¹¹ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, § 66, 373.

¹² About the meaning and role of the sentence “tat tvam asi” in the Upaniṣads see *Upaniṣads*, tr. by P. Olivelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 349.

¹³ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, § 67, 375-76.

¹⁴ Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, § 18, 163.

ics of the will from an originally biogico-anthropological phenomenon – the elusive, innermost and obscure feeling. The innermost (i. e. the bodily) realm within us, that which is the closest to human beings, our bodily feelings and compassion stemming from them, all these are primal ethical phenomena.

It is thus also clear that compassion is not merely a disturbance of human nature at the sight of a suffering individual. When I become aware of the suffering of the world in the light of eternal justice, I begin to suffer myself with the suffering, and suffering of all the world's beings becomes my suffering. Therefore compassion, stemming from the universal nature of suffering, encompasses the virtues of fulfilled justice and love, and motivates us to help other beings.

In our next chapters we would like to examine how Schopenhauer's ethical intuitions on the inner – bodily – origin of compassion are traceable to the religious expressions that he due to a lack of knowledge or aprioristic prejudices regarded wholly negatively (Vedic hymns, ancient Near Eastern religiosity and Judaism) on one or to those expressions which he regarded positively (Buddhism) on the other side.

2. Compassion in the *Rgvedic Hymns*

The hymn to the god Varuṇa that will open a brief outline of how compassion and mercy are conceived in *Rgvedic* hymns (RV 5.85) was written by the poet Atri Bhauma.¹⁵ It admits human transgressions, entreating Varuṇa to take our sins away from us – a sign of an awareness that wrong has been done to a friend and guest (Sanskrit *mitriya* and *aryamiya*), a brother or resident, either a native or a stranger/immigrant.¹⁶

If we have sinned against the man who
loves us, have ever wronged a brother,
friend or comrade,
the neighbour ever with us, or a stranger,
O Varuṇa, remove from us the trespass.¹⁷

¹⁵ Only a few hymns from the fifth maṇḍala of the *Rgveda* have been ascribed to him, among them the one in question, others were the work of his family or a broader circle of authors. Cf. *Der Rig-Veda I-IV*, übers. von K. F. Geldner, Vol. I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951).

¹⁶ P. Thieme believes that a stranger is an immigrant or servant (in his *Gedichte aus dem Rig-Veda*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993, 51).

¹⁷ RV 5.85.7. For this and other citations from the *Rgveda* see *The Hymns of the Rgveda*, tr. by R. T. H. Griffith, New Revised Edition, Reprint (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995), 281 (cited as RV). For a Sanskrit edition see *Rig Veda, A Metrically Restored Text with an Introduction and Notes*, ed. by B.

This stanza has a thematic counterpart in the eighth (final) one, where the author speaks of transgressions (cheating at gambling, for example) that have been committed either wilfully or unwittingly, and begs the mighty ruler Varuṇa for absolution and for friendship in order again to win his favour. This stanza brings clear evidence that an awareness of sin was already closely connected with, and incorporated into a system of interpersonal relations within Vedic religiosity. In his analysis of the hymn, Bergaigne stresses particularly sentence 7c, translated as “the neighbour ever with us, or a stranger,” positively relating it to the rules of interpersonal relations.¹⁸ Varuṇa is a friend just as anyone close to me is – be it my brother, my neighbour, or my guest/ally –, and friends are trusted. A precondition of friendship is mutual trust, as opposed to mere reciprocal (self-serving) trust. By betraying a friend, we lose his trust and thus, indirectly, we may also stop trusting ourselves. The poet is therefore aware of the need for absolution that only Varuṇa can grant him, and entreats him to become dear (Sanskrit *priyasaḥ*) to him once again. In another hymn dedicated to Varuṇa (RV 2.28), the latter is addressed as a son of Āditi – and the poet wishes to enter with him into a relationship of friendship, which is like an alliance (Skr. *yujya*) between comrades. This is a relationship based in *rta*, i. e. the order/truth over which Varuṇa rules, and the poet is imploring divine goodwill:

O sons of Āditi, for ever faithful, pardon
us, Gods, admit us to your friendship.”
“Loose me from sin as from a bond that
binds me: may we swell, Varuṇa, thy
spring of order.¹⁹

In hymns 7.86–89, too, the relationship between man and God encompasses both friendship and alliance in truth. Varuṇa has absolute power over the world and rules everything in his justice, but he is also an intimate friend. He is a merciful and compassionate God, ready to forgive human sinfulness. A hymn dedicated to him contains the most explicit plea for mercy in the whole of the *Rksamḥitā*:

A. van Nooten and G. B. Holland (Cambridge, Mass.: Dept. of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, 1994).

¹⁸ Cf. A. Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique d'après les hymnes du Rig-veda*, Tome III (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1963), 178–179. Bergaigne claims that here “a moral element may have been introduced” from naturalistic conceptions.

¹⁹ RV, 148–49 (2.28.3 and 2.28.5).

O Bright and powerful God, through want
of strength I erred and went astray:
Have mercy, spare me, Mighty Lord.²⁰

Pleas for mercy – although less intense in their expression and extent – can also be found in hymns dedicated to other R̥gvedic gods: to Savitṛ (1.35), to Rudra,²¹ and, particularly, to Agni and to Soma. The latter are both people's intimate friends and are daily involved in their lives. Agni is not just a (supreme) cult god to whom we must be grateful. He is also “merciful” (Skr. *sumṛīkas*), and the one who communicates to *Varuṇa* the transgressions that people have committed: being associated with the hearth, he witnesses their daily life and constantly observes their acts.²² Soma, too, is merciful “as sire to son,”²³ and his mercy and compassion are also compared to a father's in hymn 8.48.4.²⁴ Stanza 10 from this hymn, however, seems to be the most relevant for our topic. Here Soma is addressed by the expression *ṛdūdara*, which best explains the anthropological-ethical significance of certain Vedic hymns: “May I be with the Friend, whose heart is tender [...]” (*ṛdūdareṇa sakhyā*). *Ṛdūdara*, consisting of the words *ṛdu* (as *mṛdu*²⁵ – ‘soft, delicate, tender’) and *udara* (‘the belly, abdomen, stomach, the womb’), denotes a “soft/tender/mild inside” that is characteristic of one who is compassionate, one who is touched at the sight of another's suffering. The expression that pertains to human nature can thus also be understood as compassion stemming from what we feel in the body, while in relation to Schopenhauer, it can be understood as denoting the secret presentiment, obscure feeling within us or conscience. Thus compassion is conceived as an individual's awareness of another's pain, as shared suffering that stems from one's body. To be tender

²⁰ RV, 378 (7.89.3).

²¹ Only three hymns in the *R̥gveda* are dedicated entirely to him – 1.114, 2.33, and 7.46. But they all potently address a merciful god (1.114.2; in 1.114.11 he is addressed together with the Ādityas), a god who looks upon us with compassion (2.33.7), and sustains us and our successors in well-being (7.46.3).

²² Cf. Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique d'après les hymnes du Rig-veda*, 169. About Agni as a merciful God see 169–174. Since some sins, contrary to the usual practice of cleansings by water, were “burnt,” it is clear that Agni played an important role in Vedic morality. About Agni's mercy and pleas for his forgiveness see hymns RV 7.93.7 and 10.150.3. In hymn RV 4.1.2–5, sacrificers ask their friend Agni to help them assure *Varuṇa*'s mercy. Bergaigne believes that sacrifice in this hymn can be understood in the moral sense.

²³ Hymn 10.25; RV, 546.

²⁴ For the analogous equation of ‘mercy’ and ‘compassion’ in earlier Christian philosophy (Augustine, Cyprian of Carthage, Cesarius of Arles and Thomas Aquinas) see n. 37. For the medieval Christian mystics (Meister Eckart, Johannes Tauler, Julian of Norwich) see n. 43.

²⁵ M. Monier-Williams relates *ṛdu* to *mṛdu*, and explains *ṛdūdara* as “having a soft or pleasant inner nature” (*A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999, 226).

inside suggests man's innermost capacity to feel with other human beings, a potential that comes to be realised at a crucial moment for the emergence of ethical awareness, i. e., when another enters the consciousness of an individual. Such "tenderness" comes to be expected from Soma, from the Ādityas (RV 3.54.10: *ṛdūdarās ādityāsas*), and from Rudra (RV 2.33.5: *ṛdūdarah suhavo*). It seems that Vedic man was aware of, or felt the fact that the world defined by "the circles of one's closeness to one's fellowman"²⁶ (cf. RV 5.85) was one in which suffering had always been present. Through awareness of suffering and through trust in divine benevolence and kindness – both dimensions are manifest in expressions like *ṛdūdara*, *sumṛlikāya* etc. – Vedic man hoped to preserve and make ethical sense of the relationship he had had with his God since prehistory.

It thus seems that in rejecting all those aspects of the pre-Buddhist and pre-Upaniṣadic Indian Vedic religiosity that were inconsistent with his picture of the teachings of the Upaniṣads, Schopenhauer left out an important source of religious-anthropological evidence that supports his own view of suffering, and his own ethics of compassion.

3. Compassion in Near Eastern Religious Literature and in the Hebrew Bible

The *eršahunga* (*ér-šà-hun-gá*) prayer, probably originating in Sippar, is considered to be the first example of this literary "genre". Originating in the old Babylonian period, it refutes the belief that the earliest *eršahunga* prayers were written in the middle Babylonian period.²⁷ This earliest known *eršahunga* prayer already potently presents an individual's distress, and his pleas to God:

Like the heart of a mother, may your heart return to its place for me,
Like a natural mother and a natural father may you return for me!²⁸

In the following *eršahunga* prayer, there is an appeal to a goddess for her goodwill and compassion:

²⁶ M. Ježić, "Pojam praštanja u brahmanizmu i kršćanstvu", in: *Praštanje* (Split: Vijeće za pravdu, 1995), 118.

²⁷ The tablet on which it is inscribed is kept in the British Museum (BM 29632). Its discovery pushed back the date of the first individual laments (see P. Michalowski, "On the early history of the *eršahunga* prayer", *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 39 (1/1987), 37–48). Michalowski also enumerates other examples of laments that he dates as belonging to this period. See also S. Maul, '*Herzberuhigungsklagen*' – *Die sumerisch-akkadischen Eršahunga Gebete* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988).

²⁸ Michalowski, "On the early history of the *eršahunga* prayer", 44.

O Lady, say to your servant: 'No more!' May your heart
be at rest [towards him]!
Have compassion for your servant who suffered harm!²⁹

In a later hymn dedicated to the god Marduk, the appeals to him are liturgically repeated as they are in *eršahunga* prayers – the “petitions for reassurance of the heart”. The hymn is an exceptional testimony to human distress that brings one face to face with God, and Marduk is a merciful God who responds to man’s sinfulness, even in the worst of cases, with fatherly kindness. The father may be strict, but his benevolent nature always takes mercy on a repentant man, and forgives him:

Your heart abounds in mercy, you are [gene]rous inside,
in sin [and in] injustice you carry [the g]lood!³⁰

Marduk is the creator of all life, but he is also guardian of a person’s life when he or she strays. Only with his help is it possible to overcome illness, pain, bodily as well as inner suffering. The hymn presents Marduk as a compassionate God bringing salvation to one who in the “final hour” dissolves in tears in front of “the doors of judgement” and truth:

[...] may sighs and compassion say to you 'No more!'
Have com[passion] for him, spare your servant!³¹

Human awareness of sin and human trust in divine compassion and mercy are evident particularly in the *Psalms*, where God is addressed in prayer, and is appealed to as being merciful and compassionate. The Hebrew language denotes God’s mercy and compassion by the stem *ṣḥm*, which in its singular form (*raḥam/reḥem*) means “a (female) body/womb,” while its plural form (*raḥāmîm*) denotes “maternal feelings, compassion,” suggesting that originally, the body of a mother was considered to be the locus of compassion.³² Dalglish stresses that

²⁹ Maul, ‘*Herzberuhigungsklagen*’ – *Die sumerisch-akkadischen Eršahunga Gebete*, 22 (Ešh n74, vv. 20–21). See also the hymn to Ishtar: “She dwells in, she pays heed to compassion and friendliness” (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. by J. B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. with suppl., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, 383). The hymn was written in ca. 1600 B.C.

³⁰ *Texte aus der Umwelt des alten Testaments*, hrsg. von O. Kaiser (TUAT II/5, Bd. 2 – Religiöse Texte, Lfg. 5 – Lieder und Gebete I (über von W.H. Ph. Römer und K. Hecker), Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1989, 754 (vv. 17–18). See note on v. 10 (Akkadian ‘re-mi’ (i. e. pt. from ‘rêmu’) for mercy/compassion).

³¹ *Texte aus der Umwelt des alten Testaments*, 757 (v. 148) and 758 (v. 205).

³² *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, hrsg. von H.-J. Fabry, Bd. 7 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993), 460.

the word expresses either brotherly feelings shared by those born out of the same womb, or is used metonymically for maternal feelings.³³ It is of some interest that the Akkadian word *'rêmu'* (it appears in the hymn to Marduk; see note 30 below) meaning “a mother’s body” and “compassion” – in both cases suggesting loving kindness – also originates in the common Semitic stem *rh̄m*. Expressions that can be related to compassion are used as epithets for a god also in the Ugaritic form *“ltpn il dpid”* (“benevolent, good-natured El”), whose echo can already be found in the *Old Testament* in Ex 34:6, where God is addressed as being “merciful” and “gracious” (*‘ēl raḥûm wēḥannûn*).³⁴ M. S. Smith therefore concludes that both El and Yahweh act in a compassionate orientation towards people.³⁵ Along with *rahāmîm*, another important word related to compassion appears in Psalm 51 and in other texts of the Hebrew Bible: *ḥesed*, which as “kindness, loyalty, mercy, love” originally occurred within “the relationship among the members of the covenantal community”³⁶ as an agreement among them, but the word implies God’s universal benevolence towards people. The tone of Psalm 51 is powerfully set at the very beginning: in verse 3, an individual addresses the God of “mercy” (Hebrew *ḥnn*), of “loyal love” (Heb. *ḥsd*), and of “compassion” (Heb. *rh̄m*).³⁷ Dalglish explains the verb *ḥnn* as “the bestowal of a kindness which cannot be claimed;”³⁸ *ḥsd* as the above mentioned covenant or, speaking of God, the power of his benevolence, goodwill and steadfast love; and

³³ Cf. E. R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 82ff.

³⁴ W. Herrmann, ‘El’, in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons*, ed. by K. van der Thorn, B. Becking and P. W. van der Horst, Second Edition (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 275 and 279.

³⁵ Cf. M. S. Smith, *The Early History of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 10.

³⁶ Cf. the study by H.-J. Stoebe “Die Bedeutung des Wortes *ḥāsād* im Alten Testament”, *Vetus Testamentum* 2 (1952), 244–254. See also the article by E. Hagg “Psalm 51” in *Trierer Theologische Zeitung* 96 (1987), 169–197, which places the notion originally in the domain of the family (a community characterised by love and friendship between partners and between parents and children), and figuratively explains it as an expression denoting God’s mercy and His redeeming love.

³⁷ Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism*, 56 (the translation of Psalm 51). As regards later Christian use of those expressions (‘mercy’ and ‘compassion’; Lat. *miseriordia* and *compassio*) – in Book IX of *De civitate Dei* Augustine relates ‘mercy’ and ‘compassion’ to ‘*passiones*’ in an attempt to delineate them from justice. Cyprian of Carthage (in *De eleemosyne*) and Cesarius of Arles (in *Sermon XXV*) relate mercy and compassion to good deeds or almsgiving (Lat. *eleemosynae*). Thomas Aquinas defines compassion within his discussion of virtues in q. 30 *Summa Theologiae II-II*, where he contemplates whether mercy or compassion (“[...] mercy, being compassion for the misery of another [...]”; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae II-II*, Vol. 34, tr. by R. J. Batten, London: Blackfriars, 1975, 211, q. 30, a.1) is the greatest virtue: as *passio* it has to be tempered by reason, but within love it can be refined, and raised among theological virtues. For the medieval Christian mysticism and ethics of compassion see n. 43.

³⁸ Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism*, 83.

rhm as referring to compassion that can be compared to the intimacy of maternal feelings, to a mother's love and care for her child:

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast
love;
according to your abundant
mercy
blot out my transgressions.³⁹

The relation of utter human closeness from which this plea emerges prefigures human compassion. Both concepts are more explicitly expressed in the Hebrew word *rahāmîm* which, in the sense of "maternal feelings/compassion", postulates the female/a mother's body as the locus of compassionate feelings, and thus testifies that humans are also considered to possess a natural/innate – bodily – predisposition for compassion within ancient Middle Eastern or, more narrowly, *Old Testament* documents. Also within this Semitic religious-anthropological world, as in Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion, it is the body that is vital for the emergence of an ethical awareness from which shared suffering stems.

4. Compassion in Buddhism (*Śāntideva*)

In early Buddhism, compassion played an important role for Buddha as well as for his disciples. Buddha was a compassionate teacher, and his boundless care for others is described in many passages (*suttas* and latter commentaries) of the *Pāli Canon*, where the following expressions denoting compassion are used in relation to Buddha: *anukampā*, *kāruṇṇā*, and *anuddayā*.⁴⁰ Buddhaghōṣa, a representative of the Theravāda, considered compassion to be one of the four divine states that he described in his *Visuddhimagga*.⁴¹ Candrakīrti, a Mahāyāna/Mādhyamaka Buddhist, dedicated part of his *Mādhyamakāvatāra* and its commentary (*bhāṣya*) to compassion as an element of a bodhisattva's path.

³⁹ Ps 51:1 (for citations from the *Bible* see *The Holy Bible [NRSV]*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publ., 1990).

⁴⁰ For many passages of the *Pāli Canon* see H. Aronson, *Love and Sympathy in Theravada Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), Ch. I. Aronson translates the upper Pāli expressions as "sympathy," "simple compassion," and "tender care" (3). Cf. also later Sanskrit expressions for compassion - *anukampā/anukampā* (lit. 'co-trembling,' 'co-shaking'; from the verb *anu*kamp*), and especially their ethical-anthropological (i. e. bodily!) implications.

⁴¹ Cf. Buddhaghōṣa, *The Path of Purification*, tr. by B. Ñyānamoli, Volume One (London: Shambala, 1976). About Schopenhauer's knowledge of Buddhism see U. App, "Schopenhauer's Begegnung mit dem Buddhismus", *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* 79 (1998), 35–56.

Analogous views of compassion were subsequently expressed by Candrakīrti's Tibetan commentators, Dzong-ka-ba and Jay-dzun-ba.⁴² The key personality as regards compassion within the Mahāyāna tradition, however, was Śāntideva.⁴³

In his *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva discussed compassion within the philosophy of Mādhyamaka. His conceptions represent the very peak of the Buddhist “philosophy of compassion.” Altruism in its highest degree – in Buddhist practice, the orientation of the mind/person as being-for-others – is denoted in Mahāyāna by the following expressions: *bodhi-cittotpāda*, its shorter version *bodhi-citta* (‘the mind of enlightenment’), and *cittotpāda* (‘mind-production’; also, ‘lifting up the heart’).⁴⁴ Within the developments of Mahāyāna thought and its fundamental altruistic orientation, the expressions that originate in the earliest Mahāyāna sūtras can be understood synonymously but with methodological differences. The first of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā*), describes a bodhisattva's path in the following way: “A *bodhisattva* should therefore identify all beings with his parents or children, yes, even with his own self [...]”⁴⁵ Thus the concept of “the great wheel” (Mahāyāna) emerges; *cittotpāda* is the fundamental

⁴² Cf. G. Newland, *Compassion: a Tibetan Analysis* (London: Wisdom, 1984).

⁴³ As has been mentioned before, Schopenhauer familiarised himself with Buddhism early in his life (i. e. from 1813 on). However, it was only a year before he died in 1860 that he included a note on the Mahāyāna *prajñāpāramitā* and “dependent arising” in the 3rd edition of his major work (1859). He read about both conceptions in I. J. Schmidt's article (see App, “Schopenhauers Begegnung mit dem Buddhismus”, 51 and 56).

In this paper, we will not discuss Schopenhauer's understanding of the **Christian mysticism**: it is in the 3rd edition (1859; 1st ed. 1819; 2nd ed. 1844) of his major work, that Schopenhauer wrote: “But an even greater mystic, Meister Eckart, whose wonderful writings have at last (1857) become accessible to us through the edition of Franz Pfeiffer, says [...]” (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 381). Schopenhauer referred in his work also to Tauler, but among other mystics he does not mention Julian of Norwich (for compassion [Old Engl. *compassyon*] in the *Shewings* of Julian of Norwich see M. A. Palliser, *Christ, Our Mother of Mercy: Divine Mercy and Compassion in the Theology of the Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992, and Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, tr. by E. Spearing, London: Penguin, 1998). Of interest for our topic is Julian's “insistence that God is not only our father but our **mother**” (*Revelations of Divine Love*, xxi; our emphasis). About the relation between Eckart and Buddha see Volume II of his major work (§48). Eckart and Tauler denote mercy and compassion by Middle High German expressions *barmherzkeit* and *mitliden* (see Meister Eckart, *Die Deutschen Werke*, hrsg. und übersetzt von J. Quint, Fünfter Band – Traktate, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1963, 51–52), but for our purpose and context of the bodily compassion it is important that (apart from the LXX, where ‘oiktirmoi/oiktirmós’ have regularly been the Greek translations for the Hebrew *rahāmim*) the Greek term ‘splānchna’ (i. e. an ‘inside’ or womb as the locus of tender/warm feelings!) for compassion in the *New Testament* is of key importance (see *Theologische Realencyklopädie*, hrsg. von G. Müller, Bd. V, Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994, 226–27).

⁴⁴ Cf. G. Sparham, “Indian Altruism: A Study of the Terms bodhicitta and cittotpāda”, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 15, 2, 224.

⁴⁵ Sparham, “Indian Altruism: A Study of the Terms bodhicitta and cittotpāda”, 225.

motivation, the altruistic desire (Skr. *kāma*), and the purpose (Skr. *cetanā*) that are necessary on a bodhisattva's path: an attempt as well as determination to *feel* – cf. *cittotpāda* as 'lifting up the heart', and *daśa cittāśayāḥ* (Skr. *āśaya* meaning 'the stomach', 'the abdomen!') as the locus of feelings and thoughts in *Daśabhūmika sūtra* – all sentient beings in their countless prior births '*as-though-they-are-our-parents-brothers-sisters...*' The relation between them and myself is one of "sameness" (Skr. *samatā*) – for neither my dharmas nor theirs have a beginning or an end. Everything is entrapped in the boundlessness of space and time. Awareness of this sameness and consequent altruistic motivation incorporate Buddhist compassion. With later developments in Mādhyamaka, this fundamental altruistic motivation came to be understood in the sense of a conventional level of worrying about other beings that acquired the name *bodhi-cittotpāda*. The highest expression of this motivation, however, was *bodhicitta*, i. e. perfect wisdom and non-discrimination among dharmas. Later, *bodhicitta* also came to cover lower meanings of concern for others and the desire that the suffering be ended, but it also retained its original and higher meaning of perfect wisdom, i. e. being fundamentally aware that phenomena do not differ among themselves.

Śāntideva speaks of compassion in the eighth book of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* called "Dhyānapāramitā". The method presented in this work is encapsulated by the concept of non-attachment: if all appearance is impermanent (Skr. *anitya*), then no form of attachment to others who are impermanent makes any sense.⁴⁶ The meditator therefore withdraws into seclusion to develop his mind so as to attain perfect meditative concentration: any care for my own or another's body, any attachment to beings, including those we love, must be overcome through an insight into their impermanence. Through this radical method, all contentfulness of one's relations with people and other sentient beings is gradually eliminated. Friends, enemies, neutral persons no longer exist. Love ceases too, for: "The Tathāgatas have said that the worldly people are nobody's friends, because a worldly being's love cannot but be born of selfishness."⁴⁷ What is then the path leading out of this complete annihilation of everything phenomenal, of relationships, of all persons, of both my friends and foes? How will I develop my motivation, my desire to help, what kind of knowledge will enable the transition from the sphere of "the worldly people" into a (soteriologic) ethics of compassion? "The return journey" begins at the methodical and meditative point zero, when the last remnants of attachment to persons, their bodies, thoughts, and acts have been annihilated. This is the point in meditation on the human situa-

⁴⁶ Cf. P. Sharma, *Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra: Original Sanskrit Text with English translation and exposition based on Prajñākarmati Panjikā*, Vol.-I (Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1990), 290 (VIII, 5–6). About the issue of altruism in Śāntideva's work see also P. Williams, *Altruism and Reality: Studies in the philosophy of the Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998) Ch. II.

⁴⁷ Sharma, *Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 297.

tion when the thought *bodhicitta* arises. It is the moment when the meditator realises the following:

In this manner one should first make a sincere effort to meditate upon the equality between oneself and other beings owing to identically experiencing joy and sorrow.⁴⁸

This realisation that I am the same as others (Skr. *parātma-samatā* as ‘the sameness of self and others’)⁴⁹ results in efforts to act for the benefit of another. Why should I protect only myself when feeling pain and fear if others feel the same? The world is full of beings that all share the destiny of impermanence and of consequent suffering. I do not actually experience the pain felt by another, but when I become aware of our sameness, his pain becomes unbearable for me: when I realise that *I-am-the-same-as-others*, another’s pain becomes the source of my own pain. I know for another that he or she suffers, more precisely, that “someone” feels pain as a consequence of interrelated dharmas being active. I also know that “another” does not exist just as “I” do not exist. Nevertheless, the world is full of misery, and despite this antinomy forcing itself upon me, I continue developing the thought of *bodhicitta*. Another’s pain becomes universal pain. In the same way that I protect my own hand if something endangers it, I protect another’s hand when I see it being threatened – without drawing any kind of distinction between them. There are no differences between us. However, this does not mean that in doing so I was aware of my “self”. The only remaining aim, the only remaining orientation is to put an end to the process of suffering. This is a state that does not permit any thoughts about “me” and “others”. However, does not the fact that I suffer for another and am compassionate with him – the Sanskrit expressions used to denote compassion are *kṛpā* (‘tenderness’), *dayā* (‘sympathy’), and *karuṇā* (‘compassion’) – only aggravate the suffering in the world? The answer is negative: “However, looking at the misery of the world, the ‘dukha’ generated by ‘kṛpā’ or compassion appears negligible.”⁵⁰ Many beings can be delivered from great suffering for the price of slight suffering felt by the person “me”. When another’s body becomes my own body, I enter the realm of the mind/thought of compassion (Skr. *dayācitta*). Śāntideva provides another method of enabling a bodhisattva to treat everyone, including himself, in exactly the same way, and to strive for the happiness of all beings: “exchanging one-self with that of others” (Skr. *parātma-parivartana*).⁵¹ This is

⁴⁸ Sharma, *Śāntideva’s Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 323.

⁴⁹ Sparham, “Indian Altruism: A Study of the Terms *bodhicitta* and *cittotpāda*”, 231.

⁵⁰ Sharma, *Śāntideva’s Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 329.

⁵¹ Sharma, *Śāntideva’s Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 340.

also a characteristic of Buddhas that distinguishes them from ordinary people. Such exchange is not an act of ‘mercy’ that would result from my non-suffering being confronted with another’s suffering. Rather, such an exchange is possible precisely from the opposite situation – one of sameness, when the “self” has realised the non-existence of its own nature, and its interrelatedness with all beings. A bodhisattva thus becomes the same with others, and at the same time, he reduces himself into an eternal slave of everything living. Thus, in Śāntideva’s thought the attainment of *bodhicitta* can also be understood as an expression of a secret presentiment (cf. Skr. *daśa cittāśayāḥ*, meaning bodily compassion, stemming from ‘the stomach,’ ‘the abdomen’,⁵² and related term *anukampaṇa* – ‘co-trembling,’ ‘co-shaking’ [of the body]), a fundamental ethical phenomenon pertaining to all living beings connected through (bodily) suffering and compassion.

Conclusion

Schopenhauer is considered to be a philosopher who firmly grounded his philosophy in metaphysics. In my view it is possible – by looking into expressions of Indian Vedic and of ancient Near Eastern religiosity, and by leaning on those Indian (and Christian)⁵³ philosophers and mystics who sought in compassion a path towards the divine and towards fellow creatures – to reconsider the suppositions of Schopenhauer’s metaphysical ethics and to revive his ethical soteriology through the significance of the *body* for the constitution of compassion both within his philosophy and within the above traditions. What all religions considered by Schopenhauer – either negatively (Vedic Brahmanism and Judaism) or positively (Buddhism) – have in common is suffering as a timeless and basic characteristic of all human beings that leads to an emergence of conscience and morality, i. e. compassion in us. Through his metaphysics of the will, Schopenhauer therefore posits suffering into the centre of his thought, which he develops into an ethics of compassion precisely through the primary anthropological phenomenon of the body and through conscience originating in it. Compassion originating in (bodily) *feeling* of another’s suffering (analogous to his constitution of the world as representation from the body in the § 6 of his main

⁵² See n. 40.

⁵³ On Christian mysticism and compassion see n. 43. As regards the relation of Schopenhauer’s ethics to contemporary (social and political) ethics, see my essay on Schopenhauer’s ethics of compassion as related to the contemporary ‘natural/physical/bodily’ oriented ethics of care/trust (C. Gilligan and A. Baier) and R. Rorty’s neopragmatist’s ethics of solidarity (L. Škof, “From Compassion to Solidarity”, *Synthesis Philosophica* 39 (1/2005), 141–150.

work)⁵⁴ and therefore arising from a fundamental biologico-anthropological (i. e. *physical*) predisposition in humans, leads to the development of an ethical awareness, and to the realisation that all living beings are essentially (and *metaphysically*) the same. And finally – could this be a signpost of the “important step [which] remains to be taken”, namely, a step in *ethics* itself – i. e. “beyond jurisprudence and moral philosophy in Europe” – as Schopenhauer has indicated in his *On the Basis of Morality*?⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See also *Ueber die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde*, in: A. Schopenhauer, *Kleinere Schriften, Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. III, bearb. und hrsg. von Frhr. von Löhneysen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994, 68 (§ 21)). The significance of the body for the ethics could therefore be analogously compared to the significance of the body for the constitution of the world as representation in Schopenhauer vs. prior constitutions from *mens* (Descartes etc.) in the European philosophy, as proposed by R. Malter (see *Arthur Schopenhauer – Transzendentalphilosophie und Metaphysic des Willens*, Questiones 2, Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991, 187).

⁵⁵ *On the Basis of Morality*, 214.