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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Department of Philosophy

Schopenhauer's Pessimism

by

David Woods

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Philosophy

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

SCHOPENHAUER'S PESSIMISM

David Woods

In this thesis I offer an interpretation of Arthur Schopenhauer's pessimism. I argue against interpreting Schopenhauer's pessimism as if it were merely a matter of temperament, and I resist the urge to find a single standard argument for pessimism in Schopenhauer's work. Instead, I treat Schopenhauer's pessimism as inherently variegated, composed of several distinct but interrelated pessimistic positions, each of which is supported by its own argument.

I begin by examining Schopenhauer's famous argument that willing necessitates suffering, which I defend against the misrepresentative interpretation advocated by Ivan Soll. I also offer a metaphysical reading of Schopenhauer's claim that no amount happiness can compensate for the mere fact of suffering, based upon his negative conception of happiness.

I proceed by analysing Schopenhauer's criticisms of two prominent optimists, Leibniz and Rousseau. I attempt to salvage something of Schopenhauer's counterargument against Leibniz that this is the worse of all possible worlds, and I also examine Schopenhauer's claim that the optimistic metaphysics of *a priori* rationalistic philosophy cannot cope with the evidence of meaningless suffering. In the case of Rousseau, I interpret Schopenhauer's brief objection to Rousseau's assumption of original goodness, by means of an examination of Schopenhauer's conception of the contrary doctrine, original sin.

Next I consider the metaphysics of Schopenhauer's account of eternal justice. After defending it against a number of objections, I argue that the nature of his version of eternal justice, which he admits constitutes a justification for suffering, does not conflict with the fact that he so strongly condemns Leibniz's and Rousseau's optimistic justifications for suffering.

Finally I assess whether and to what extent Schopenhauer's ethics of salvation are either pessimistic or optimistic. I conclude that the mere fact that salvation is possible is not necessarily a cause for optimism, but that Schopenhauer's doctrine of salvation is made partly optimistic by the higher form of cognition that he describes as part of it. I also argue that Schopenhauer's views on the essentially mystical nature of the state of salvation ultimately commit him to being neither positively optimistic nor positively pessimistic about salvation.

I conclude overall with some brief remarks about the meaning of Schopenhauer's pessimism, and how in spite of its diverse nature, it is able to lay down a singular challenge to all future philosophers concerned with the question of suffering.

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Declaration of Authorship

I, David Woods

declare that the thesis entitled

Schopenhauer's Pessimism

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
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- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
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Abbreviations of Schopenhauer's Works

- BM*: *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E. F. J. Payne. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995.
- PP I, II*: *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Volumes I and II, ed. and trans. E. F. J. Payne. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.
- WN*: 'On Will in Nature' in *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. D. E. Cartwright, E. E. Erdmann, C. Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. pp. 303-448.
- WWR I, II*: *The World as Will and Representation*, Volumes I and II, trans. E. F. J. Payne. New York: Dover, 1969.

There was a man whom Sorrow named his friend,
And he, of his high comrade Sorrow dreaming,
Went walking with slow steps along the gleaming
And humming sands, where windy surges wend:
And he called loudly to the stars to bend
From their pale thrones and comfort him, but they
Among themselves laugh on and sing alway

From *The Sad Shepherd*, W. B. Yeats

Introduction: The Merry Pessimist

Iris Murdoch once said of Arthur Schopenhauer that '[h]e is a self-proclaimed pessimist – but he is also merry' (Murdoch 1992: 62). There is indeed something seemingly paradoxical about Schopenhauer. The world which he denounces as monstrous and contemptible appears nevertheless to leave him invigorated and enchanted. Nothing could be in starker contrast to Schopenhauer's grim message than the style in which it is presented, which Murdoch brilliantly summarises as 'insatiable omnivorous muddled cheerful often casual volubility' (Murdoch 1992: 80). This thesis is an interpretation of Schopenhauer's pessimism; it emphasises its philosophical relevance and pays careful attention to the variety of distinct senses in which Schopenhauer can be called a pessimist. The following summary of the arguments may therefore read like a litany of various miseries, and seems also to be incompatible with Schopenhauer's overall zeal. However, I want to take the opportunity at the end of this introduction to briefly show that even Schopenhauer's merriness in his pessimism is founded upon part of his philosophical position.

In the first chapter, I propose a new general model for interpreting Schopenhauer's pessimism. The model is developed against certain approaches which, I argue, obscure the real nature of Schopenhauer's pessimism. One obstructive approach is to regard Schopenhauer's pessimism as if it were somehow separable from his philosophy. This includes considering Schopenhauer's pessimism in light of the famous question 'Is the glass half-empty or half-full?', which misleadingly implies that the description of the object of Schopenhauer's inquiry is a neutral matter between him and the optimists, and also the mistake of assigning Schopenhauer's pessimism to his psychological temperament. A second obstructive approach which I identify is the search for a standard argument for pessimism in Schopenhauer's philosophy. This is not so much incorrect as it is unnecessarily restrictive, given that there are many different pessimistic claims in Schopenhauer's work, each (or most) of which is worth considering on its own merits and has its own argument. It is better, I argue, to conceive of Schopenhauer's overall pessimism as composed out of this variety of distinct pessimisms. My fundamental aim, therefore, is to bring these pessimisms to light, to reveal their individual significance and their interrelatedness, as well as the way in which they determine the complex structure of Schopenhauer's overall pessimism. Moreover, this approach boasts the advantage of

accommodating, as integral parts of Schopenhauer's pessimism, his criticisms of certain prominent optimistic philosophers and his engagement in other niche but nonetheless intriguing debates. It is also consistent with Schopenhauer's conception of philosophy in general, according to which philosophical questioning is fundamentally motivated and sustained by the problem of meaning and suffering in the world.

In Chapter II, the real exegetical work begins as I address the aspect of Schopenhauer's pessimism that has attracted the greatest attention from commentators (so much so that if anything is regularly identified as constituting the whole of Schopenhauer's pessimism, it is this): the relationship between willing and suffering. I define my interpretation against Ivan Soll's, which I argue is misrepresentative in some significant respects. In contrast to Soll's view that, for Schopenhauer, only lasting satisfaction of the will is real satisfaction, I do not take Schopenhauer's comments about the duration of satisfaction to be essentially related to his comments about the reality or unreality of desires and satisfaction. Instead, I argue that his comments about the duration of satisfaction are related to his views on the insatiability of the will. The insatiability of the will, though not directly painful, nevertheless contributes to a life of suffering as the constant turnover of desires that are themselves directly painful. I offer an alternative way of accounting for the illusory quality that Schopenhauer undoubtedly attributes to the satisfaction of desires, which does not depend upon the lastingness of the satisfaction, but instead upon the necessary delusion that the object of desire will continue to be regarded as good even after it is obtained. In this chapter I also interpret Schopenhauer's comment that the mere existence of suffering is sufficient to render superfluous the debate over whether there is greater happiness or suffering in the world. I offer a metaphysical reading based upon Schopenhauer's negative conception of happiness, as opposed to the moral reading endorsed, but also queried, by David Cartwright.

I begin to discuss Schopenhauer's direct criticism of optimism in Chapter III, where I lay out and analyse Schopenhauer's views on Leibniz's theodicy. The chapter picks up from where the last debate left off, as Schopenhauer concedes that the question of whether there is more happiness or suffering in the world would be rendered superfluous in a different sense, if only it could be shown that the world is an end-in-itself, and therefore that the sufferings of the world are balanced out by some greater good. This is more or less what Leibniz offers in his theodicy, which Schopenhauer nevertheless rejects. I address the problem of whether Schopenhauer's picture of Leibniz's philosophy is sufficiently accurate for his criticism to have purchase, which calls for a brief examination of Leibniz's view on

the problem of evil. I ultimately locate the force of Schopenhauer's position against Leibniz in two arguments. The first is Schopenhauer's intentionally provocative argument for the worst of all possible worlds, which amounts to the claim that any world worse than the actual world would not be possible. It is, at least on the face of it, a poor argument. However, I argue that it is underwritten by Schopenhauer's earlier rejection of the appropriateness of an aesthetic standard of metaphysical perfection, which is a type of standard that Schopenhauer correctly categorises Leibniz's theodicy as advocating. I therefore read Schopenhauer's argument for the worst of all possible worlds as the needlessly hyperbolic display of a nevertheless plausible non-aesthetic standard of metaphysical perfection, which I call structural viability. Schopenhauer's second argument, which I have named the remainder problem, accuses Leibniz, among other optimists, of leaving behind an unexplained remainder when attempting to rationalise the suffering in the world. I take this to be a comment about the complacency of Leibniz's expressed resistance to *a posteriori* arguments regarding the appearance of meaningless suffering in the world. Schopenhauer, I argue, thereby anticipates the evidentialist formulation of the problem of evil, as is found in twentieth century philosophy of religion. I also address how Schopenhauer's philosophy itself copes with the remainder problem, given that Schopenhauer seemingly contradicts himself by saying that all philosophies, no matter how perfect they are, leave behind a remainder. He solves this problem, I argue, by identifying something in fundamental reality itself which corresponds to the remainder. That is, he concedes that reality is at bottom unconditioned and non-rational—in other words, the will-to-life—and therefore that the phenomenal world, as its reflection, will show no signs of being rationally and intelligently selected other than meeting the minimum conditions of sustaining an existence at all. Schopenhauer's thought is therefore deeply metaphysical, and not averse to *a priori* argumentation, but it does not contradict the way in which the world appears to us *a posteriori*, which I argue is consistent with his avowed approach to philosophy.

Chapter IV focuses on another of Schopenhauer's optimistic opponents, Rousseau. I have chosen to discuss Schopenhauer's views on Rousseau for the reason that, again, the argument picks up from when the last chapter has left off. Part of Schopenhauer's criticism of Leibniz is that his rationalistic dissimulations contradict the observable facts of life. Rousseau, on the other hand, draws his philosophy from life, by Schopenhauer's own admission. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer objects to Rousseau's foundational assumption of the original goodness of humankind. Schopenhauer lodges this objection without fully

elaborating upon it, and so I have attempted to examine its basis by means, first, of a presentation of Rousseau's views on original goodness and the origins of evil, and second, of an analysis of Schopenhauer's more developed conception of the contrary doctrine, original sin. The guilt of original sin according to Schopenhauer is, I argue, that of existing in a world that fundamentally ought not to be. Rousseau's argument is that misery and evil, which make it seem that the world ought not to be, have in fact emerged historically over time. In a pre-civilised state of moral innocence, Rousseau argues, the world and humankind are free from such corruption and misery. Schopenhauer's conception of the will, however, which is necessarily, not historically or merely incidentally, related to such misery, entails that the world always has and always will be a place that ought not to be. Schopenhauer's objection to Rousseau's assumption of original goodness is, therefore, its underestimation of the amount of misery that is natural to the world.

In Chapter V, I discuss Schopenhauer's conception of eternal justice. With the notion of eternal justice, Schopenhauer attempts to address the questionable moral intelligibility of a world in which apparently good people suffer, and apparently bad people thrive. It is a matter of interest here because, on the face of it, it seems optimistic to believe that in spite of these circumstances there is eternal justice. At the very least, it might be hypocritical of Schopenhauer to so sternly condemn Leibniz and Rousseau for their attempts to discover a justification for suffering, when he admits to having found one himself. I first analyse the metaphysics of Schopenhauer's conception of eternal justice, concurring with John Atwell that Schopenhauer's thesis that all harm in the world is ultimately self-inflicted amounts to the neutralisation of harm, and is therefore not an instance of justice strictly speaking, which we might typically expect to be concerned with the correction, in some sense, of real harms done by one being to another. I also emphasise that, in the case of eternal justice, the subject of justice is the metaphysical will-to-life itself, not the individual as an individual. I then address some of the objections to Schopenhauer's account of eternal justice, starting with the point, raised also by Atwell, that the term 'eternal justice' is a misnomer given that what Schopenhauer describes amounts to the neutralisation of harm. Against this, I argue, firstly, that Schopenhauer's account should be conceived as a philosophical appraisal of the truth (if there is any) behind the religious doctrine of eternal justice, in which case the name of the doctrine cannot be omitted. Secondly, I argue that Schopenhauer has no desire to supplant such religious doctrines in favour of their philosophical analyses, for the religious expression of metaphysical truth, Schopenhauer argues, has its own distinct merits. And thirdly, following

Susan Neiman, I contend that Schopenhauer retains the term ‘eternal justice’ in order to draw out the irony of his own interpretation, which locates the justice of all suffering plainly in the deservedness of the sufferer, and ultimately in the fundamental wretchedness of the world—not in the inherent goodness of some divine law or commandment. The second objection I address is that eternal justice according to Schopenhauer does not do justice to the individual as an individual. As I have mentioned above, I simply reject that this is, or should be, within Schopenhauer’s intentions—if it were, then Schopenhauer’s account of temporal justice, that is, jurisprudence in its normal sense, would appear to be a redundant excursion. The third and final critical remark that I address is Georg Simmel’s claim that Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of eternal justice appear to be of far greater use as a metaphysics of cruelty—more of a perverse compliment, perhaps, than an objection. I argue that whereas cruelty does presuppose a certain kind of identification with the victim’s suffering, as Schopenhauer admits, it also presupposes a certain amount of distance, or the illusion of distance, which the metaphysics of eternal justice ultimately denies. In closing, with a fuller discussion of eternal justice in hand, I consider the precise way in which Schopenhauer’s conception of eternal justice is supposed to function as a justification for suffering, and whether or not this draws his views too close to those of Leibniz and Rousseau. I conclude that Schopenhauer’s description of eternal justice manages to account for rightfulness of suffering, or more precisely its non-wrongfulness, without giving an overarching reason for suffering. The world is, therefore, morally intelligible without being metaphysically comforting—rather like hell.

In the sixth and final chapter, before some concluding remarks on the legacy of Schopenhauer’s pessimism, I examine the extent to which Schopenhauer’s ethics of salvation are either pessimistic or optimistic. I begin by outlining Schopenhauer’s rejection of eudaemonic ethics, namely Cynicism and Stoicism, and therefore his argument for the need for transcendent ethics, which deny the world and the will-to-life rather than affirm it. I therefore also give a number of reasons why Schopenhauer would not assent to Julian Young’s quasi-Stoical ‘Schopenhauerian solution to Schopenhauerian pessimism’, which are not the reasons that Young himself suggests. I then give an account of Schopenhauer’s conception of salvation, placing emphasis on the type of knowledge and the type of detachment that characterise it, both of which are distinct from the form they find in Stoicism. I reject the assumption that any philosophy in which there is a doctrine of salvation is necessarily optimistic, or more optimistic than a philosophy in which there is no such doctrine. This assumption is founded upon a misleading abstraction, I argue, as

Schopenhauer's particular conception of salvation, which consists in recoiling from a constitutionally hostile world, is such that for any world which does not contain the possibility of it, we might take this very impossibility as a sign that such a world is milder in nature overall. However, I then examine Schopenhauer's repeated claims that salvation is in some sense the purpose of life, and although I query whether even this is in every respect optimistic, given the world-denying nature of the salvation in question, I do not doubt that the higher consciousness which is essential to salvation, and thereby also part of the purpose of life, makes his doctrine of salvation partly optimistic. Finally I argue that, in spite of the different ways in which Schopenhauer's doctrine of salvation is optimistic and pessimistic, he is ultimately committed, at a certain point, to being neither positively optimistic nor positively pessimistic about the state of salvation. This is because, as Schopenhauer well notes, such a radically alien moral experience is impossible to judge from the outside, except in purely negative terms, hence the fact that it is shrouded in mysticism. Becoming what one is not—the essentially negative core of Schopenhauer's ethics of salvation—may be attractive from the perspective of the desperate inhabitant of the world that Schopenhauer has, by now, described in gruesome detail. However, apart from a few mere hints, the positive inner life of the extraordinary being that attains salvation is a constant mystery beyond our judgement.

So where does merriness come into this pessimism? In order to answer this, Schopenhauer's commitment to truth must be reemphasised. The motivation behind all philosophical thought according to Schopenhauer, as I mention in Chapter I, is a kind of existential distress felt towards the world; however, the aim—and, in a certain sense, the cure—is truth. This alethic optimism, as I call it in the final chapter, underlies the way in which the higher consciousness described by Schopenhauer's doctrine of salvation makes that doctrine partly optimistic. However, philosophy's attempt to respond to the horror of the world is occasionally perverted into a quest to find metaphysical comfort and consolation at any cost, even at the cost of truth. This is the essence Schopenhauer's diagnosis of systematic optimism. Systems of thought are mapped on to the world in accordance with the existential needs of the philosopher and his or her public, but not in accordance with the needs of truth. By contrast, Schopenhauer conceives of his overall philosophy as the triumph of truth over self-serving desire, rather like an abstract version of the final moments of his ethical philosophy. Optimism, in short, vainly tries to fit a delicate glass slipper on to an ugly sister. Schopenhauer's exuberant satisfaction with his

own pessimistic conclusions about the world, in spite of their highly disturbing content, is akin to finally finding the shoe that fits. The shoe may be ugly, but then so is the world.

Chapter I: Interpreting Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Pessimism

1. Introduction

The first question to be settled is how to even approach Schopenhauer's pessimism, for the precise relation in which his pessimism stands to his general philosophy is not obvious at all. Is pessimism merely Schopenhauer's psychological inclination, which leaves a permanent impression upon his work, or does it rely upon some argumentation? Is it possible to argue for pessimism itself, or does one argue pessimistically for something else—and in both cases, what does this mean? Deciding the nature of this relation will noticeably affect how Schopenhauer's pessimism is interpreted, and failing to find the correct relation could doom the search from the very beginning. The inadequacies to be found in some existing interpretations can be traced back to the model the interpreter clearly had in mind when approaching the subject. I will therefore begin by identifying some of these mistaken ways in which Schopenhauer's pessimism has previously been approached (sections 2 and 3). After doing so, I will describe a new model, which is hopefully more fertile (section 4). The significant difference between this model and those of previous studies is that the latter, if they take Schopenhauer's pessimism very seriously at all, have limited themselves to finding one central, standard argument for pessimism in Schopenhauer, whereas the model developed here aims to be as comprehensive as possible. It resists taking one of Schopenhauer's many distinct pessimistic arguments to be representative of his pessimism as a whole, and instead advises paying attention to each individually and as they relate to one another.

2. The half-empty glass

'Pessimism' has a non-technical, non-specialist usage for which it is better known. The term is historically and colloquially associated with the question, 'Is the glass half-empty or half-full?'. The mistake in thinking about philosophical pessimism by analogy to this question is that the question implies that the properties of the object of inquiry, that is,

what the glass and its contents are taken to represent, are ultimately a neutral matter. When observing a pint-sized glass, both the optimist and the pessimist would agree that the volume is half a pint; they distinguish themselves only by evaluating that volume differently. Bryan Magee (1997: 14) takes Schopenhauer's pessimism in this spirit, making explicit reference to the image of the half-empty glass. For this reason, Magee concludes that pessimism is logically separable from Schopenhauer's philosophy, although he does make a vague exception for 'some of those parts that deal with ethics and aesthetics'. In this way, he is led to the astonishing claim that Schopenhauer's philosophy could be expressed just as well in terms of optimism. As the volume of liquid in the glass remains undisputed, so the facts of the world that Schopenhauer identifies can be assimilated by both optimist and pessimist. For this reason Magee explicitly challenges the whole notion of a 'philosophy of pessimism', as is implied by the title of Frederick Copleston's *Arthur Schopenhauer: Philosopher of Pessimism* (1946). He is in disbelief that commentators have failed to pay attention to such a basic point of logic: 'you cannot derive an "is bad" from an "is"' (Magee 1997: 13). And so, according to Magee's view, even if he is a classic example of a pessimist, pessimism is necessarily irrelevant to Schopenhauer's—and any—philosophy. If anything, it is a matter for his biography only.¹

When Magee denies that there is any sense to Copleston's 'philosopher of pessimism' label, Magee is arguably at odds with Schopenhauer himself. Copleston meant to go beyond the 'glass half-empty' model when he noted that the 'pessimism of the ordinary man who is temperamentally inclined to look on the black side of things', and who is therefore only 'superficially a pessimist', is vitally distinct from 'the pessimism of him whose gaze has penetrated to the roots of things and has seen there the abyss of irrationality' (Copleston 1942: 159; see also Copleston 1944: 73-4). In the context of optimism, Schopenhauer hints at the same distinction between the temperamental and the philosophical when he says: '*optimism*, where it is not merely the thoughtless talk of those who harbour nothing but words under their shallow foreheads, seems to me to be [...] a really *wicked* way of thinking' (*WWR* I 326). There are clearly two kinds of optimism implied here: one unreflective, the other reflective—each in its own way contemptible. His comments on particular forms of optimism also firmly imply that he does not regard all optimism to be merely a matter of temperamental evaluation. By looking at what Schopenhauer regards as optimism, it can be told that for him optimism consists in the

¹ There are many reasons to think that Schopenhauer was pessimistic in the psychological sense.

actual descriptive content of particular doctrines and beliefs, which attempt an objective portrayal of the world. His recurring examples of such optimistic doctrines include, but are by no means limited to: a collective destiny for the world, the inherent goodness of human beings, and our unity with some divinely intelligent force (*WWR* II 584; *PP* II 99-102). Who could realistically claim that when Schopenhauer enters into his fierce disputes with such optimists, he conceives of himself as merely arguing over which is the correct temperament to adopt towards the world that they describe? He at least gives the highly convincing impression that greater things are at stake. And if Schopenhauer would draw a distinction between temperament and philosophical doctrine with regard to kinds of optimism, then it can be assumed that he would draw the same distinction with regard to kinds of pessimism. Therefore if commentators have neglected a basic logical point about deriving 'is bad' from 'is', then it is only because they were following Schopenhauer's example.²

Even though Schopenhauer would arguably be on the side of those who assert the distinction that Copleston draws, it does not, however, follow that the distinction is valid, either in this context or in itself. The correct interpretation will not necessarily be the one that coincides with what Schopenhauer imagines is the nature of his own philosophy, though it is encouraging. All that can be concluded so far is that, if it is Magee's aim to reduce Schopenhauer's so-called 'philosophy of pessimism', on the one hand, to Schopenhauer's temperament, on the other, then he does a disservice to Schopenhauer that he may not have foreseen. In the course of this chapter, however, two aspects of the half-empty glass model of interpreting Schopenhauer's pessimism will become noticeably untenable. The first is that the descriptive claims characteristic of Schopenhauer's pessimism are, or can be made, as neutral between sides as the volume of liquid in the glass. For, a noted consequence of this is that Schopenhauer's claims would be assimilable to the optimist, but one struggles, for example, to find the optimistic equivalent to the claim that 'the world [...] is something which at bottom ought not to be' (*WWR* II 576). The second challenge, which partly depends upon the first, is that, if anything, the exact reverse of what the half-empty glass model depicts is true. Rather than two sides each taking themselves to witness the same object, yet coming to evaluate it differently, in the case of Schopenhauer's pessimism and his optimistic opposition, roughly the same evaluative standards are applied, only to two very different and conflicting arrangements of

² See Young (1987: 54), who also rejects Magee's interpretation and argues that Schopenhauer himself draws a distinction between psychological and philosophical pessimism.

the world. In short, it will be seen, it is not that Schopenhauer evaluates the world differently; he sees a different world.

Magee's position nevertheless provides an important service that is worth reinforcing: that Schopenhauer's temperamental pessimism—for there can be no doubt that he was *at least* temperamentally pessimistic in one way or another—is irrelevant to the validity of his philosophy, whether his philosophical pessimism can be reduced to it or not. If the impending interpretation is successful in its aims, therefore, then Magee's shortcoming will be seen to be a simple underestimation of the range of senses in which the label of pessimism can be applied, which will include senses in which pessimism is relevant to Schopenhauer's philosophy.

3. The search for a standard argument

John Atwell makes a key observation about Schopenhauer's pessimism, which highlights a factor in its interpretation that is more important than Atwell seems to realise. He first touches upon it when he comments: 'Schopenhauer was pessimistic about many, many things' (Atwell 1990: 150). Then, at another point in his discussion, Atwell says: 'It is safe to say [...] that Schopenhauer's fundamental pessimism has not yet been located. Perhaps there is none to locate' (Atwell 1990: 165). Finally, Atwell decisively remarks that 'Schopenhauer did not put forth a unified, coherent philosophy of pessimism; he did not have a standard set of arguments for establishing a pessimistic conclusion about conscious life' (Atwell 1990: 173). To speak of 'Schopenhauer's pessimism' as if it referred to a single unified position would be 'presumptuous of a critic', Atwell argues, and he proceeds to list several distinct conclusions, each of which Schopenhauer reaches by a different argument, but all of which could justifiably be classed as pessimistic. His list includes the inevitability of unfulfilled and frustrated willing, the related inevitability of dissatisfaction with oneself, as well as the guilt associated with the egoistic and malicious sides of human nature.

Atwell's observation could be contrasted with the fact that Schopenhauer makes only one explicit reference to an 'argument for pessimism' in *The World as Will and Representation* (*WWR* II 354-6). However, this 'argument', which occurs in a very long footnote, is inspired by a travel article Schopenhauer had read in a French newspaper, according to which a particular snake found in the Javanese jungle had been observed hypnotising squirrels in such a way that they would walk straight into its waiting jaws. 'This story is

important not merely in a magic regard, but also as an argument for *pessimism*' (*WWR* II 356). Schopenhauer appears not to be moved by the fate of the unfortunate squirrel as much as the pathetic circumstances of that fate: to be fatally preyed upon is bad, but to have a hand in it is tragic. What is important to note is that, in spite of being Schopenhauer's only reference to an 'argument for pessimism', the character of this 'argument' ought, on the contrary, to demonstrate the variegation—and sometimes obscurity—of Schopenhauer's arguments for pessimism. They range from highly specific empirical observations of an almost encyclopaedic range, such as the above, to *a priori* reasoning about the metaphysical nature of the world.

In the absence of a unified argument for pessimism, and with some reservations about the details of Schopenhauer's pessimism in mind, Atwell proposes to 'construct' a singular, coherent argument for pessimism on Schopenhauer's behalf, using the grounds provided by Schopenhauer, and therefore remaining consistent with his overall philosophy. Atwell summarises his constructed argument thus: 'It has been argued that pessimism is a philosophical doctrine about the natural human character to the effect that suffering is essential to the life of the affirmer of the will-to-live' (Atwell 1990: 205). Special emphasis must be put on Atwell's use of the term 'natural' because, he argues, it is only when the human being is in its 'natural garb', that is, situated in nature, that it suffers. Suffering, he argues, does not belong essentially to all human beings. It does not, for example, 'belong to the supersensuous human being or character' (Atwell 1990: 174) in whom Schopenhauer's notion of the 'better consciousness' has been realised. If this were not the case, Schopenhauer's eventual arguments for salvation from suffering would appear to be compromised.³

For our current purposes, Atwell's finished interpretation of Schopenhauer's pessimism—his elucidation of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of character, as well as its relation to Schopenhauer's ethical philosophy—are secondary in importance to the implied interpretative model. It must be noted that, at the moment when Atwell proposes to construct a unified argument for pessimism, he ceases to interpret Schopenhauer, regardless of whether his argument is constructed upon grounds provided by Schopenhauer. At most, he is giving a Schopenhauerian argument, for which direct interpretation of Schopenhauer is only a necessary means by which to check consistency with Schopenhauer. Atwell can feel entirely comfortable with this, because it is merely an

³ See Chapter VI.

analysis of his aim: to build upon Schopenhauer, moving as little away from the source as possible. This is Atwell's response to his important observation that the search for a standard argument for pessimism in Schopenhauer is a lost cause.

There is an alternative response to Atwell's, suitable for the commentator who does not wish to move from interpretation to careful re-construction. This is to isolate just one prominent argument for pessimism, unaltered, from Schopenhauer's selection of potential arguments; one might search for the strongest, or the most prevalent, the most unusual, or the most interesting, the one most picked up on in the literature, or some other salient quality. To give an example of this method, in search of the essence of Schopenhauer's pessimism, Mark Migotti narrows it down to three likely candidates. The conclusions of these arguments are: 'all life is suffering', which Migotti names 'the metaphysical thesis'; 'all life is vain and futile', named 'the conative thesis'; and finally, 'life is not choiceworthy', named 'the prohairetic thesis' (Migotti 1995: 645). Finding some inadequacies in the first two of these theses, Migotti decides upon the prohairetic thesis as the strongest. He bases its plausibility on Schopenhauer's argument for the impossibility of an absolute or unconditioned good, given the necessarily instrumental tendencies of the will. Moreover, Migotti argues, the attraction of the argument for the prohairetic thesis is that it is non-hedonistic in essence, unlike the potentially objectionable assumptions lying behind some of Schopenhauer's other arguments for pessimism.

Once again, Migotti's interpretation is not yet as interesting to us as the approach it assumes. For, in both of the example interpretations given above, Atwell's and Migotti's, the same basic interpretative principle is implicitly applied. It is the principle that a philosopher cannot reasonably advocate a given doctrine without having a standard, unified argument for it; we might call this the standard-argument principle. By the light of the standard-argument principle, Migotti tries to locate such an argument for Schopenhauer's pessimism, guided by the further principle of finding the strongest and most attractive existing argument. Atwell, on the other hand, opts instead to create such an argument along Schopenhauerian lines, which are for this reason assiduously studied. Other responses could include a rejection of the view that Schopenhauer is a pessimist in any philosophically interesting sense at all, which might explain the minimal concern about pessimism in some well-known accounts of his philosophy.⁴ However, I would argue that in the case of Schopenhauer's pessimism, it appears that the standard-argument principle is

⁴ For example, Gardiner (1963) and Hamlyn (1980).

best not applied if one aims at a truly representative interpretation. The reasons for abandoning this principle, which will take up the majority of this chapter, are not difficult to see; nevertheless, they must be given carefully, because the standard-argument principle is not at all unreasonable in itself, for it has countless uses in other interpretative contexts.

Abandoning the standard-argument principle is not tantamount to admitting that Schopenhauer's pessimism does not exist in some kind of unity. Rather, we are looking for a new way in which to consider it unified. As Atwell has pointed out, it cannot be doubted that there is no singular, standard argument that Schopenhauer gives for his pessimism. It can therefore be agreed upon, too, that it really is 'presumptuous' to believe that the term 'Schopenhauer's pessimism' refers to just such a position. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer's pessimism can be referred to as a totality, without any presumptuousness at all; one only has to consider that, because Schopenhauer's pessimism does not definitively reside in any one of his individual pessimistic arguments alone, it might be better understood as comprising all of these arguments at once, in some way. With this possibility in mind, the search for a standard, unified argument for pessimism in Schopenhauer's philosophy can be called off in good conscience, in order to let the true, *inherently* variegated structure of Schopenhauer's pessimism reveal itself. We can still expect a certain amount of unity in Schopenhauer's pessimism, as each of Schopenhauer's pessimistic arguments emerges out of the others in the different stages of his philosophy. However, in conceiving of Schopenhauer's pessimism in this way, a far more ambitious task now lies ahead of anyone seeking to fully interpret it: she has to remain mindful of the fact that his pessimism is a network of related but distinct arguments, each of which has its own pessimistic conclusion but none of which can be taken as *the* definitive argument for Schopenhauer's pessimism without, as Atwell notes, being presumptuous. This entails that each argument is as important to understanding Schopenhauer's pessimism as any of the others, but also that the internal relations existing between these arguments are important too.

Readings such as Atwell's or Migotti's would therefore not be invalidated according to this view; it is not as if they lead to any manifest complications or inconsistencies, but their aims would need to be made slightly more modest. They successfully capture one or more of the many constituent parts that make up Schopenhauer's pessimism, but without appreciating that, in proceeding to call these mere parts themselves 'Schopenhauer's pessimism', the broader and more complex structure of his pessimism is obscured. Any accurate interpretation of each individual pessimistic argument in Schopenhauer's philosophy is therefore highly valuable—and many of the existing interpretations will be

discussed and employed throughout the following discussions—but ultimately as a valuable contribution to the bigger picture. The aim of the interpretation elaborated over the forthcoming chapters, once this proposed model has been fully described, will therefore still be to interpret Schopenhauer's individual arguments, but without treating any individual argument as anything more than partially constitutive of what is known as Schopenhauer's pessimism.

3. Schopenhauer's philosophy of pessimism

The form of a new model for interpreting Schopenhauer's pessimism has so far been hinted at by side-lining two apparent obstructions: the half-empty glass misconception and strict observance of the standard-argument principle. It is now time to expand upon the model in more detail, and to prospectively fill in some of its contents. The central interpretative benefit of this model—that its broader scope is far more faithful to the wide-ranging multiplicity of Schopenhauer's pessimism—will become obvious once it has been described in full. It is hoped that this alone proves to be persuasive; however, I will also note, as a further consideration, that the new model dovetails with Schopenhauer's expressed conception of the motivation behind all philosophy in general, which, he believes, ties all philosophy inextricably to the matter of optimism and pessimism. Additionally, by the close of the chapter, we will be in a position to understand some final categories of error that have occurred in the interpretation of Schopenhauer's philosophy.

A model for Schopenhauer's pessimism

The claim is that Schopenhauer's pessimism can be considered as a totality insofar as it consists of a collection of several interrelated but independently pessimistic arguments. However, there are some important details to be added to this picture, if it is to be fully understood. For, if Schopenhauer's pessimism does not inhere in one standard argument, but is comprised of many, then a clear idea must be had, firstly, of what is required to qualify as just one of the individual, independently pessimistic arguments out of which Schopenhauer's pessimism is composed, and secondly, of the nature of the relation that stands between these arguments.

In order to provide these details, it will be helpful to have a list of some of the pessimistic claims that Schopenhauer argues for in the course of his work (the dedicated analysis of which is to be saved for later chapters):

- (1) 'life swings like a pendulum to and fro between suffering and boredom, and these two are in fact its ultimate constituents' (*WWR* I 312);
- (2) 'all happiness is only of a negative, not a positive nature, and [...] for this reason it cannot be lasting satisfaction and gratification' (*WWR* I 320);
- (3) '*absolute good* is a contradiction [...]' (*WWR* I 362);
- (4) 'as nothing can come out of nothing, [evil and wickedness] too must have their germ in the origin of the world itself' (*WWR* II 171-2);
- (5) 'for a blissful condition of man, it would not be by any means sufficient for him to be transferred to a "better world"; on the contrary, it would also be necessary for a fundamental change to occur in man himself, and hence for him to be no longer what he is, but rather to become what he is not' (*WWR* II 492);
- (6) 'were the evil in the world even a hundred times less than it is, its mere existence would still be sufficient to establish a truth that may be expressed in various ways, namely, that [...] it is something which at bottom ought not to be' (*WWR* II 576);
- (7) '[t]he chief source of the most serious evils affecting man is man himself; *homo homini lupus*' (*WWR* II 577);
- (8) 'against the palpably sophistical proofs of Leibniz that this is the best of all possible worlds, we may even oppose seriously and honestly the proof that it is the *worst* of all possible worlds' (*WWR* II 583).

The list, which is not even exhaustive of Schopenhauer's pessimism, demonstrates concretely that Schopenhauer himself is responsible for the proliferation of senses in which he can be considered a pessimist. We will become better acquainted with the arguments behind each claim in time.⁵ What is important to notice for now is that the claims are actually quite easily and quite naturally differentiable, and that this is with respect to their

⁵ For (1), (2), (3) and (6), see Chapter II; for (4) and (8) see Chapter III; for (7) see Chapter IV; for (3) again and (5) see Chapter VI.

descriptive content. For example, (1) is quite a different proposition from (3), in that a life that is ultimately characterised by suffering and boredom is not necessarily devoid of any absolute good; it certainly does not follow directly from (1) that the very notion of an absolute good is a contradiction in terms, and it can be vouchsafed now, until further discussion makes it plain, that (3) also does not directly follow from the argument behind (1).⁶ The same kind of thing can be said about each of these claims in relation to the others, that is, they may be related, but no one claim automatically implies the other; and so what individuates each argument is the content of the claim made by its conclusion. Quite simply, they are different arguments insofar as they argue for different things. As trivial an observation as this might seem, it needs to be made in order to rule out the alternative possibility that Schopenhauer's many pessimistic arguments are different only insofar as they give different arguments for the same basic pessimistic claim.

There is now the matter of what makes each different claim independently pessimistic; which is to say, what conditions obtain in all of these claims such that, in spite of their differences in content, each is still correctly described as 'pessimistic'. Already existing in the literature on pessimism, there is a very simple general definition from which to work: 'pessimism is a judgement of value regarding life or reality as a whole, which results from the conflict between man's *supreme* value and the supposed facts of life' (Krusé 1932: 395). This is hardly a recent definition, nor a surprising one, but it has not been surpassed in terms of the balance it achieves between simplicity and accuracy. To elaborate on it just a little: for any given question, there will obviously be a selection of conceivable answers. Given a certain value, or framework of values, these answers form a scale of implications, ranging from the optimal outcome to its opposite—the 'pessimal' outcome, so to speak. A pessimistic argument is simply the one whose conclusion is the least appealing out of the range of conceivable answers to the question being asked, or close enough to it.

This raises the question of what so-called 'supreme value' lies behind Schopenhauer's pessimism. In answering this, it is finally revealed where the variety of distinct senses in which Schopenhauer is a pessimist originates from. For, according to the above definition of pessimism, each of the claims (1)-(8), if they are to be correctly called pessimistic, imply some possible source of value in the world, which the fact of the claim about the world happens to deny. But, looking at each of these claims in turn, there is a diverse mixture of

⁶ Incidentally, Migotti's interpretation centres around claim (3), whereas Atwell's interpretation places greater emphasis on claims such as (1) and (5).

possible sources of value being entertained. For example, a hedonistic standard of value appears to underlie claims (1) and (2), but this is not the case for, say, claim (8). It is hard to find a neat term for the value threatened by claim (5), but the challenge is clearly aimed at the notion that self-realisation, in the appropriate environment, is a possible route to bliss, as opposed to Schopenhauer's claim that, on the contrary, a radical and possibly inconceivable form of self-abnegation, no matter what the environment, would be necessary.

Claim (8) in particular demonstrates that one can even draw up different categories of values that Schopenhauer entertains and ultimately counterposes. The threatened value implied by claim (8) is quite obviously taken from a famous notion in the history of philosophy: Leibniz's 'best of all possible worlds'. Schopenhauer is therefore explicitly polemical here, and it is an advantage of this more inclusive model that negative arguments against specific philosophers can also be taken up as integral part of Schopenhauer's pessimism itself. Claim (5) may also be seen as challenging some notions that have a history in philosophy and theology, that is, those of both self-realisation and the afterlife. On the other hand, Schopenhauer also challenges naïvely held, pre-philosophical sources of value, such as the possibility of happiness and the ability to avoid suffering, that is, (1) and (2). This is the reason why many of his claims can be identified quite intuitively as pessimistic: because they refer to values that are universally familiar, if not completely natural, to us. Finally, there is a category of value that is concerned neither with traditions in the history of philosophy, nor with what is naïvely valued, but appears to be made up of concerns peculiar to Schopenhauer. For example, claim (6) is quite radical in its implication that the only valuable world would be one in which suffering does not even exist, never has, and never will. Nevertheless, it turns out that this claim is intended as a response to the typical debate over whether there is a preponderance of either pain or pleasure in the world, which is not exclusively philosophical nor colloquial, but occurs in both camps.

Earlier in this chapter, it was suggested that Schopenhauer's dispute with the optimists is not the result of his evaluating the world differently, but rather his seeing a different world, hence it is the reverse of what the half-empty glass model implies. Now it is claimed that the distinctness of the senses in which Schopenhauer is a pessimist can be explained in terms of the several different values by which the world can be judged. Just in case of confusion, it should be made clear how these two claims fit together. Whatever value Schopenhauer happens to be challenging, there will always be some corresponding form of optimism, which consists in taking the world to conform to that value. Schopenhauer's

own picture of the world remains essentially constant throughout, but like any philosophy it differs from many alternative philosophical pictures, and so it conflicts with many different values at once, that is, those values which one might have to look from one optimistic philosophy to another in order to find affirmed—to Leibniz, to Rousseau, to Hegel, and so on—or else to our naively conceived pursuit of happiness. Schopenhauer's philosophy is like a hub of pessimism, therefore, fighting optimism on multiple fronts. One might even suggest that his pessimism is inherently oppositional in essence; it always has in mind some kind of optimism as a target. But in the end, for any particular value, one finds that the dispute consists not so much in whether or not the value itself is correctly upheld, but whether, *if* upheld, the world is even fit to fulfil this value. It is rare for Schopenhauer to agree with the optimist's description of the world, and for his disagreement to consist merely in whether such a world would be valuable or not.⁷ There are many different ways in which a world could possibly be valuable; however the problem, as Schopenhauer repeatedly points out, is that our world embodies little to none of these ways.

It has been shown how each of the examples (1)-(8) is correctly described as pessimistic, and yet is differently pessimistic in terms of the value that it threatens. What remains is the nature of the relations between the arguments for these claims, in virtue of which they are all a part of Schopenhauer's overall pessimism. This is to be found in the fact that each of the conclusions recurs somewhere else as the premise in one or more of the arguments for the other claims. For example, that happiness is essentially negative in nature, (2), and that evil and wickedness are essentially positive, (4)—each pessimistic in themselves—are important premises in the argument that concludes, pessimistically, that the world ought not to be, (6). For, if happiness were an inherent, positive force in the world then it could not be denied that something that presumably ought to be equally has its 'germ in the origin of the world'.⁸ In this general fashion, Schopenhauer's arguments are overlapping and interrelated, while each remains distinct and distinctly pessimistic in its own conclusion. Though the quotations (1)-(8) admittedly derive from a concentrated area of Schopenhauer's work,⁹ it is not possible to separate the insights that they express from the rest of his philosophy, not to mention the fact that each insight is frequently re-expressed elsewhere. A good demonstration of this is how Schopenhauer's account of the

⁷ We might see Schopenhauer bordering on this in my interpretation of his argument for non-aesthetic standards of metaphysical perfection. See Chapter III.

⁸ See Chapter II.

⁹ Roughly pp. 300-400 of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, and pp. 400-600 of the second volume.

value of aesthetic and moral experience points forward to the doctrine that salvation requires one to become what one is not, claim (5), but the ultimate kind of selflessness described by this doctrine points back to the arguments underlying claim (1), that is, that our essence is to will, that to will is necessarily to suffer, that willing is the essence of human beings, and so on.¹⁰

To put my claim boldly, then, saying 'Schopenhauer's philosophy of pessimism' is really the long way of saying 'Schopenhauer's philosophy'. There is little, if anything, to which one can refer when speaking of any part of Schopenhauer's philosophy without thereby at least implicitly referring to an element that constitutes a part of his philosophy of pessimism. Therefore, the sense of the phrase 'philosophy of pessimism', when considered with respect to Schopenhauer's philosophy, is not structurally analogous to, say, that of the phrase 'philosophy of art': while it would not only be false but absurd to say, 'Schopenhauer's philosophy is a philosophy of art', it would be both true and useful to say, 'Schopenhauer's philosophy is a philosophy of pessimism'. Pessimism is also not to be thought of as a position in itself which Schopenhauer is attempting to advance; in fact, to try to argue just for 'pessimism' alone is nonsensical. One is not simply a pessimist; one is always pessimistic *about* something, or in Schopenhauer's case, about many things. Rather than a position of its own, then, pessimism is a way of characterising the prevailing manner of Schopenhauer's many philosophical positions regarding the nature of life and the world. The positions themselves are argued for, and are pessimistic with respect to various widely held or historically significant values—not with respect to his psychological inclination, or with respect to differences in his evaluative perspective on some pre-agreed description of the world.

The need for metaphysics and the need for optimism or pessimism

The character of Schopenhauer's work, as presented here at least, epitomises a principal theme in modern philosophy which has only recently received detailed scholarly treatment. In her book *Evil in Modern Thought: an Alternative History of Philosophy* (2002), one of Susan Neiman's 'central claims' is that 'the problem of evil is the guiding force of modern thought' (Neiman 2002: 2). She makes clear that by 'the problem of evil' she does not

¹⁰ See Chapters II and VI.

exclusively mean the theological problem, but also the secular problems surrounding the intelligibility of evil and suffering. From the early modern period onwards, Neiman argues, philosophers can be organised according to what they advocate as the appropriate response to evil. Thus, the history of philosophy can be divided into two main camps: the first includes those who argue that there is a moral demand to make evil intelligible (Leibniz, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Marx, according to Neiman); the second includes those who argue that there is a moral demand *not* to make evil intelligible, and instead to take it at face value (Bayle, Voltaire, Hume, and Schopenhauer) (Neiman 2002: 8).¹¹

Reflecting on the motivations behind philosophy in general in his essay 'On Man's Need for Metaphysics', Schopenhauer expresses an opinion similar to Neiman's. His overall point is most distinctly made in a comment about religion, although the remark applies equally well to his consideration of any systematic metaphysical thought:

I cannot, as is generally done, put the *fundamental difference* of all religions in the question whether they are monotheistic, pantheistic, atheistic, but only in the question whether they are optimistic or pessimistic, in other words, whether they present the existence of this world as justified by itself, and consequently praise and commend it, or consider it as something which [...] really ought not to be.

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Schopenhauer is not merely expressing his preferred way of organising his views. When he speaks of a '*fundamental difference*' he really is attempting to distinguish systems of thought with respect to their very foundations. All metaphysics are fundamentally either optimistic or pessimistic, Schopenhauer believes, because of the general motivation behind all metaphysical thought. He argues that philosophical and religious speculation begins not only with wonder, but with despair. A despairing astonishment is felt towards the world because its purpose, if it has a purpose, is not immediately apparent. In the absence of this sense of purpose, the world appears to us as senseless, intolerable, even evil and wicked. 'Not merely that the world exists,' Schopenhauer argues, 'but still more that it is such a miserable and melancholy world, is the *punctum pruriens* [tormenting problem] of

¹¹ There is also a small unofficial third camp which Neiman mentions: those who cannot neatly fit into either of the first two, but seem to straddle both. It includes Nietzsche and Freud (Neiman 2002: 11).

metaphysics, the problem awakening in mankind an unrest that cannot be quieted either by scepticism or criticism' (*WWR* II 172). Speculative thought is the demand for answers to the questions that might arise from these circumstances. Any metaphysics is therefore incomplete so long as it fails to respond somehow to the despairing sense of wonder from which it arose. It may do so by identifying whatever it is that might justify the world, which might mean discovering a hidden region of order, purpose or design, for example, and thereby curbing the despair.¹² Alternatively, metaphysics may respond by demonstrating that, on the contrary, nothing exists that truly justifies the world—a response which validates the despair instead. In short, philosophy runs deeper than mere long-term intellectual curiosity. It begins with the question of the value of life, and hopes to end with its answer, even if it proceeds by means that, perhaps only apparently, contain no reference to any such question of value. Depending upon what kind of conclusion a given philosophy reaches, this explains why optimism and pessimism are ultimately the fundamental philosophical categories.

Having pinned down the motivation behind philosophy, and its relation to optimism and pessimism, its aim should also be made clear. For Schopenhauer, philosophy's constant and abiding aim is truth:

[A]s regards to the *obligations* of metaphysics, it has but one, for it is one that tolerates no other beside it, namely the obligation to be *true*. If we wished to impose on it any other obligations beside this one, such as that it must be spiritualistic, optimistic, monotheistic, or even only moral, we cannot know beforehand whether this would be opposed to the fulfilment of that first obligation, without which all its other achievements would of necessity be obviously worthless. Accordingly, a given philosophy has no other standard of its value than that of truth. For the rest, philosophy is essentially *world-wisdom*; its problem is the world.

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Philosophy is good because it is true, then, not true because it is good, and the same goes for the wisdom with which it supplies us. In the course of the following interpretation, we

¹² See Chapter III on how this manifests in Leibniz, and Chapter IV for Rousseau. See Chapter V for how close Schopenhauer comes to this, without fully reaching it, in his conception of eternal justice.

will see that in terms of philosophy's motivation, which is an answer to despair, along with its aim, which is truth, optimism about our world can only be explained by the former's dubiously having gained the upper hand. Being comforted becomes secondary to ascertaining the truth, the semblance of which is retained only as a necessary pretext for belief in the reality of that comfort. Pessimism, on the other hand, answers its questions candidly—or rather a candid answer will only result in pessimism—and so it faces up to an uncomfortable conclusion.

It should be unsurprising, then, that Schopenhauer's philosophy is inextricably and thematically tied to questions of where to find worth in the world: his very conception of philosophy calls for it. He finds his answers first, in strict observance of the truth, and tests them against different standards of value after, but this second step is always important, if only to refute the abusers of truth. It may be that he is so specifically remembered for his pessimism only because of the degree to which he was self-aware that such a motivation lay behind his philosophy, if not philosophy in general—a self-awareness which could be what Nietzsche was referring to when he claimed to admire Schopenhauer above all for his honesty, where the contrasting dishonesty would be to engage in philosophy under the pretence that one is unconcerned either way about life's grander questions, or to be without this pretence but to tailor one's results simply for sake of metaphysical comfort.¹³ The task of this interpretation can therefore be regarded as tracing the line of pessimism as it runs through Schopenhauer's thought. In other words, to provide the details of how Schopenhauer's pessimism appears when his contention that it is where his (and all) philosophy ultimately begins and ends is substantiated.

Some final categories of error

As a final remark, I would like to discuss briefly two more categories of error in the interpretation of Schopenhauer's pessimism, one of which I have already touched upon, the other of which is additional. First, the commonly held view that Schopenhauer's pessimism is logically separable from his philosophy, because it is just a psychological fact about the man, can now be explained in terms of the suggested new model in which, on

¹³ 'Schopenhauer as Educator' in *Untimely Meditations* (Nietzsche 1997: 125-194); see also *Gay Science* §357 (Nietzsche 2001: 217-221). See Chapter III for intellectual (dis)honesty in its relation to optimism and pessimism.

the contrary, his pessimism is close to indistinguishable from his philosophy. The former position can be regarded as the mistake of taking the very surface of Schopenhauer's philosophy for a projection upon that surface. That is, the error occurs because the continual presence of pessimism in his work, which makes it unlike other aspects of his philosophy, and which defies one's normal expectations of a philosophical argument on a given subject, leads one to suspect that it is carried through by his personality alone, and not by any philosophical means. In this way, one understandably, but incorrectly, treats the spread of Schopenhauer's pessimism as if it were merely a superficial property cast on to his arguments, when really it is supervenient upon them. Here, then, might lie the reason why Lukács (1979: 192-243), Magee (1997: 3-14), Hamlyn (1980: 43), Fox (1980: 47-70), Cartwright (1988: 66), and others, all casually subscribe to versions of the 'temperament, not argument' interpretation of Schopenhauer's pessimism.¹⁴ But in truth, Schopenhauer's pessimism, in the sense that should interest the interpreter, is nothing without philosophical argumentation.

With regards to my very final category of error, I point it out only because it is a cheap-shot that someone might conceivably take at Schopenhauer's pessimism. It also helps, incidentally, to clarify my overall aim for the following interpretation. Schopenhauer should not be regarded as inconsistent if he is optimistic in places; nor should it be concluded that his pessimism is merely a matter of mood and temperament just because he is pessimistic in one place but optimistic in another. One may indeed look upon his philosophy at one time and find pessimism, and then look at another time and find

¹⁴ Migotti (1995: 644f.) helpfully lists these advocates. The unshakeable influence of the half-empty glass conception of pessimism might equally explain their views, if it is considered as a prejudice; on the other hand, resorting to the half-empty glass conception might be initiated by the confusion just outlined. To add just one last advocate of the temperamental reading, Kuno Fischer is reported as commenting that Schopenhauer would have been an optimist if only he had lived in a more prosperous time. In an 1855 letter to Julius Frauenstädt, in which Fischer's remark is mentioned, Schopenhauer himself protests that his pessimistic realisations first came about in a time of liberty and hope for Germany, specifically between 1814 and 1818 (Atwell 1990: 146-7). The assumption behind Fischer's comment is contrary to an interesting psychological observation made by William James in his essay 'Is Life Worth Living?': 'It is, indeed, a remarkable fact that suffering and hardships do not, as a rule, abate the love of life; they seem, on the contrary, usually to give it a keener zest [...] Need and struggle are what excites and inspire us; our hour of triumph is what brings the void' (James 1956: 47). Penetrating as this insight is—perhaps it resembles Schopenhauer's account of boredom (see Chapter II)—it should not be used as the basis for an inversion of Fischer objection, this time aimed at Schopenhauer's response to Fischer's original objection. The problem is that, if meant seriously, the fundamental form of either objection would be that of a genetic fallacy. The conditions in which Schopenhauer's philosophy arose, whether they be a crisis or an idyll, are ultimately irrelevant to its validity. Nevertheless, Fischer's objection has clear historical worth, in that it led Schopenhauer to reflect on exactly how and when his pessimism first developed.

optimism (although one is unlikely to have looked in the same place). And, above all, the proposed model in fact permits that Schopenhauer is occasionally optimistic.¹⁵ His occasional optimism is not even necessarily to be regarded as superficial: it can share the same philosophical validity as his pessimism. However, what it does not share with his pessimism is the quality of pervasiveness: it does not encompass the central arguments of his philosophy, nor the inherent interrelations between them; it is neither the beginning, nor the end. Therefore—on pain of a very swift refutation—it is not among the hopes for the following interpretation to support the claim that Schopenhauer is a pessimist in every sense and in every place. Rather, it just so happens that he is pessimistic in many significant senses, in many significant places, and moreover, in the links between those places.

4. Conclusion

I have proposed that Schopenhauer's pessimism should be interpreted as a philosophically relevant aspect of his work, composed of several distinct and independently pessimistic arguments. This is opposed to the views, firstly, that Schopenhauer's pessimism is in some way merely a matter of temperament or psychological perspective, and secondly, that one central argument for pessimism can be derived from his work. By way of rejecting the temperamental-psychological interpretation, if this is not anyway based upon a genetic fallacy, I have shown that Schopenhauer's pessimism depends upon substantive claims about the world, which cannot be assimilated by just any evaluative perspective, least of all an optimistic one, and that Schopenhauer can often be seen to be entertaining the very same proposed values as his opposition in order to test their compatibility with the reality of the world—a test which they almost invariably fail. The interpretative advantage of the proposed model, I argue, is its faithfulness to the continuity of Schopenhauer's pessimism throughout the stages of his philosophy, as well as its overall inclusivity, especially with regards to Schopenhauer's polemical views against certain prominent varieties of optimism. It also chimes with Schopenhauer's views on the motivation lying behind all philosophy, which, he claims, emerges from the need to address a sense of metaphysical despair.

¹⁵ See Chapter VI for Schopenhauer's alethic optimism.

Chapter II: Willing and Suffering

1. Introduction

A well-known feature of Schopenhauer's pessimism is his claim that suffering is perennial and inevitable, whereas joy and relief are momentary and ultimately hollow. These facts, he argues, are necessitated by the essence of the human being, which consists in the will. Various attempts have been made to precisely comprehend the necessary relation that Schopenhauer means to establish between willing and suffering.¹⁶ In this chapter I will add to this tradition, but I will also attempt to dispel an existing interpretation that I take to be particularly damaging.

I begin with a description of the character of human suffering according to Schopenhauer (section 2), with an emphasis on its inevitability and on the extent to which it appears to be subjectively determined. After a brief summary of how Schopenhauer establishes the will-to-life as the primary metaphysical essence of the human being (section 3), I elucidate his attempt to demonstrate in what way the subjective element that determines the inevitability of human suffering is the will (section 4). The interpretation developed is primarily defined against an opposing interpretation, offered by Ivan Soll, which I argue is based upon a misrepresentation of Schopenhauer's views. The outcome is, I claim, a fairer, more representative reading of Schopenhauer, which attributes to him a subtler and more plausible argument. Finally, I interpret Schopenhauer's argument that the suffering necessitated by the will can never be outweighed by any amount of happiness, on account of the latter's purely negative nature, which thus renders superfluous all attempts to argue about whether there is greater suffering or happiness in the world (section 5).

2. The life of suffering

There are only two certainties in life: suffering and death. These are not life's exclusive characteristics, fortunately. A certain kind of happiness is possible; though, in

¹⁶ A selection: Gardiner (1963: 174-86); Simmel (1986: 32-74); Young (1987); Cartwright (1988); Atwell (1990: 143-209); Migotti (1995); Janaway (1999); Fernández (2006); Soll (2012).

Schopenhauer's view, it consists only in consciousness of a temporary absence of suffering, and so is entirely negative in its nature (*WWR* I 319-23). Variety in life is otherwise created by the fact that suffering, while it is never completely vanquished, is constantly transforming: 'The ceaseless efforts to banish suffering achieve nothing more than a change in its form' (*WWR* I 315). We are wellsprings of latent suffering, according to Schopenhauer; it is only in the individuated realm of the intellect that this homogeneous material is formed into the variegated extremes of the passions, that is, 'sexual impulse, passionate love, jealousy, envy, hatred, anxiety, ambition, avarice, sickness, and so on' (*WWR* I 315). Schopenhauer points out that the human being is inseparable from a life of suffering even when conceived of in its most perfected form. If the stories of our original heroes—Achilles, Odysseus, Ajax, Hercules—are anything by which to judge, then the capacity for pain and woe only increases in proportion to completeness of the person (*WWR* I 314-5).

Failing this—that is, if a life is not filled with passionate suffering—the space that is left behind is filled up by suffering of a low, dull and monotonous kind: boredom. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that the space left behind is itself a form of suffering: 'boredom is just that feeling of [existence's] emptiness' (*PP* II 287). Moreover, '[b]oredom is anything but an evil to be thought of lightly' (*WWR* I 313). In a bid to ward off boredom, and obscure from view the sight of mere existence itself—'our existence is happiest when we perceive it least' (*WWR* II 575)—a host of behaviours may be adopted, ranging from seemingly innocuous time-wasting activities to the full-blown vices of an extravagant lifestyle: 'hence luxury, delicacies, tobacco, opium, alcoholic liquors, pomp, display, and all that goes with this' (*PP* II 294). 'Just as need and want are the constant scourge of the people,' Schopenhauer says, 'so is boredom that of the world of fashion' (*WWR* I 313). Nevertheless, a demonstration of the true seriousness of boredom, Schopenhauer adds, is its use as a form of punishment in the penitentiary system, that is, solitary confinement (*WWR* I 313). It is a severe, but highly effective punishment to give to a person everything necessary to prolong her existence, yet nothing with which to keep it passionately occupied.

Assuming, then, as Schopenhauer does, that existence is something akin to a vessel to be filled, whether occupied or unoccupied, there is no escape from suffering for the human being. 'Hence its life swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom, and these two are in fact its ultimate constituents' (*WWR* I 312).

Schopenhauer makes noticeably little reference to the outer world in order to depict

a life of inevitable suffering. The role that the external world does play is to determine what specific form our suffering assumes, depending upon what kinds of things take our interest, and how accessible and available these things are. That there will inevitably be suffering in the first place is determined by the inner nature of the human being, in some way not yet disclosed. In other words, ‘a very large part’ of the suffering encountered in life is ‘subjective and determined *a priori*’ (*WWR* I 316). Schopenhauer takes as evidence of this the fact that ‘we come across at least as many cheerful faces among the poor as among the rich’ (*WWR* I 316), which is to say that adverse circumstances alone are insufficient to determine their effect on a given person’s well-being: character must be included as a co-decisive factor. If it is not so obvious that there are as many cheerful faces among the poor—or if one baulks at the apparent implication that, regardless of how extreme the adversity of any given circumstances may be, it is ultimately a matter of character whether someone suffers or not—then his alternative example is that ‘the motives that induce suicide are so different, that we cannot mention any misfortune which would be great enough to bring it about in any character with a high degree of probability, and few that would be so small that those like them would not at some time have caused it’ (*WWR* I 316).

Schopenhauer further points out that the suffering that one can expect in life appears also to be predetermined with respect to the proportion of its magnitude: ‘we might be led to the paradoxical but not absurd hypothesis that in every individual the measure of the pain essential to him has been determined once for all by his nature, a measure that could not remain empty or be filled to excess, however much the form of suffering might change’ (*WWR* I 316). For, in everyday circumstances, the quantity of suffering supplied by one’s disposition is spread out thinly across ‘a hundred little annoyances and worries’, but if a single sudden event is invested with the entirety of one’s pain, then ‘our capacity for pain is [...] filled up by that principal evil that has concentrated at a point all the suffering otherwise dispersed’ (*WWR* I 317). These two options appear to be mutually exclusive at any one time, Schopenhauer notes. One mode of consciousness forces out the other—we have, presumably, all experienced the way in which small trifles can vanish at the appearance of one substantial misfortune, and perhaps have also all consciously attempted to resolve the overwhelming pain of such a misfortune back into smaller trifles—which suggests that the volume of suffering encountered in life, though seemingly abundant in its source, is meted out in a fixed and subjectively determined way. Additionally, however, this overall state of affairs cannot be due to the nature of consciousness alone, for the reason

that consciousness itself cannot account for the reliably constant supply of suffering, even if it can account for the limits of its momentary provision. Hence, Schopenhauer says:

[I]f a great and pressing care is finally lifted from our breast by a fortunate issue, another immediately takes its place. The whole material of this already existed previously, yet it could not enter consciousness as care, because consciousness had no capacity left for it. The material for care, therefore, remained merely as a dark and unobserved misty form on the extreme horizon of consciousness [...] If so far as its matter is concerned it is very much lighter than the material of the care that has vanished, it knows how to blow itself out, so that it apparently equals it in size, and thus, as the chief care of the day, completely fills the throne.

WWR I 317

The external world, then, is really only a system of channels for suffering. In some direction or other, the flow of suffering is inevitable. The 'external motive for sadness is only what a blister is for the body, to which are drawn all the bad humours that would otherwise be spread throughout it' (WWR I 317). As Schopenhauer shrewdly points out, however, the relatively small extent to which external circumstances do play a role in suffering provides a foothold by which the sufferer can disingenuously attribute to her circumstances a far greater role. Rather than treating the external world as merely a determinant cue for suffering, it is treated as the true and original source of suffering. In this inverted picture, the human being is ultimately destined for happiness, and any painful event is such because it is an impediment to the joy which one is owed: 'We then believe that, if only this were removed, the greatest contentment would necessarily ensue' (WWR I 317). This leads Schopenhauer to make the perceptive psychological point that the more cunning beings amongst us, with an unconscious (and correct) inkling that the opposite is the case, that the external world is merely the occasion for sufferings, endow some immovable object in their lives with responsibility for the greatest of their pains, so that they 'then have [...] something that [they] can denounce at any moment, instead of [their] own inner nature as the source of [their] sufferings' (WWR I 319).

But in fact, Schopenhauer says, discovering that suffering comes from within makes for a far more consolatory and liberating attitude. It is liberating because, if it is true that 'we are constantly looking for a particular external cause, as it were a pretext for the pain

that never leaves us, just as the free man makes for himself an idol, in order to have a master' (*WWR* I 318), then it follows that taking responsibility for one's pain sheds us of a master. The external world need not appear as the forcible imposition that it otherwise would. Furthermore, there is some consolation in the fact that suffering is no accident, nor something that would not have occurred if only this or that particular event in one's life had been avoided:

For our impatience at these arises for the most part from the fact that we recognise them as accidental, as brought about by a chain of causes that might easily be different. We are not usually distressed at evils that are inescapably necessary and quite universal, for example the necessity of old age and death, and of many daily inconveniences.

WWR I 315

Or, rather, we are not usually distressed by these inevitabilities *in the same way* as we are distressed by contingent evils. Above all, that suffering is not accidental re-emphasises the point stated at the beginning: that the human being is inseparable from a life of suffering. It is not a life-gone-wrong that is prone to suffering, but a life lived—and, again, perhaps the greatest lives have led straight into an enormous web of suffering. But whichever way one chooses to nuance it, suffering of some variety—along with death, the terrifying force of which keeps self-expulsion from life in check (*WWR* I 312-3; *WWR* II 498)—is the constant of life.

3. The will as essence

The life of suffering is underpinned by the life of willing in Schopenhauer's philosophy: suffering is essential to life because willing is the inner essence of all living beings. The first proof that the will is our essence, Schopenhauer argues, is gained by introspection. One's own body is the only object of experience that is given in two heterogeneous ways: once in the same manner as any other object, subject to and thoroughly determined by the same laws and principles, that is, as representation; once as outside of these laws, as a spontaneous mover, as will. It is important to Schopenhauer's point that these two, will and representation, are understood as the two ways of knowing the self-same event, from

within and from without. They are emphatically not intended as two distinct, causally-related realms:

The act of will and the action of the body are not two different states objectively known, connected by the bond of causality; they do not stand in the relation of cause and effect, but are one and the same thing, though given in two entirely different ways, first quite directly, and then in perception for the understanding.

WWR I 100

The second proof of the will as essence is the visible evidence that backs up the will-body identity thesis implied by the proof from introspection. With every act upon the body, Schopenhauer observes, there is an act upon the will to be found, and with every stirring of the will, there is a stirring of the body:

The identity of the body with the will further shows itself, among other things, in the fact that every vehement and excessive movement of the will, in other words, every emotion, agitates the body and its inner workings directly and immediately, and disturbs the course of its vital functions.

WWR I 101

Schopenhauer also submits these proofs, perhaps more convincingly, in indirect form. If human beings were no more than rational thinking subjects, then how could the nature of their experience of the world be explained? That is, if representation were the only category we drew upon to describe human experience, then how far would we get? Not very far, is Schopenhauer's answer:

[T]he meaning that I am looking for of the world that stands before me simply as my representation, or the transition from it as mere representation of the knowing subject to whatever it may be besides this, could never be found if the investigator himself were nothing more than the purely knowing subject (a winged cherub without a body [*Engelskopf*]). But he himself is rooted in that world; and thus he finds himself in it as an *individual*, in other words, his knowledge [...] is nevertheless given entirely through the medium of a

body, and the affections of this body are, as we have shown, the starting point for the understanding in its perception of the world.

WWR I 99

To think of a human being as merely a window to the world would be deficient—if it could even make sense at all. How would the activity of his own body appear to him? ‘[J]ust in the same way as the changes of all other objects of perception; and they would be equally strange and incomprehensible to him, if their meaning were not unraveled for him in an entirely different way’ (WWR I 99). He would relate to her body inferentially, seeing its movements first, and only then being able to account for them, by reference to the principle of sufficient reason which governs representation. He would see his ‘conduct follow on presented motives with all the constancy of a law of nature, just as the changes of other objects follow upon causes, stimuli, and motives’ (WWR I 99-100). He would therefore ‘account’ for his bodily activity only in a minimal sense; his body, and the rest of experience, would ‘pass by [...] like an empty dream, or a ghostly vision’ (WWR I 99); a string of related items devoid of any significance. ‘All this, however, is not the case;’ Schopenhauer says, ‘on the contrary, the answer to the riddle is given to the subject appearing as individual, and this answer is given the word *Will*’ (WWR I 100). That is, the scant existence envisaged above is not our own. The world is experienced as containing an undercurrent of spontaneity and significance, which emanates first from ourselves. But it is not simply a projection of ourselves either. On pain of taking oneself to be unique in being more than mere representation—the crime of ‘theoretical egoism’ (WWR I 104)—one must assume that, just as in the case of oneself, there really is more to other objects than their outward representation, that is, they too have an inner being of their own. The choice, Schopenhauer suggests, is really just a pragmatic one between sense and insanity, but it is made possible by awareness of oneself as will. Furthermore, the will, Schopenhauer argues, is the only available reference point for beginning to interpret what the inner nature of outer objects is. Hence, the rest of the world is to be understood by analogy to the twofold experience of the body as will and as representation. Atwell (1995: 98) describes this move as Schopenhauer’s ‘macranthropological turn’, guided in his terminology by Schopenhauer’s own claim that ‘[f]rom the most ancient times, man has been called the microcosm. I have reversed the proposition, and have shown the world as the macranthropos, in so far as will and representation exhaust the true nature of the world as well as that of man’ (WWR II 642-643).

Putting aside the intrinsic merits (and demerits) of Schopenhauer's prescient promotion of the body and the will in experience and philosophical interpretation,¹⁷ the question to be pursued here is: what necessary relation lies between being a creature of will and a creature of suffering?

4. The life of willing

The following passage, lengthily quoted, is a compact expression of how Schopenhauer takes willing and suffering to relate to one another:¹⁸

All *willing* springs from lack, from deficiency, and thus from suffering. Fulfillment brings this to an end; yet for one wish that is fulfilled there remain at least ten that are denied. Further, desiring lasts a long time, demands and requests go on to infinity, fulfillment is short and meted out sparingly. But even the final satisfaction itself is only apparent; the wish fulfilled at once makes way for a new one; the former is a known delusion, the latter a delusion not as yet known. No attained object of willing can give a satisfaction that lasts and no longer declines; but it is always like the alms thrown to a beggar, which relieves him today so that his misery may be prolonged till tomorrow. Therefore, so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with its constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we never obtain lasting happiness or peace. [...] Thus the subject of willing is constantly lying on the revolving wheel of Ixion, is always drawing water in the sieve of the Danaids, and is the eternally thirsting Tantalus.

WWR I 196

According to Ivan Soll's reading of this passage, Schopenhauer's arguments for the

¹⁷ One might, for example, see anticipations of Heidegger: 'In the first division of *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that the inquiry into the nature of Being has to proceed via inquiry into the nature of the being (namely, *Dasein*) that asks about the nature of Being. In a similar fashion, Schopenhauer thinks that the uniquely correct starting point for philosophy is the self and its private experiences' (Came 2012: 238).

¹⁸ Though, by a very long stretch, it is not his only argument for this relationship, nor the only place in which he characterises it.

inevitability of suffering, and the impossibility of peace and happiness, depend upon (or are identifiable with) the claim that only lasting satisfaction is real satisfaction (Soll 1989: 179; 1998: 85; 2012: 304-5). We are never really happy, because what happiness we have never lasts; all that remains for us, therefore, is suffering. For good reason, Soll finds this unconvincing. He accepts that, depending on the context, some satisfactions are too short to be considered real; for example, spending an hour in Singapore waiting for a connecting flight to Australia could hardly count as satisfying the desire to visit Singapore. However, this cannot be generalised to all cases of satisfaction, as Schopenhauer appears to suggest (Soll 2012: 305). Soll counters that some cases of satisfaction, in spite of coming to an end, last long enough to be considered real—this is obviously correct.

Soll's objection to the claim that only lasting satisfaction is real satisfaction consciously mirrors Nietzsche's reflections on the duration of pleasure. For example, consider this from *The Gay Science*:

Brief habits. — I love brief habits and consider them invaluable means to getting to know *many* things and states down to the bottom of their sweetnesses and bitternesses [...] And one day [the object of desire's] time is up; the good thing parts from me, not as something that now disgusts me but peacefully and sated with me, as I with it, and as if we ought to be grateful to each other and shake hands to say farewell.

Nietzsche 2001: 167¹⁹

Transience, rather than undermining satisfaction, is very often (if not always) a condition of satisfaction. Furthermore, we rely on satisfaction's being finite in order to enjoy further satisfactions, or to repeat the same satisfactions again and again. 'Do we really want to be free of hunger and lust?' Soll asks, along these Nietzschean lines, 'Do we not rather lament the loss or diminution of our appetites?' (Soll 1998: 87). 'Do we really want an existence in which we want for nothing if it entails wanting nothing?' (Soll 1989: 183). Is it not, on the contrary, that 'all joy [*Lust*: lust; joy; pleasure] wants eternity — wants deep, deep, deep eternity!' (Nietzsche 1961: 244; quoted in Soll 1989: 184).²⁰ Any honest answer to these

¹⁹ See Higgins (1998: 163-4) for a contrast between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche along these lines.

²⁰ In quoting this sentence, it was necessary for Soll to highlight that the variety of ways in which the German 'Lust' can be translated includes the English 'lust' as well as 'joy', or else Nietzsche, too, could be construed as saying something close to the claim that only lasting happiness is real.

questions would show that *'we clearly do find our desires themselves desirable'* (Soll 2012: 306).

If Soll's interpretation were correct, then our next question would be: what explanation is there for Schopenhauer's grave and naïve misjudgment of human psychology? How could he be so confused about the nature of satisfaction? Soll himself concludes thus:

It is, perhaps, best to view this, and other Schopenhauerian arguments for the impossibility of finding real satisfaction as the symptom of an underlying malaise rather than as the cause of his pessimistic stance.

Soll 1989: 181

Indeed, the argument that Soll attributes to Schopenhauer should not be taken as the cause of his pessimism, but not because his pessimism is really due to some kind of psychological dispiritedness. For the fault does not ultimately lie with Schopenhauer, but with Soll's interpretation. Although Soll can technically find enough support in the passage quoted above (*WWR* I 196), especially when it is considered in isolation, there is another way to read the passage, which I will now detail. This second reading is, moreover, both consistent with surrounding passages and a far less implausible claim for Schopenhauer to use as the basis for his argument that willing necessitates suffering.

The reading offered must accomplish three things in order to be able to answer to Soll's: it must explain Schopenhauer's reference to the (im)permanence of satisfaction; it must explain his reference to the unreal or delusory quality of desires; and it must connect these two in relation to the inevitability of suffering and the impossibility of peace. In one fell swoop, Soll achieves all three of these through the argument that can be neatly summarised as 'real satisfaction is lasting satisfaction'. In the following subsections, the aim is to achieve all three (not, as it turns out, in the order presented) without forcing the same short-sighted error upon Schopenhauer.

'No attained object of willing can give a satisfaction that lasts and no longer declines'

Immediately after claiming that satisfaction never lasts, Schopenhauer comments that the satisfaction of attaining the object of one's will 'is always like the alms thrown to a beggar, which reprieves him today so that his misery may be prolonged till tomorrow'. It is the

analogy to the beggar that reveals Schopenhauer's true meaning, for the alms that the beggar receives, though they are as transient as our pleasures, would not for this reason be deemed unreal. In fact, it is precisely because they are real that the beggar is preserved in his adverse circumstances, and this is the important point. For Schopenhauer, it is not (at this stage) a matter of whether or not the satisfaction was ever really had, but rather that no amount of satisfaction—whether real or unreal—is sufficient to overcome the need for satisfaction itself. If anything, satisfaction keeps the will's momentum steady. The will might find satisfaction in this or that goal, but the satisfaction of specific ends will never spell the end of willing and satisfaction as such:

[A]bsolute good is a contradiction; highest good, *summum bonum*, signifies the same thing, namely in reality a final satisfaction of the will, after which no fresh willing could occur; a last motive, the attainment of which would give the will an imperishable satisfaction. According to the discussion so far carried on [...] such a thing cannot be conceived. The will can just as little through some satisfaction cease to will afresh, as time can end or begin; for the will there is no permanent fulfillment which completely and for ever satisfies its craving.

WWR I 362

The claim that satisfaction never lasts, therefore, is not essentially connected to the claim that it is not real, contrary to what Soll has led us to believe. It is simply an observation about the will's insatiability.

The problem, one might object, has been repeated. At the very least a similar problem has been created. Even if the satisfaction's being real or unreal has no relevance to the point that Schopenhauer is making when he says that 'no attained object of willing can give a satisfaction that lasts and no longer declines', the point that Schopenhauer has now been credited with making still assumes that, because our satisfactions do not put an end to the need for satisfaction in general, our satisfactions are in some way flawed. What is wrong, it is then asked, if a satisfied will fails to overcome willing as such?

Such willing could be directly disappointing only if the willing-being had as the aim of each of her individual acts of will the permanent or lasting satisfaction of all willing. When this goal is frustrated—which is presumably all the time—she is pained. But to think that acts of will have lasting satisfaction as a universal aim would be, as Soll correctly points out, a 'dubious assumption' (Soll 1998: 85). '[T]here is little reason', Soll continues, 'to

accept Schopenhauer's notion that we hope to find in the fulfillment of each desire a satisfaction without end and even the cessation of all further desire' (Soll 1998: 85). It is hard to believe that in preparing a meal, for example, a person hopes never to have to eat again. But can this really be what Schopenhauer imagines—especially seeing as he himself notes that 'such a thing' as everlasting satisfaction 'cannot be conceived'?

Schopenhauer admittedly does suggest that it is possible for us to unwisely entertain the aim of everlasting satisfaction. That 'every attained end is at the same time the beginning of a new course' becomes painfully apparent, he argues, when we consider the 'human endeavours and desires that buoy us up with the vain hope that their fulfillment is always the final goal of willing' (*WWR* I 164). It is ambiguous as to whether this is intended as a general feature of willing, or just as the trouble with a peculiarly expectant type of willing.²¹ Less ambiguous, however, is the form that the same notion finds in the following passage:

Every *immoderate joy* (*exultatio, insolens laetitia*) always rests on the delusion that we have found something in life that is not to be met with at all, namely permanent satisfaction of the tormenting desires or cares that constantly breed new ones. From each particular delusion of this kind we must inevitably later be brought back; and then, when it vanishes, we must pay for it with pains just as bitter as the joy caused by its entry was keen.

WWR I 318, my emphasis

The aim described here is clearly specific, and not one that is universally implied by every act of will, because its result is immoderate joy and then sorrow, which is not common to all satisfaction or dissatisfaction. For something to be immoderate is, by definition, for it to be beyond the norm. Consequently, and again contrary to Soll's claim, it cannot be the case that for Schopenhauer the aim of permanent satisfaction is a feature of the will in general—even if such an aim can dramatically exaggerate the painful effects of the will, in the form of a long climb down. It follows that the fleetingness of satisfactions cannot be the universal source of pain to the willing-being for Schopenhauer, and therefore it also cannot be the direct source of pain that he ascribes to all willing either.

²¹ Although it is in Schopenhauer's favour, one may be reading the quotation a little too closely if one suggests that Schopenhauer's use of the restrictive 'human endeavours and desires that [...]', as opposed to the nonrestrictive 'human endeavours and desires which [...]', is significant here.

The better option—which Soll does not appear to consider—is that the satisfaction that fails to last, the will that fails to overcome willing as such, is intended as the indirect cause of greater pain. According to this reading, the import of such comments as, ‘no attained object of willing can give a satisfaction that lasts and no longer declines’, would not be that the peculiar desire to be permanently satisfied by one particular satisfaction is forever frustrated, and that this is itself the constant and intolerable burden of the will. Rather, precisely because the object of such a desire is so absurd, because no cure for willing is to be found in willing, the floodgates of desire will remain forever open. It is all the desires that this lets in that are directly painful, not necessarily—and not even commonly—the far-fetched desire to find general satisfaction in just one satisfaction. Instead of being a source of suffering itself, the turnover of willing entailed by the impermanence of satisfaction *enables* greater suffering; this is its flaw. Whereas Nietzsche loves his ‘brief habits’ for their allowing pleasures to be known inside out, to be repeated and to be replaced, Schopenhauer hates brief habits for their allowing our sufferings to be similarly explored and replenished. Moreover, this is consistent with the restlessness of the will that Schopenhauer appears to be emphasising in the passage in question (*WWR* I 196).

There is, of course, a new burden of proof on this reading. The claim is that the transience of satisfaction is the indirect cause of suffering, in terms of sheer volume, but that it is not on its own an explanation for why willing is inevitably painful. The direct cause of suffering in the will, upon which this indirect cause depends, is yet to be revealed. However, Soll has equal (if not greater) reservations about Schopenhauer’s argument for why individual acts of will are themselves direct sources of suffering, which must first be defended against. His reservations are, most likely, the reason why Soll does not consider the indirect option proposed here.

‘All willing springs from lack, from deficiency, and thus from suffering’

Privation is a central link between willing and suffering for Schopenhauer: ‘all striving springs from want and deficiency, from dissatisfaction with one’s own state or condition, and it is therefore suffering so long as it is not satisfied’ (*WWR* I 309; see also *WWR* I 312). Willing implies privation, for one only wills that which one does not yet have. Furthermore, it implies privation of a kind that is sufficient to move the willing-being into action, that is, a more or less uncomfortable, frustrating or miserable privation. According to

Schopenhauer, '*to desire is ipso facto to suffer*' (Soll: 1998: 84). An obvious point of attack, therefore, would be the assumption that willing implies privation. Soll, for one, is not convinced of this assumption.²² 'It is not so clear', he argues, 'that we cannot *will* or *want* what is already the case. We do sometimes say, and believe, that we are exactly where we want to be, or doing exactly what we want to be doing, or with the person with whom we want to be' (Soll 1998: 84-5; see also 2012: 302). It is not difficult to bring to mind scenarios that would fit this description, and if willing without lack is imaginable, then so too is willing without suffering.

However, this objection, that there can be willing without lack, can be made only if the highly circumscribed sense in which Schopenhauer uses the term 'will' is ignored. It should be recalled that when the notion of the will as the essence of the human being is first presented by Schopenhauer, it is presented along with the will-body identity thesis:

Every true, genuine, immediate act of the will is also at once and directly a manifest act of the body; and correspondingly, on the other hand, every immediate impression on the body is also at once and directly an impression on the will.

WWR I 101

The will-body identity thesis, as the quotation indicates, has important implications for action; namely, that willing is identifiable with action, and that they therefore mutually imply one another. 'Only in reflection are willing and acting different,' Schopenhauer argues, 'in reality they are one' (WWR I 100-1). If the two are not really distinct, then in order to qualify as willing, there must be some corresponding action. Schopenhauer, in fact, often (though not always) uses 'wishing' as a contrasting technical term to designate a pseudo-desire that does not imply any bodily action: 'in the case of man only the resolve, and not the mere wish, is a valid indication of his character for himself and for others. But for himself as for others the resolve becomes a certainty only through the deed' (WWR I 300). Without action—that is, without being converted into will—wishing is as yet a mere figment of the mind, an idle mental event: 'Only the carrying out stamps the resolve; till then, it is always a mere intention that can be altered; it exists only in reason, in the abstract' (WWR I 100). If I claim that I 'will' to go outdoors, while in fact I freely remain

²² See also Cartwright (1988: 58n.).

indoors, then all that I am really doing is expressing a mere wish in the technical sense. Similarly, being a year or two younger, or being suddenly transported to a remote and luxurious paradise, can be categorised as mere wishes because we cannot act in such a way as to bring them about, yet we would eagerly welcome them were they to occur and we derive pleasure from the mere thought of them. By contrast, Schopenhauer's conception of willing is such that it specifically entails embodied action in the hope of attainment. As many commentators have pointed out, it is a type of active striving.²³

This enables us to understand the kind of circumstances that Soll points out, that is, where 'we are exactly where we want to be, or doing exactly what we want to be doing', as idle mental events, more akin to wishing than willing. For example, if I am midway through writing a paper, then to a certain extent it is true that this is where I want to be and this is what I want to be doing (it is, of course, not where I want to be in an ultimate sense). But it is not as if there is an act of will being satisfied above and beyond the act itself of writing my paper, even though the act of writing my paper can certainly be broken down into countless smaller acts of will. Contentment of the kind felt towards the point at which I currently am in my paper does not imply any action, that is, any action additional to the incomplete action of writing the paper (an action which, importantly, *does* imply privation), and so it cannot qualify as willing in Schopenhauer's sense. I do not truly *will* where I am, or *will* what I am doing, at least not in a sense further than the will that is identical to what I am and what I am doing. In short, according to Schopenhauer's definition of willing, I may adopt some kind of mental attitude towards my acts of will, but not another act of will. Thomas Mann was, therefore, entirely correct when he defined Schopenhauer's conception of the will as 'the opposite pole of inactive satisfaction' (Mann 1980: 7).

There is the argument that, even if it is accepted that lack is a condition of any willing, and furthermore that this lack must be experienced with at least as much discomfort as is necessary to move a given person to put things right, it is not a painful lack

²³ See Atwell (1990: 162), Janaway (1999: 329) and Young (2005: 209). As a result of the distinction between wishing and willing, Schopenhauer points out, what one wishes and what one wills can be conflicting, which makes a kind of self-deception possible. For example: 'I have entered very eagerly into a mutual obligation that I believe to be very much in accordance with my wishes. As the matter progresses, the disadvantages and hardships make themselves felt, and I begin to suspect that I even repent of what I pursued so eagerly. However, I rid myself of this suspicion by assuring myself that, even if I were not bound, I should continue on the same course. But then the obligation is unexpectedly broken and dissolved by the other party, and I observe with astonishment that this happens to my great joy and relief. We often do not know what we desire or fear [...] because the intellect is not to know anything about it, since the good opinion we have of ourselves would inevitably suffer thereby' (*WWR* I 209-10).

in any truly grievous sense that is incurred. Parsing willing as 'striving' or 'struggling' is too strong because of their inbuilt negative connotations. Janaway has defended against this objection as it is put forward by Cartwright (1988: 59). He argues:

[I]t misses the mark as regards Schopenhauer's argument. Schopenhauer does not hold that each episode of willing involves the subject in misery; rather that, as a presupposition of there occurring an episode of willing, dissatisfaction or a painfully felt lack must be present in some degree. Misery is, let us say, some prolonged frustration of what is willed or massive non-attainment of goals basic to well-being [...] [H]is point here is that all lives, even those free of misery, inevitably contain numerous, if miniscule, dissatisfactions.

Janaway 1999: 329-30

It is not within Schopenhauer's intentions to argue that all instances of willing are insufferable in the extreme. Instead, he claims that each act of will begins with at least the smallest prick of suffering, or else there would be no impetus for action to begin with. It only takes a few alterations in one's environment, where, for example, the object of one's will becomes unavailable, for the effects of this initial drop of suffering to be exaggerated. The original pain is small, even meagre, but it must be there; and so the difference between it and genuinely grievous suffering is only the degree, which is determined by circumstance. We must bear in mind, of course, Schopenhauer's above-mentioned observation that the overall quantity and proportions of suffering are not determined by external circumstances. These small doses of pain correspond to the many 'little worries and annoyances', while the alteration of circumstances into any kind of extremity corresponds to the 'principal evil' that eclipses all such worries.

Above all, Schopenhauer's comments regarding the relation between willing and suffering are best understood when the experience of the willing-being as a whole is kept in mind—which is the reality of the combination of both the direct and the indirect claims about the relationship between willing and suffering made here and above. If broken down into micro-willing events, so to speak, it is hard to see where the alleged 'life of suffering' comes from. I feel thirsty, I locate some available water, I drink—where is the suffering? However (as Janaway alludes to when he speaks of 'numerous' dissatisfactions) the willing-being encompasses a multitude of such desires. '[F]or one wish that is fulfilled there remain at least ten that are denied' (*WWR* I 196). Amongst these there will be desires of greater

intensity; perhaps there will even be two or more that require mutually contradictory conditions for their fulfilment. Certainly, there are many simultaneous claims made upon the willing-being at once, and a string of consecutive ones to follow. Willing is painful and manifold, satisfactions are transitory and few. Therefore, without embarrassment, it may be admitted that while any willing involves some suffering, not every instance of suffering is significant or overwhelming. This is because the human being suffers less from particular episodes of willing—necessarily painful though they are—than she does from being the will. She is composed through-and-through of many different desires—large and small, long and short—the whole insufferable effect of which is ultimately greater than the sum of its parts, but nonetheless dependent upon their contributions.

‘the final satisfaction itself is only apparent; the wish fulfilled at once makes way for a new one; the former is a known delusion, the latter a delusion not as yet known’

So far, two of the three conditions for an alternative interpretation to Soll’s have been met. We have an explanation for Schopenhauer’s reference to the duration of satisfaction, as well as his argument for the claim that to will, if not to be will, is to suffer. Soll is justified in mentioning degrees of reality in his interpretation, because Schopenhauer clearly believes that satisfaction of the will is delusory in some way, and to some degree. The current interpretation must now offer its own account for the nature of this delusion. It cannot depend on the fleetingness of satisfaction, as Soll suggested, without causing problems. But when the nature of willing as conceived by Schopenhauer is laid bare, as it soon will be, it becomes obvious why it must necessarily be concealed beneath delusions and hidden from the willing-being. That willing continues at all, given what it entails, turns out to be evidence that it has never been seen for what it truly is.

First, consider this statement that Schopenhauer makes with regard to rationalistic philosophers (namely, Descartes and Spinoza), who ‘regarded the will as of a secondary nature’ and placed ‘man’s inner nature in a *soul* that is originally a *knowing* [...] entity’:

[H]e would then first know a thing to be *good*, and in consequence will it, instead of first *willing* it, and in consequence calling it good. According to the whole of my fundamental view, all this is a reversal of the true relation. The will is first and original; knowledge is merely added to it as an instrument belonging

to the phenomena of the will

WWR I 292

In short, something is called good only because it is willed, and not vice versa. For this reason, Bernard Reginster categorises Schopenhauer's model of desire as 'need-based', as opposed to being 'object-based' (Reginster 2006: 118; 2012: 350-1). As the quotation indicates, this is so integral to Schopenhauer's philosophy that he regarded it as emanating from its very foundations. On an object-based model, the object itself contains worth, which is uncovered when one has sufficient knowledge about the object. As a consequence of his conception of human nature, according to which the will is primary, Schopenhauer rejects the notion that attributions of worth are quite so intellectual; need, instead, is primary in all matters of worth.

Now, recall from earlier Schopenhauer's claim that all willing is premised upon lack. From this claim (summarised in P2) and the observation above (P1), a conclusion follows:

- P1: Person P regards object x as good if and only if x is willed by P.
- P2: If x is willed by P, then x has not been fulfilled.
- C: If P regards x as good, then x has not been fulfilled.

This is to say that if someone has fulfilled her will, then she no longer regards the erstwhile object of her will as good. As alarming as this is, one must be careful about what is being maintained. The hypothetical syllogism above demonstrates that Schopenhauer is logically bound to its conclusion, but things are not quite as straightforward as it might suggest. On a certain reading the conclusion C strikes us as highly implausible, and this would ultimately be rooted in the implausibility of the first premise. For, if P1 were to be read as a definition of what is good, as opposed to the conditions under which one regards something as good, then either it would be hopelessly implausible, or it would have to be rephrased or reinterpreted into a dispositional claim such as, 'P regards x as good if and only if x is conceivably willable for P'. That is, where a person recognises something as useful to a given end, only they do not currently have that end, like aspirin to a person free of aches and pains. If this were the case, however, then C would not follow from the combination of P1 and P2. On the other hand, a plausible version of P1 as it stands—and the sense in which I believe Schopenhauer meant the above-quoted passage upon which P1 is based—can be found if P1 is read as describing what it is to actively value as a willing-being. That

is, the conditions under which something strikes us as good, or flags itself up as good, so to speak. One might therefore say that P1 and the conclusion derived from it are better described as phenomenological: they attempt to determine the location in consciousness of what is regarded as good, and therefore the strict limits of where it is consciously to be found, given what kind of beings we are.

Something like this effect is in fact outlined in the following characterisation, offered by Schopenhauer, of his negative conception of happiness:

We painfully feel the loss of pleasures and enjoyments, as soon as they fail to appear; but when pains cease even after being present for a long time, their absence is not directly felt, but at most they are thought of intentionally by means of reflection. For only pain and want can be felt positively; and therefore they proclaim themselves; well-being, on the contrary, is merely negative.

WWR II 575

In this respect, Schopenhauer's negative conception of happiness can be viewed as the remote realisation of the very consequence drawn above. He expresses it in terms of the asymmetry between suffering and happiness, in which one 'proclaims' itself while the other is discovered only by means of some reflective effort; however, the same point is made that suffering is granted the ability to 'proclaim' itself through the need upon which it is premised, but happiness, achieved only when a particular need is fulfilled and therefore temporarily silenced, has no basis upon which to proclaim itself to consciousness.

If goodness is discerned only in the object of as-yet-unfulfilled will (C), then it follows that the good is always some distance away in human consciousness. For any given person, knowing and understanding this, believing it with conviction, would mean being exposed to the naked truth that what she values now will necessarily fall from her concerns precisely at the moment that she attains it. This is the knowledge that her actions cannot ultimately be in her interest, insofar as their success will never bring to her that which she regards as good, but only ever push the focus of that regard further into the inherently unreachable future. In spite of appearances, her actions are driven only by the insatiable will, which is indifferent as to whether she personally feels satisfied. Schopenhauer believes

that such knowledge cannot present itself as a motive to the individual human intellect.²⁴ In the more specific context of sexual desire, for example, he writes:

Egoism is so deep-rooted a quality in all individuality in general that, in order to rouse the activity of an individual being, egoistical ends are the only ones on which we can count with certainty [...] Yet when the individual is to be active [...] the importance of the matter cannot be made so comprehensible to his intellect, calculated as this is merely for individual ends, that its effect would be in accordance with the matter. Therefore in such a case, nature can attain her end only by implanting in the individual a certain *delusion* [...]

WWR II 538

Sexual desire has a specific set of delusions, of course, but taken in a general sense, the type of delusion described here would seem to be common to all desire. At least, Schopenhauer must be committed to this position, given that a person cannot possibly will out of accurate knowledge of what she does, that is, out of full knowledge of the nature of willing. An illusion must descend, which is the illusion that some way or another, what is regarded as good now will continue to be regarded as good even once it finally obtains (a familiar illusion to us all, presumably). It is hard to see how willing, as conceived by Schopenhauer, could possibly function in individuals without such a delusion.

Reading Schopenhauer's claim about the delusory nature of desires in this way explains why Schopenhauer commonly phrases it in retrospective and prospective terms: 'the final satisfaction itself is only apparent; the wish fulfilled at once makes way for a new one; *the former is a known delusion, the latter a delusion not as yet known*' (WWR I 196, my emphasis). This manner of speaking is even more vivid in the following notable passage, which makes roughly the same point, but more figuratively:

If [life] has promised, it does not keep its word, unless to show how little desirable the desired object was [...] The enchantment of distance show us paradises that vanish like optical illusions, when we have allowed ourselves to be fooled by them. Accordingly, happiness lies always in the future, or else in

²⁴ If a person does come to intuit this general truth about the will, then it will be in a form quite the opposite of motivation, which is the point at which Schopenhauer's ethics of resignation enter. See Chapter VI.

the past, and the present may be compared to a small dark cloud driven by the wind over the sunny plain [...]

WWR II 573

Here, Schopenhauer perfectly captures the nature of the delusion of which he speaks: something that appears in front of us, seeming real enough to pursue, only for us to find, up close, that it was a mirage; it was simply never there. If we take the belief in ‘final satisfaction’ in this case to mean the belief that we will continue to regard the attained object as good, then this is the sense in which it is delusory for Schopenhauer. The ‘final satisfaction’ that he claims is ‘only apparent’ is to be understood as an *imagined* final satisfaction, part of the delusion that is necessary to sustain willing in general.²⁵ It acts as a siren call, but it necessarily outstrips the reality of the will.

The above reading also has a key advantage over the one offered by Soll: the claim that it takes Schopenhauer to be making is far more plausible. Recall that Soll understands Schopenhauer’s reference to the delusion involved in the fulfilment of the will as the claim that only lasting satisfaction is real satisfaction. In truth, the rub of this claim, the reason why it would be so hopelessly naïve for anyone to assert in earnest, is not just that it does not square with human psychology: it is in fact inherently conflicted. Soll’s interpretation implies a kind of satisfaction that is real enough to be temporary, but not lasting enough to be real. It simultaneously asserts and denies the reality of the same satisfaction. Implicit belief in such an absurdity would therefore be Schopenhauer’s true problem. According to the interpretation offered here, however, the unreality of satisfaction lies in the inflated delusions that one necessarily harbours about the satisfaction that one can expect in the future (and also that one has had in the past). Importantly, this satisfaction will never be received, due to the nature of the will, but the individual’s delusory belief in it is necessary for the sake of willing at all. Schopenhauer therefore does not deny the reality of a satisfaction that, at the same time, he asserts: he denies *simpliciter* the reality of the satisfaction that one constantly expects. He then investigates how life can continue—which it conspicuously does—in spite of what has been denied, and this can only be by means of a general delusion about the nature of willing.

²⁵ It is not, of course, the hope for a satisfaction to end all willing, which, it has been shown, Schopenhauer regards as a possible hope—and deluded in the extreme—but not common to willing in general.

A side note on boredom and the desirability of desires

One of Schopenhauer's oversights, according to Soll, is his assumption that we would prefer to be free from desires. In truth, just as we bemoan a lack of appetite, we find desire itself desirable (Soll 1998: 87; 2012: 306). However, upon closer inspection, Schopenhauer does appreciate the desirability of desires. At least, he appreciates the equivalent undesirability of desirelessness, which he calls boredom.

Boredom, it may be recalled, is a state of frightful emptiness. Schopenhauer accounts for this emptiness in terms of a lack of things to will:

It is fortunate enough when something to desire and to strive for still remains, so that the game may be kept up of the constant transition from desire to satisfaction, and from that to a fresh desire, the rapid course of which is called happiness, the slow course sorrow, and so that this game may not come to a standstill, showing itself as a fearful, life-destroying boredom, a lifeless longing without a definite object, a deadening languor.

WWR I 164

The above quotation might even put one in mind of the 'brief habits' passage quoted from *The Gay Science* earlier, which is now seen not to contrast with Schopenhauer's views quite so much. Clearly, for Schopenhauer too, the life of willing commands that desires and satisfactions be kept up at a pace, that new desires enter into the balance, without toppling it, and so on. The risk of suffering lies either side of this balance between desiring prolongedly and desiring nothing. For this reason, Schopenhauer says that once we secure the necessities in life, we seek all manner of luxuries, just for the sake of desire itself (*PP* II 294). Schopenhauer knows all too well that, 'as Voltaire rightly remarks, *il n'est de vrais plaisirs qu'avec de vrais besoins* ["There are no true pleasures without true needs"]' (*PP* I 338). It is therefore disingenuous to suggest that Schopenhauer does not at least see the desirability of desires.

In fact, Schopenhauer and Soll convene not only on the desirability of desires, but they also reach for the same analogy in order to articulate this point. Soll blurs the distinction between heaven and hell: 'Is the condition in which one no longer experiences desires, longings, and wants a heaven in which we experience no lack of anything, or a hell

in which our appetites have withered away? [...] The angelic ideal turns out to be a diabolical piece of work' (Soll 1989: 182-3). He paints the 'heaven' of desirelessness as a new hell. Equally, however, Schopenhauer remarks that his view that suffering and boredom are the ultimate constituents of life 'has been expressed very quaintly by the saying that, after man had placed all pains and torments in hell, there was nothing left for heaven but boredom' (*WWR* I 312). Here, too, 'heaven' is characterised as being far less desirable than it might at first have seemed.

The desirability of desires nevertheless figures in Schopenhauer only up to a certain point: that of the quotidian experience of the willing-being trying to maintain the optimal balance of excitement and peace in life; staving off both boredom and outright suffering, as much as is possible. Desire for desires is, according to Schopenhauer, natural to us. However, it is not to be respected for this reason alone. Of course we desire desires, but the next question is whether it is ultimately in our interest to do so. As part of his ethical philosophy of saintly resignation, Schopenhauer will eventually reject the desirability of desires, not as a natural fact, but as something itself desirable. At this point, for Soll (as for Nietzsche), Schopenhauer's fault would not be his short-sightedness—Schopenhauer at least has the sense to recognise how human desires basically operate—but his advice. We should give in to the natural desirability of our desires, Soll argues, for boredom is in many ways a more distressing fate. But Schopenhauer's rejection of the desirability of desires, at the ethical level, is far from a call to lapse into boredom, as Soll implies by painting Schopenhauer's rejection itself as a new kind of hell. It is, of course, characterised by desirelessness, but it is not characterised by the desire for desires either. Whereas the desirelessness of boredom really consists in having no specific desires, but still retaining the general desire for some specific desire—hence the quality of insufferably empty longing—the desirelessness that is the culmination of Schopenhauer's ethical philosophy is quite a different proposition. It is desirelessness *per se*; the saint 'ceases to will anything' (*WWR* I 380). Insofar as this moral experience is even imaginable to us,²⁶ therefore, it is a distinct experience from the mere sullenness felt at the loss of one's appetites, that is, boredom. A full discussion of Schopenhauer's ethical philosophy, however, is not within the aims of this chapter.²⁷

²⁶ Which Schopenhauer doubts: 'we freely acknowledge that what remains after the complete abolition of the will is, *for all who are still full of the will*, assuredly nothing' (*WWR* I 412, my emphasis).

²⁷ See Chapter VI.

5. Suffering and happiness

There is one final relation between willing, suffering and, in this case, happiness, which is worthy of note. It brings us to an archetypal dispute between optimists and pessimists: whether there is greater suffering or happiness in the world. On this matter, Schopenhauer has a unique argument about the essential relationship between happiness and suffering, with respect to the will, which tips the balance *a priori* in the favour of suffering—to such an extreme degree, in fact, that no amount of happiness can compensate for any amount of suffering. The mere existence of suffering is enough to render the question of whether there is more suffering or more happiness in the world ‘superfluous’, in Schopenhauer’s words. It is remarkably fortunate that he has this argument in his arsenal, for the empirical method of answering the question, as we shall now see, is inherently flawed.

Flaws in the empirical approach

Schopenhauer famously claimed that ‘life is a business that does not cover its costs’ (*WWR* II 573). He was of the opinion that, if anything, there is greater suffering than happiness in the world, and that for this reason there is no consolation to be had in weighing one off against the other:

Whoever wants summarily to test the assertion that the pleasure in the world outweighs the pain, or at any rate that the two balance each other, should compare the feelings of an animal that is devouring another with those of that other.

PP II 292

His favoured method of supporting such claims, as the above image suggests, is empirical. He asks the optimist to follow him through ‘hospitals, infirmaries, operating theatres, through prisons, torture-chambers, and slave-hovels, over battlefields and to places of execution [...] and finally to glance into the dungeon of Ugolino where prisoners starved to death [...] For whence did Dante get the material for his hell, if not from this actual world

of ours?' (*WWR* I 325). The intended effect of this tour is to draw attention to the commonplace sites in which extreme and concentrated suffering can be found.

There are two foreseeable objections to the argument made on empirical grounds. The first objection is put this way by John Hick:

If we must compare two virtual infinities, we can only say that the sum of contentment and happiness is greater than the sum of misery, since otherwise mankind would long since have destroyed itself. Men have to be very miserable indeed to reject life as not worth having, for even amid deep pain and distress they can usually relate the present moment to a wider situation within which there is the hope of a better future.

Hick 1992: 177

The fault in Hick's reasoning is twofold: he neglects the fact that accurate knowledge of one's own misery is also required in order to reject life as not worth having, and he assumes that human beings are qualified judges of how happy or miserable they really are. In truth, if there is not a sufficient degree of happiness in the world to stave off self-destruction, then an illusion of happiness will do just as well. From a Schopenhauerian perspective, Hick invites his defeat at the mere mention of a prospectively brighter future. It has become clear from the discussion further above that Schopenhauer's conception of human nature is such that we are exceptionally prone to illusions that exploit temporal distance, like 'paradises that vanish like optical illusions' on a horizon that recedes with every step in its direction (*WWR* II 573). The future is the ideal place in which to position any motivational illusion. A scholastic motto that Schopenhauer applied in other contexts therefore applies equally well here: '*causa finalis movet non secundum suum esse reale, sed secundum esse cognitum* [The final cause operates not according to its real being, but only according to its being as that is known]' (*WWR* I 295). Such a psychological disposition regarding final causes and the future does not prove on its own that the balance of happiness is not in our favour, but it is a convincing reason why one cannot conclude that the balance of happiness is in our favour simply from the fact that we have not collectively self-destructed.

In his *Theodicy*, Leibniz forwards a different objection to the empirical method. He is responding to a point made by Pierre Bayle, whose caustic fideism is the central antagonist of the *Theodicy*:

Man is wicked and miserable. Everybody is aware of this from what goes on within himself, and from the commerce he is obliged to carry on with his neighbor. It suffices to have been alive for five or six years to be completely convinced of these two truths. Those who live long and who are much involved in worldly affairs know this still more clearly. Travel gives continual lessons of this. Monuments to human misery and wickedness are found everywhere—prisons, hospitals, gallows, and beggars. Here you see the ruins of a flourishing city; in other places you cannot even find the ruins.

Bayle 1991: 146-7

The argument is worthy of Schopenhauer himself, or rather Schopenhauer is the worthy successor to this argument, given that Bayle made it over a century before. Leibniz replies directly to this passage: ‘I think that there is exaggeration in that: there is incomparably more good than evil in the life of men, as there are incomparably more houses than prisons’ (Leibniz 1952: 216). His response is hardly scientific, but then neither are Bayle’s and Schopenhauer’s challenges. No one in this debate has anything like real statistics about pain and pleasure, good and evil, nor could they, it seems. Moreover, a variation on Leibniz’s response is possible, one which casts an even longer shadow over the empirical approach to the question of whether there is greater pain or pleasure in the world. For Leibniz does not need to appeal to examples that are more obviously favourable to the optimist, such as housing. Both Schopenhauer and Bayle mention hospitals and prisons; yet, one might ask, is treating the sick truly a cause for lament? And is the successful execution of justice evidence of the world’s deficiency, or just the opposite? Does it not take at least some good people for these places to operate adequately, and will these people not ultimately be a cause of joy? Schopenhauer and Bayle assume that the grisly sites of their respective tours of suffering are obviously pessimistic, fit to make an optimist of Leibniz’s stripe reconsider. But this is not the case.

The empirical method of settling the question rarely issues in decisive arguments, therefore, though it certainly makes a vivid impression. It is the approach most frequently found in Schopenhauer’s writings—his encyclopaedic knowledge of horrors from around the globe has been mentioned in the first chapter—however, it is not his only approach. Elsewhere, though only very briefly, he reflects upon the nature of the essential

relationship between happiness and suffering and the significant implications that this relationship has for the question of their relative balance, to which we now turn.

The argument from superfluosity

The following quotation is not just Schopenhauer's most explicit formulation of the point that it makes: it appears to be the only place in which Schopenhauer makes it. However, if successful, it would be decisive in answering the question of whether pleasure outweighs pain in the world:

Before we state so confidently that life is desirable or merits our gratitude, let us for once calmly compare the sum of pleasures which are in any way possible, and which a man can enjoy in his life, with the sum of the sufferings which are in any way possible and can come to him in his life. I do not think it will be difficult to strike the balance. In the long run, however, it is quite superfluous to dispute whether there is more good or evil in the world; for the mere existence of evil decides the matter, since evil can never be wiped off, and consequently can never be balanced, by the good that exists along with it or after it.

Mille piacer' non vagliono un tormento.

[Petrarch: "A thousand pleasures do not compensate for one pain"]

For that thousands had lived in happiness and joy would never do away with the anguish and death-agony of one individual; and just as little does my present well-being undo my previous sufferings.

WWR II 576

According to Schopenhauer's final views on the matter, then, supporting claims about the balance between pain and pleasure by empirical means is a waste of time—albeit, seemingly, his favourite waste of time. The mere existence of suffering is *a priori* enough. There is something in the nature of suffering, or perhaps in the nature of happiness, that means that the former can never be outweighed by the latter. By claiming that the joy of

many cannot compensate for the agony of one, Schopenhauer in fact presents the inversion of Leibniz, who at one point suggests that the blessedness of the saved minority may well be able to counteract the evil of the fact that the majority are damned (Leibniz 1952: 379). And, in a trivial sense, he is of course correct to say that suffering can never be undone: what has happened, has happened, and cannot be changed. But to say that it can never be undone in the sense of never being compensated for by a greater happiness seems, at first sight, far too strong a claim to make. What is it about suffering and happiness, according to Schopenhauer, that makes weighing them up 'superfluous'? Schopenhauer argues that it is a consequence of the negative nature of happiness.

Put simply, Schopenhauer's negative conception of happiness is that suffering alone is of a positive nature, because it is the direct experience of the will; whereas happiness is merely the absence of suffering, because it consists only in satisfaction (or temporary relaxation) of the will:

All satisfaction, or what is commonly called happiness, is really and essentially always *negative* only, and never positive. It is not a gratification which comes to us originally and of itself, but it must always be the satisfaction of a wish.

WWR I 319

We feel pain, but not painlessness; care, but not freedom from care; fear, but not safety and security. We feel the desire as we feel hunger and thirst; but as soon as it has been satisfied, it is like the mouthful of food which has been swallowed [...] For only pain and want can be felt positively; and therefore they proclaim themselves; well-being, on the contrary, is merely negative.

WWR II 575

The second quotation comes just before Schopenhauer blasts the balance between pain and pleasure as superfluous. As remarked above, in a way, the negativity of happiness is an expression of the fact that one can regard as good only that which one does not yet possess—it 'proclaims' its goodness only through the pain felt in needing it. The negative conception of happiness also has appeal as a psychological observation, which Schopenhauer occasionally exploits by phrasing it in terms of everyday experience: '[...] we *do not feel* the health of our whole body, but only the small spot where the shoe pinches' (PP II 291). However, it is fundamentally intended as a metaphysical descriptive of the very

nature of happiness: happiness consists only in an absence, the absence of something terrible, and whatever experience we attach to it is only the relief felt at this absence. The negative conception of happiness is once again an inversion of Leibniz's view, in this case that evil is of a privative nature, and Schopenhauer appears to be conscious of this fact (*PP* II 291; cf. Leibniz 1952: 61, 219, 384).

How exactly does the negative conception of happiness entail that weighing suffering and happiness is superfluous? First, the notion that happiness and suffering can even be compared by analogy to weighing scales must be rejected. Consider, for example, the following characterisation of the negativity of happiness, expressed in terms of the dynamics of desire:

[E]xperience [...] teaches us that, after the appearance of a long-desired happiness, we do not feel ourselves on the whole and permanently much better off or more comfortable than before. Only the moment of appearance of these changes moves us with unusual strength, as deep distress or shouts of joy; but both of these soon disappear, because they rested on illusion

WWR I 316

When examined closely, this implies, among other things, that happiness depends upon the experience of a *change* from the presence of will to the absence of will. Happiness itself is dependent upon this transition, and, to this extent, its very essence is related to suffering: it consists precisely in a momentary deliverance from the suffering that is necessarily implied by willing. By pointing out the relevance of the negativity of happiness to the debate about the balance between suffering and happiness, Schopenhauer draws attention to fact that the debate typically neglects the important essential relationship between pain and pleasure that cuts across the balance. Take an illustration from Leibniz, for example, who states: 'the general of an army will prefer a great victory with a slight wound to a state of affairs without wound and without victory' (Leibniz 1952: 378). Schopenhauer would presumably deny that the general is correct in his preference, and we might have expected him to deny it on the rather dubious grounds that the victory, however great, cannot compensate for the mere existence of the slight wound. But in fact the problem lies in Leibniz's formulation of the general's dilemma. With the negative conception of happiness in mind, if the relevant joy is that of the general's victory, then the relevant pain cannot be that of his wound. For, if his joy consists in his awareness of a change to the absence of suffering,

that is, the absence of will, then the relevant suffering that should be brought to bear in his particular dilemma is the striving and anguish required in order to achieve his victory. Therefore, the general should not be weighing up whether a wound is worth a victory; he should be weighing up whether the joy of victory is worth the strife of battle, which is less straightforward by far. In short, we need to ask whether ‘[*L*]e jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle [The game is not worth the candle]’ (*WWR* II 358). By identifying the essential relationship between happiness and suffering, Schopenhauer reminds us that, even when we generalise the dilemma of the general, and consider happiness and suffering in the world as a whole, there is not just an abstract total of pleasure and an unrelated abstract total of pain. The whole is the sum of all concrete particular pleasures, each of which is necessarily related to some particular pain; for, as their negation, the former always imply the latter.²⁸

Now, assume that, under normal circumstances, the practice of weighing happiness and suffering against one another takes a set of weighing scales as its model. A precondition of the weighing scales effect is reciprocal causal symmetry. If an equal chance of either item outweighing the other is to be possible, then it is necessary that the item that sits on one side of the scales is able to affect the item on the other side in a particular way, namely, using its own weight to lift the weight of the other, and vice versa. But, given the negativity of happiness, the analogue of these conditions does not obtain in the case of weighing happiness and suffering. For the essential relationship in which all happiness stands to suffering is not reciprocal, but is causally asymmetric. Suffering, as we know, is the direct result of the will, and happiness is caused by the absence of suffering, that is, the absence of the will. To be the cause of something by absence might seem strange, but it is only the same effect that removing a quantity from one side of weighing scales has upon the other; an ounce of sugar taken from one side causes the measuring weights on the other to rise up.²⁹ Happiness, however, because it consists merely in an absence, can have no reciprocal effect on suffering, whether positively or negatively. After all, how can something that consists in a negation be expected to affect that of which it is the negation?

²⁸ Curiously, by extension, Schopenhauer might well have said that the existence of happiness ‘decides the matter’ of whether happiness can outweigh suffering just as much as the existence of suffering: if happiness is essentially related to suffering in the above way, then all happiness implies some suffering; happiness therefore implies the existence of that which (pending proof) directly ‘decides the matter’, hence, indirectly and by association, happiness ‘decides the matter’ too.

²⁹ Negative causal power is also a common notion in the field of theology and theodicy (which, as noted, Schopenhauer seems to be exploiting for rhetorical effect; *PP* II 291). There the distinction between *causa efficiens* and *causa deficiens* can be found hard at work, for example: ‘[...] properly speaking, the formal character has no *efficient* cause, for it consists in privation [...] That is why the Schoolmen are wont to call the cause of evil *deficient*’ (Leibniz 1952: 136).

In the case of happiness and suffering, therefore, the appropriate kind of causal relation goes only in one direction, from suffering to happiness. Happiness has no weight of its own to contribute; its apparent weight is only relative to actual changes in the will, which is to say, actual changes in suffering. Given this asymmetry, then, the model of weighing scales is rendered inappropriate. If there is any appropriate analogy along these lines, it is where the will permanently has a thumb on the scales. The odds are permanently stacked against happiness. Attempting to weigh suffering and happiness is, therefore, *a priori* superfluous.

If thinking about the relationship between happiness and suffering by analogy to weighing scales is wrong-headed, then what is the correct way to consider them? Georg Simmel suggests an enlightening analogy to debt: 'Life does not provide for real gains, but only for compensations, for payments on a mortgage to will' (Simmel 1986: 54). In fact, Schopenhauer himself offers the same image:

Far from bearing the character of a *gift*, human existence has entirely the character of a contracted *debt*. The calling in of this debt appears in the shape of the urgent needs, tormenting desires, and endless misery brought about through that existence. As a rule, the whole lifetime is used for paying off this debt, yet in this way only the interest is cleared off. Repayment of capital takes place through death. And when was this debt contracted? At the begetting.

WWR II 580

Life, it seems, can neither cover its costs nor pays its debts; nothing is to be gained by it. In contrast to the weighing scales analogy, the debt analogy expresses the important consequence that the negative conception of happiness has for any attempt to weigh happiness against suffering. Absolutely positive contributions of happiness, it implies, do not factor into the equation at all. Furthermore, recall that the central flaw in the empirical approach was that any of the sites called up as evidence were only ambiguously either optimistic or pessimistic. In light of the debt analogy, this matter can now be seen differently. Although the official functions of houses, hospitals, prisons and arguably certain wars are good, they are good with a significant qualification. For each of them ultimately aspires only to restore that which we feel ought to be the case anyway. That '[w]e feel pain, but not painlessness; care, but not freedom from care; fear, but not safety and security' (WWR II 575) is therefore not a psychological fault, or some general

ungratefulness ingrained in human beings, as it might seem; we are right to feel this way if painlessness, care and security can only ever raise the balance back up to nought. Bayle's and Schopenhauer's point when describing their respective horror tours may not just be that the places that they name contain suffering, but that these places contain beings who are seemingly set up to suffer, who need to strive constantly just to keep the insufferable situation in which they find themselves at bay (never mind making any positive gains on it). Bayle in particular prefaces his tour with the suggestion that human beings are constitutionally deficient, and by now it should be clear that Schopenhauer thinks the same.

One might feel tempted to argue that something is still gained in happiness. It may only ever tend towards nought, nevertheless it is still a relative gain. But what does this really amount to? Bear in mind that any happiness gained is only the conscious passing away of the suffering that it is premised upon; and bear in mind also that the objective of this debate overall is to determine whether the amount of happiness can compensate for suffering. Happiness, the negation of suffering, suggested as a compensation for suffering can be taken as a joke at best, and as an insult at worst. Imagine the analogous case of an offender who offered as compensation for her misdeeds the mere fact that these misdeeds had eventually stopped. If this is the only form of reparation that a relative increase in happiness can assume—and according to the negative conception of happiness, it is—then it is no wonder why *any* amount of happiness will not do. Which is to say, once again, that calculating how much actually is on offer is ultimately superfluous.

The moral reading of the argument from superfluosity

There is the temptation to read Schopenhauer's claim about the superfluosity of weighing suffering against happiness, not metaphysically as has been done above, but in a moral light. Indeed, there is a comment that Schopenhauer makes elsewhere, in the context of his moral philosophy, which reflects something of the argument from superfluosity:

He is really worthy of reverence only when his glance has been raised from the particular to the universal, and when he regards his suffering merely as an example of the whole and for him; for in an ethical respect he becomes inspired with genius, one case holds good for a thousand, so that the whole of life, conceived as essential suffering, then brings him to resignation.

The phrase ‘one case holds good for a thousand’ echoes the part of Schopenhauer’s argument from superfluosity where he states that, ‘that thousands had lived in happiness and joy would never do away with the anguish and death-agony of one individual’. However, in this light, Schopenhauer can be read as arguing that the anguish and death-agony of one individual stands *symbolically* for the suffering of many more. By virtue of this alone, such an individual is fit to be compared with the happiness of thousands. According to Schopenhauer, this is possible only in the eyes of the truly moral person, who has achieved ‘a consciousness that has resulted from knowledge of the vanity of all possessions and of the suffering of all life, not merely of one’s own’ (WWR I 396). Such a person is cognisant on some intuitive level of the same truth that Schopenhauer attempts to give mere philosophical expression: that in virtue of the will, suffering is the single reality for the human being, and happiness only its deceptively hollow absence. The attempt to weigh up pleasure and pain can only be made from the perspective of a person who lacks this advanced degree of sympathetic insight—which according to Schopenhauer is, unfortunately, most if not all of us.

In this vein, David Cartwright draws a direct comparison between Schopenhauer’s argument from superfluosity and the following remark made by William James:

[I]f the hypothesis were offered us of a world in which [...] millions [are] kept permanently happy on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torture, what except a specific and independent sort of emotion can it be which would make us immediately feel, even though an impulse arose within us to clutch at the happiness so offered, how hideous a thing would be its enjoyment when deliberately accepted as the fruit of such a bargain?

James 1956: 188

When he brands the attempt to weigh up happiness in suffering as ‘superfluous’, Cartwright suggests, ‘Schopenhauer advance[s] an analogously anti-utilitarian stance’ (Cartwright 2009: 138). But Cartwright has reservations about turning down James’ ‘hideous bargain’ on compassionate grounds:

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

Cartwright 2009: 152

The normative theory that Cartwright has in mind includes considerations of deservedness and responsibility. Earlier in the same essay, he argues that Schopenhauer's moral philosophy can accommodate the fact that preventing suffering sometimes requires the suffering of others, and that certain principles are necessary in governing compassion, especially principles of justice. Nevertheless, the above quotation comes from the very end of Cartwright's essay, leaving the moral reading of Schopenhauer's argument from superfluosity hanging in the balance.

I would suggest, however, that these convincing reservations about the moral reading of the argument from superfluosity are in fact a sign that the moral reading itself should be abandoned. This is not merely because the moral reading encounters difficulties such as those that Cartwright has pointed out. For, apart from the passage quoted above, in which some of its claims are echoed in a moral context, there is little in the argument itself to suggest that Schopenhauer intended for it to be understood as resting on a moral basis. Instead it directly follows on from Schopenhauer's discussion of the metaphysics of happiness, namely its negative nature with respect to suffering. Therefore, bearing in mind the above elucidation of how the negative conception of happiness is supposed to support the argument from superfluosity, it is perhaps advisable to pursue the metaphysical reading only.³⁰

³⁰ Hence, a discussion of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy is again postponed, until Chapter VI.

6. Conclusion

As an answer to how willing stands in a necessary relationship to suffering, Ivan Soll takes Schopenhauer to be arguing, unconvincingly, that satisfaction of the will itself is a delusion because it does not last, whereas to will is *ipso facto* to suffer. Suffering therefore reigns and happiness and peace are mere fantasies. While Schopenhauer certainly wants to make the majority of these claims in some form, the problem is that, quite obviously, the duration of satisfaction does not necessarily determine its reality or unreality. Instead, then, I have taken Schopenhauer's remarks about the duration of satisfaction to be a stand-alone observation about the will's insatiability, and not in itself constitutive of the delusory quality that he attributes to desire and satisfaction. It is relevant to the discussion of the relationship between willing and suffering only in the indirect capacity of a regular turnover of desires, which are themselves painful. As a consequence, it was necessary for me to reinforce Schopenhauer's argument that willing is directly painful in virtue of the privation that it implies.

I have also argued that the delusory quality that Schopenhauer attributes to desires in fact consists in the inflated expectations human beings harbour regarding the result of fulfilment of the will. These delusions are necessary given the demoralising reality of the will, according to which one can regard as good (read: actively value) only that which one wills but does not yet possess. I believe Schopenhauer is committed to this last claim about the will as a consequence of some of his other claims about the nature of willing, and that it is partly reflected in his description of the negativity of happiness. The delusion which necessarily conceals the reality of willing is not so drastically inflated that one expects to overcome willing as such by means of one satisfaction; it is only the expectation that the object of desire will continue to be regarded as good once the need for it has subsided. But even this meagre promise is far too great for will-governed reality to ever fulfil.

As if this were not enough, Schopenhauer also argues that the suffering necessitated by the will cannot possibly be outweighed by happiness, no matter how small the suffering, nor how great the happiness. His argument from superfluousness, as I have called it, is founded upon his negative conception of happiness. The negativity of happiness entails that happiness cannot possibly compensate for suffering because all happiness, as the negation of a certain amount of suffering, is essentially related to suffering, and a negation cannot realistically compensate for the thing of which it is the negation. I therefore recommend that moral readings of the argument from superfluousness, the difficulties of

which I have noted, should be abandoned in favour of a metaphysical reading of this kind.

Chapter III: Against Leibniz's Optimism—Theodicy, the Worst of All Possible Worlds, and the Remainder Problem

1. Introduction

Schopenhauer realises that his debate with the optimists will not be settled merely by a demonstration that suffering can never be outweighed by happiness. He is quick to add a caveat:

If the world and life were an end in themselves, and accordingly were to require theoretically no justification [...] then the sufferings and troubles of life would not indeed have to be fully compensated by the pleasures and well-being in it.

WWR II 577

Leibniz, though he was named as part of the opposition in the previous chapter, would agree that it is naïve to argue only on the level of the balance between pleasure and pain. In fact, when Leibniz claimed notoriously that this is the best of all possible worlds, his primary concern was far from whether there is greater happiness or suffering within it. In this chapter, therefore, I will ascertain Schopenhauer's critical views on Leibniz's official optimism, that is, his famed theodicy.

The main reason why this is a complicated task is that, arguably, Schopenhauer does not always have a clear and representative picture of Leibniz's theodicy in mind when he is criticising it. After outlining Leibniz's argument for the best of all possible worlds, with reference to some sympathetic readers of Leibniz (section 2), I will argue that Schopenhauer's depiction of Leibniz is partially skewed by his reading of Leibniz's early critics, namely Voltaire and Hume, as well as by his dim view of the post-Kantians, whom he considered to be the philosophical heirs of Leibnizian optimism (section 3). The question is then asked whether under these circumstances Schopenhauer's arguments against Leibniz can have any purchase, or whether they miss the mark.

I will argue that instead of merely repeating the same mistakes that the sympathetic

readers of Leibniz attribute to Leibniz's early critics, Schopenhauer in fact lends these critics, and himself, greater plausibility by combatting directly some of Leibniz's central assumptions, for which the earlier critics had in effect only offered their own alternative assumptions. For example, Schopenhauer actively makes room for alternative standards of metaphysical perfection, I will argue, by criticising the appropriateness of the ultimately aesthetic standard of perfection advocated by Leibniz. His provocative argument for the worst of all possible worlds, which is admittedly poor, is partly redeemed to the extent that it offers a possible concrete instance of a non-aesthetic standard of metaphysical perfection (section 4). I will also raise the problem of the 'remainder' which Schopenhauer claims that all optimistic philosophies of an *a priori* rationalistic nature, particularly Leibniz's theodicy, leave behind when they attempt to account for the appearance of evil and suffering in the world. Schopenhauer's position, I will argue, amounts to an insistence on the importance of evidence in the context of the problem of evil, which Leibniz had effectively denied (section 5). He thereby reintroduces the theme of intellectual honesty, originally initiated, once again, by the critics of Leibniz whom Schopenhauer admired.

2. Leibniz's best of all possible worlds

What is the true nature of Leibniz's argument for his claim in *Theodicy* that our world is the best of all possible worlds? To begin with its aim and motivation, as briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, Leibniz took exception to the fideism advocated by Pierre Bayle, particularly as presented in the 'Manicheans' entry of Bayle's inflammatory *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. For Bayle, in the words of one commentator, reason breaks over the traditional problem of evil, leaving room only for faith:

The first of his premises, that evil exists, is a matter of observation. Bayle thought nobody willing to face experience could call evil into doubt. Drop the second premise, God's benevolence, and you're left with a nightmare. Drop the third, God's omnipotence, and you're left with Manicheanism—covertly or not. If the rejection of any of these claims is unacceptable, the only recourse is to reject that very reason which insists on making sense of them.

Neiman 2002: 125

Notably, not even Bayle was actually denying the existence of God, and therefore the argument Leibniz formulates as a response to Bayle is not intended as a defence of God's existence. In modern times, insistence on the problem of evil as ferocious as Bayle's is casually equated with atheism: God's essential attributes are impossible with his supposed creation, therefore no God. However, Leibniz conceived of his reaction to Bayle not as argument for theism, to counter the possible threat of atheism, but as an argument for reason, to counter Bayle's scepticism and faith.³¹

Leibniz's project in *Theodicy*, then, is to make God's essential attributes rationally compatible with his creation. An important premise in his argument is that, given the very nature of God, he could not have failed to create the best possible world, or else he would not be God or he would have chosen not to create at all:

[I]his supreme wisdom, united to a goodness that is no less infinite, cannot but have chosen the best. For as a lesser evil is a kind of good, even so a lesser good is a kind of evil if it stands in the way of a greater good; and there would be something to correct in the actions of God if it were possible to do better [...] if there were not the best (*optimum*) among all possible worlds, God would not have produced any.

Leibniz 1952: 128

Already, therefore, if it is agreed that God is the author of the world—and, given that this debate originally occurs *within* theism, it is agreed—then it is agreed that the world is the best possible world, because any lesser selection would be contrary to God's nature. But what is the standard by which potential worlds are to be judged? For Leibniz, the standard that must assume logical priority is not, say, the greatest amount of happiness, or even the greatest amount of virtue. The primary concern is for order:

[W]e may say that no matter how God might have created the world, it would have been regular and in a certain order [...] God has chosen that world which is the most perfect, that is to say, which is at the same time the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in phenomena [...]

³¹ See Neiman (2002: 116-128) for a detailed analysis of Bayle's position.

Leibniz 1969: 306

Divine order, to Leibniz, means metaphysical perfection; he defines metaphysical perfection as the simplest laws governing the greatest variety. God selects the world with the highest 'perfection ratio', as one commentator puts it.³² The reason for holding this standard above all others once again emanates from God's nature. Leibniz argues that God's creation must be structured in an intelligible way:

The *a priori* method is certain if we can demonstrate from the known nature of God that structure of the world which is in agreement with the divine reasons and from this structure can finally arrive at the principles of things. This method is of all the most excellent and hence does not seem to be entirely impossible. For our mind is endowed with the concept of perfection, and we know that God works in the most perfect way [...] [S]uperior geniuses should enter upon this way, even without the hope of arriving at particulars by means of it, in order that we may have the true concepts of the universe, the greatness of God, and the nature of the soul, through which the mind can be most perfected, for this is the most important end of contemplation.

Leibniz 1969: 283

With respect to general *a priori* intelligibility, as 'the most important end of contemplation', a God whose creation is ruled by the simplest possible discernible laws, and which is also optimally bountiful, is greater than a God whose creation is ruled by more or less random chance and caprice (whether this is by design or by divine interventions and exemptions). This can be argued solely on the grounds of the inherent goodness of reflective comprehension, but the numerous other advantages that a well-ordered world offers to its inhabitants are obvious; by means of its most perfect order, the inhabitants of the world, if they move into intellectual and spiritual alignment with its order, are enabled to order and perfect themselves in various ways. And, after all, we are attempting to consider God in his capacity as the Creator; it makes more sense that he would hold himself to the principles

³² 'It seems reasonable to suppose that Leibniz meant to suggest by this that God sought to produce a world in which the ratio of the value measuring the richness of its phenomena to the value measuring the complexity of its laws (call this its "perfection ratio") was greater than the corresponding ratio for any other world' Brown (1988: 576).

of, say, an engineer before those of a parent or guardian, and the greatest effects from the simplest rules seem like an eminently sound first principle of engineering. Hence, a rationally ordered world, too, flows from God's very nature.

What does Leibniz's argument tell us about our world, given that, of all possible worlds, it is the best in the highly specific sense outlined above? First, it explains the appearance of evil, without compromising any of the divine attributes to which, according to Bayle, we could otherwise assent only on the grounds of faith. 'God, having chosen the most perfect of all possible worlds', Leibniz says, 'had been prompted by his wisdom to permit the evil which was bound up with it' (Leibniz 1952: 67). In creating a world that is as perfect as it could possibly be, it would be wrong of God not to create any admittedly evil thing that is a necessary part of that world. For any given evil in the actual world, were we to wish it away, we would be wishing for God to have created a lesser world, which is both a practical and a rational absurdity: practical, because living in a lesser world is surely a lesser thing for us; and rational, because it is effectively the wish for God to contradict his own nature. Leibniz argues that the senseless evils seen and felt in the world are really the result of the extreme incompleteness of mere human knowledge:

If some adduce experience to prove that God could have done better, they set themselves up as a ridiculous critic of his works [...] You have known the world only since the day before yesterday, you see scarce farther than your nose, and you carp at the world. Wait until you know more of the world and consider therein especially the parts which present a complete whole (as do organic bodies); and you will find there a contrivance and a beauty transcending all imagination.

Leibniz 1952: 248

Leibniz admits to having in mind the heresy of King Alfonso X of Castile, who after carefully observing the seemingly irregular motions of the planets, judged that he could have arranged them much better. King's Alfonso conceited remark was finally revealed to be founded on a mistake when Ptolemaic geocentrism was overthrown by Copernican heliocentrism many years later; his real misfortune was to fall between these two astrophysical paradigms. For later generations of astronomers, the cosmic disorder he perceived could simply be swept away by observable and verifiable truth. Of course, not all

imperfections will simply dissolve in this way, when placed in the context of the bigger picture, but even incontrovertible evils will lose their sting, for they were ultimately necessary for the best of all possible worlds.

A further question which might be asked about our world, when seen by Leibniz's light, is whether its most perfect possible metaphysical engineering has been achieved at the expense of other possible perfections. Comments such as, 'God can follow a simple, productive, regular plan; but I do not believe that the best and the most regular is always opportune for all creatures simultaneously; and I judge *a posteriori*, for the plan chosen by God is not so' (Leibniz 1952: 260), have been understood as follows:

The only way in which this statement can be reconciled with his claim that God chooses to create the world that contains the most order, regularity, virtue, and happiness possible is by assuming that happiness and virtue are subordinate to order and regularity. The latter may be maximized only relatively to the former.

Wilson 1983: 776

More radical still, for others, perfection 'in this rarified metaphysical sense of *greatest variety of phenomena consonant with greatest simplicity of laws*' may be God's *sole* concern regarding the perfection of the world. In this case, whether or not other perfections are achieved within its limits is beside the point. Our world's 'being the best has (at bottom) little to do with how men [...] fare in it' (Rescher 1979: 156-7; see also Gale 1976: 81-2).

On the other hand, both of the above kinds of reading are clearly countered by such remarks in Leibniz's works as: 'God resolved to create a world, but he was bound by his goodness at the same time to make a choice of such a world as should contain the greatest possible amount of order, regularity, happiness, and virtue' (Leibniz 1952: 431) as well as 'pleasure [...] love, perfection, being, power, freedom, harmony, [...] and beauty' (Leibniz 1969: 426). In order to account for this, it has been suggested that all of these perfections are maximised in confluence with the maximisation of the primary perfection of harmonious order. Careful exegesis shows, for example, that for Leibniz, beauty is the perception of metaphysical harmony; that true knowledge is of the order that God imposes, and that true pleasure and happiness are sustained by such knowledge; that love of God is dependent upon comprehension of his intelligible reasons; that general virtue

begins with the love of God, and so on.³³ In short, according to this reading, the three classic categories of goodness—moral, physical, and metaphysical—if they are to be maximised, must be maximised all at once. Leibniz acknowledges these categories, stating characteristically that ‘perfection includes not only the *moral good* and the *physical good* of intelligent creatures, but also the good which is purely *metaphysical*, and concerns also creatures devoid of reason’, but—equally characteristically—that ‘the metaphysical good which includes everything makes it necessary sometimes to admit physical evil and moral evil’ (Leibniz 1952: 258).

3. Schopenhauer's Leibniz

We now have a picture of Leibniz's intended argument—albeit not completely decisive one, due to the scholarly disagreement. Schopenhauer's version of Leibniz appears to be a departure from this picture. For, in its history before Schopenhauer's reception of it, as a result of the efforts of both its critics and its adherents, the appearance of Leibniz's theodicy had been altered in some important respects.

The same commentators who argue that Leibniz's best of all possible worlds is to be judged ultimately in terms of its metaphysical order—whether or not they agree on the extent to which this is its singular perfection, its limiting perfection, or the basis of its manifold perfections—go on to argue that, for this reason, would-be critics of Leibniz are often wide of the mark:

Leibniz to a great extent escapes the criticism that the world containing, for example, the Lisbon earthquake, is clearly not the most perfect. His escape is possible simply because he can claim that his notion of perfection is not that of Voltaire [...] That he would not give up his view that the world was optimal and thus perfect is [...] not strange; he was, above all, a mathematical physicist. Perfection for Leibniz was [...] a unique mathematical-physical property of the universe.

Gale 1976: 81-2

³³ See Brown (1988: 571-591) for a thorough examination of the links that ensure the confluence of perfections for Leibniz.

This defence does not even try to claim that Voltaire's ideal of perfection, which might, for example, include maximised happiness or minimised suffering, is in fact confluent with the mathematical-physical perfection of the universe for which Leibniz had argued.³⁴ Yet it is still sufficient to demonstrate that Voltaire's satire cannot get to the heart of Leibniz's real argument. In terms of its philosophical force, Voltaire's satirical argument achieves little more than Bayle's distressed appeals to experience of the world, which Leibniz had set out to explain away as the result of a severely restricted viewpoint. A wider view—perhaps infinitely wide—would reveal the harmonious splendor of the universe. In terms of its historical force, however, Voltaire's satire does what great satires often do: it smuggles its more memorable caricatures into the rightful place of its own original subject matter; or, at least, the historical association between the two becomes irresistibly and misleadingly strong. To all but those prepared to search for the real differences, Leibniz and Pangloss become interchangeable with respect to their arguments.

Schopenhauer makes his allegiance to Voltaire quite clear, and he even does so, perhaps out of this very allegiance, with a degree of humour:

I cannot assign to the *Théodicée*, that methodical and broad development of optimism [...] any other merit than that it later gave rise to the immortal *Candide* of the great Voltaire. In this way, of course, Leibniz's oft-repeated and lame excuse for the evil of the world, namely that the bad sometimes produces the good, obtained proof for him that was unexpected. Even by the name of his hero, Voltaire indicated that it needed only sincerity to recognise the opposite of optimism.

WWR II 583

Schopenhauer could already be accused of perpetuating a lazy caricature of Leibniz, all for the sake of his joke. Firstly, only in a very loose sense is Leibniz's 'excuse' for evil that the bad sometimes produces the good. In truth, for Leibniz, 'the good' is the most perfect possible order which God imposes upon the world, and 'the bad' is in some sense its necessary concomitant. Goodness in this case is a formal-structural quality of the world, and real badness (as opposed to that which turns out to be merely apparent) either consists

³⁴ Which is one of the shortcomings of this defence according to Brown (1988: 574).

precisely in the necessary limits of that structure, and is therefore hardly something that 'produces' goodness, or it consists in some content, that is, some feature of the world, which ultimately exists in order to make possible in the first place the valuable formal structure by which it is governed. The vulgar trade-off style of arrangement that Schopenhauer glibly mentions is, therefore, a false rendering of Leibniz's views at the very least. And even if we were to follow Schopenhauer's model, we would find in Leibniz that it is the good that is sometimes forced to 'produce' the bad.

Secondly, following Voltaire—who in turn is following Bayle—Schopenhauer believes that mere candidness, an honest articulation of what one sees before one's eyes, is sufficient to puncture Leibnizian apologetics. If this is so, then Schopenhauer needs to provide further arguments, if only to be free from the very point that Leibniz originally intended to make, which was that limited human experience is not a reliable guide to the overall balance of the world, and therefore that our horror alone is not a refutation. Overall it is important to add that Schopenhauer is probably not getting Leibniz wrong unwittingly. He gives the churlish impression that Leibniz is so painfully mistaken that he deserves to be misrepresented and misunderstood; however, clearly, there is a dangerously self-perpetuating downward spiral to this.

In Schopenhauer, praise for Voltaire is often quickly followed by praise for Hume. Hence, immediately after the passage just quoted above:

Actually optimism cuts so strange a figure on this scene of sin, suffering and death, that we should be forced to regard it as irony if we did not have an adequate explanation of its origin in its secret source (namely hypocritical flattery with an offensive confidence in its success), a source so delightfully disclosed by Hume [...]

WWR II 583

And, elsewhere:

The evils and misery of the world [...] are not in accord even with *theism*; and so it tried to help itself by all kinds of shifts, evasions, and theodicies which nevertheless succumbed irretrievably to the arguments of Hume and Voltaire.

WWR II 591

Schopenhauer correctly detects that there are similarities between Hume's and Voltaire's lasting influence on how the question of theodicy is regarded. As Catherine Wilson, one of the Leibniz commentators mentioned above, concludes her essay:

[A] shift [was] already emerging in the late books of Hume's *Dialogues*. Here it is no longer war, plague, and famine which the theist seeks to reconcile with his conception of God, but psychological misery—anxiety, terror, weakness, and distress. The problem of evil is no longer intimately linked with the central preoccupation of the late rationalist, and from this point forward Leibnizian optimism becomes increasingly vulnerable to the attacks of critics whose dominant concerns lie elsewhere.

Wilson 1982: 783

For now, it will remain an open question as to whether Schopenhauer is, by means of such a historical shift, unknowingly alienated from the original form of Leibniz's argument, or whether he is consciously persuaded by the new orientation set by Voltaire and Hume, and is instead trying to fortify its validity as an argument against Leibniz. Either way, Hume certainly seems to have had a hand in determining how Schopenhauer would set himself against Leibniz, as well as optimism generally. Sensitivity to psychological forms of suffering would be a good candidate for just one of the ways in which this is so.³⁵

In some respects Schopenhauer's demands went further than those of Voltaire and Hume. In his famous *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne*, Voltaire ultimately sides with Baylean fideism:

Plato and Epicurus I reject,
And turn more hopefully to learned Bayle.
With even poised scale Bayle bids me doubt.

³⁵ Schopenhauer briefly notes, however, that he and Hume have divergent methods of reaching the same conclusion: '[Hume] [...] explains without reserve in the tenth and eleventh books of his *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, with arguments very convincing yet quite different from mine, the miserable nature of this world and the untenableness of all optimism; here at the same time he attacks optimism at its source' (*WWR* II 582). Schopenhauer is presumably referring here to his own willingness to use an *a priori* metaphysical approach, which is supported, supplemented, and confirmed by many empirical observations, but which, he claims, is intended also to be convincing independently of these observations (see *WWR* I 323).

He, wise and great enough to need no creed,
Has slain all systems—combats even himself:
Like that blind conqueror of Philistines,
He sinks beneath the ruin he has wrought.
What is the verdict of the vastest mind?
Silence: the book of fate is closed to us.

This means that Voltaire ultimately fails to explicitly bring the debate outside of theism. On two occasions in *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer mentions, with a note of disappointment, that ‘even Voltaire regarded the physico-theological proof as irrefutable’ (*WWR* II 339; *WWR* I 533). According to Schopenhauer, the only ‘three great men’ who attempted to refute this proof—before Kant swept it away once and for all—were Lucretius, Bacon, and Spinoza (*WWR* II 337). Hume receives only an honourable mention in this field, for at least trying to advance reasonable arguments against ‘the Englishmen of learning’. Seventy years after Kant, English theologians were still far too partial to the design argument, Schopenhauer thought. ‘I can think of nothing better to say for [Hume’s] fame—he is hated above all by the English clergy even at the present day’ (*WWR* II 338n). In the end, however, Hume’s position on organised religion was too cautiously dialogical, perhaps even too good humoured, and therefore not forthright enough for Schopenhauer’s liking: ‘[...] in the last of his *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, as readable as they are inexorable, [Hume] informs us that all this had been merely a joke, a mere *exercitium logicum*’ (*PP* I 111). Of course, the main source of Schopenhauer’s own confidence is Kant, and, for the reason that these philosophers came before Kant, he admits that they can be forgiven.

It was not only Leibniz’s early critics who affected Schopenhauer’s conception of Leibnizian optimism. Those whom Schopenhauer saw as Leibniz’s rightful heirs appear to have had an effect also. Moreover, in Schopenhauer’s eyes, the fact that Leibniz’s contemporary equivalents came after Kant means that they have no excuse for their errors; on the contrary, it is for this reason that they ought to be derided all the more:

The *Critique of Pure Reason* is very specially directed against this Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy and has a polemical, indeed a destructive, relation to it, just as to Locke and Hume it has a relation of continuation and of further development. That the professors of philosophy are everywhere engaged at the present time in setting Leibniz on his feet again with his humbug, in fact in

glorifying him, and, on the other hand, in disparaging and setting aside Kant as much as possible, has its good reason in the *primum vivere*³⁶ [...] Down with Kant, *vivat* our Leibniz!

WWR II 582

There can be no doubt about whom Schopenhauer has in mind here. Just before he states: 'There is more to be learned from each page of David Hume than from the collected philosophical Hegel, Herbart, and Schleiermacher' (WWR II 582). Hegel, for example, believed that his historical-dialectical form of philosophy was a significant advance in the field of theodicy:

Our intellectual striving aims at realising the conviction that was *intended* by eternal wisdom, is actually *accomplished* in the domain of existent, active Spirit, as well as in that of mere Nature. Our mode of treating the subject is, in this aspect, a Theodicea—a justification of the ways of God—which Leibniz attempted metaphysically, in his method, *i.e.*, in indefinite abstract categories—so that the ill that is found in the World may be comprehended, and the thinking Spirit reconciled with the fact of the existence of evil.

Hegel 2004: 15

Hegel contrasts his own theodicy with Leibniz's on the grounds that the latter adopts a 'metaphysical' and 'abstract' style. The distinction Hegel therefore claims for his theodicy would appear to be its immanence and its concreteness. Reconciliation with the world is not the product of reflection upon the nature of an agent who is ultimately external to the world, that is, God traditionally conceived; rather, the collective realisation and development of the human mind towards self-consciousness is responsible for the pattern in which the world and its history unfolds. In virtue of this, the mind itself assumes the mantle of the divine—if not latently always, then eventually.

Insofar as both Leibniz and Hegel are concerned to find a justification for the ways of God, and by extension to reconcile us to the world and its evils, the two projects are functionally the same. But, of course, when it comes to evaluating these two forms of

³⁶ Schopenhauer is referring to his suggested motto for professional philosophers, '*Primum vivere, deinde philosophari!* [First live, then philosophise]', by which he means: prioritise the security of one's livelihood over the honesty and quality of one's thoughts.

theodicy, their common purpose should not be allowed to overshadow their differences, which is not something that Schopenhauer appears always to have managed. Bernard Williams captures a relevant and important consequence of the differences between Leibniz's and Hegel's respective systems:

As with Leibniz, [Hegel's] thought must be that the horrors were necessary—without that, we simply have another focus for regret. But in Hegel, necessity is supposed to exercise a different kind of leverage on our thoughts. On Leibniz's account, the structure of the necessity is itself part of what makes the totality worthwhile, since it is based on God's choice of the most elegantly complex universe. For Hegel, the necessity need not in itself contribute part of the value, though perhaps it could do so. The complex working of the Geist to turn suffering into historical achievement is not itself the supreme achievement. Moreover, the value of the achievement does not have to transcend a human understanding of that value, as it does with Leibniz. Other considerations laid aside, it is merely that we can reflect “without *this*, *that* could not be, and the value of *that* means that *this*, after all, was worthwhile”

Williams 2007: 51

Were Schopenhauer a little more sensitive to this difference, he may not have so casually conceived of Leibniz's 'lame excuse for evil of the world' as 'that the bad sometimes produces the good'. At least, he would have seen more clearly how this insult lacks any real bite. He cannot take this line of argument to bear against Leibniz's theodicy because Leibniz's point is emphatically not that the bad things of the world turn out to be worth it for the sake of the good things that they bring forth, as it might be for Hegel. According to Leibniz (on Williams' reading), if the world were seen in the correct light, the very divinity of its necessary order is what reconciles us to it. The plan itself is to be admired, so to speak, not necessarily its results.

Even if advocates of Hegel were to object that the Hegelian theodicy is in fact closer to the Leibnizian theodicy, and that the structure of necessity itself is a source of value in Hegel's philosophy too (the possibility of which Williams leave room for), the view forwarded here still stands. For it is only that Schopenhauer's opinion of Hegel, as well as the post-Kantians more generally, may have clouded his judgement of Leibniz—whether or

not his opinion of the Hegel is ultimately founded upon a misinterpretation. Leibniz, as ‘the founder of systematic *optimism*’ (*WWR* II 582) is treated in the same indignant manner that Schopenhauer treats the subsequent systematic optimists. Only, Leibniz seems to have deserved it far less than the others, firstly because his arguments operate significantly differently from the way in which Schopenhauer takes Hegel’s arguments to operate; and secondly because the later optimists’ real crime was to suppress Kant, who, according to Schopenhauer, had conclusively dispensed with Leibniz. This second complaint is far more personal than it is philosophically valid, but either way, Leibniz could not possibly have earned it.

The potential for a mistake in Schopenhauer’s conception of Leibniz’s theodicy, and a corresponding mistake in his criticism, is therefore over-determined. Leibniz as seen through the lens of his latter-day incarnations is consonant with Leibniz as he was to his notable critics. Both pictures seem to do a disservice to Leibniz, and have him dogmatically believing that the bad is, quite simply, outweighed by the good that it brings forth. But, clearly, more than a flat refusal of this supposed dogmatism is necessary if Schopenhauer’s criticism is to have purchase on anything more than a superficial version of its target. Schopenhauer does in fact have a more considered (or more considerable) response to Leibniz, which is twofold. Each of its two parts, detailed in the following two sections, corresponds to and assists a trend in the picture of Leibniz as presented by his seemingly dubious legacy. Firstly, Schopenhauer challenges the standard of perfection for which Leibniz argues. He does not do so out of a mere assumption about how the world should be—which would miss the mark—but instead submits genuine reasons why the standard that Leibniz chooses, that is, harmonious order, is itself questionable. Secondly, Schopenhauer argues that at the centre of theodicy in general is a dishonest resistance to the counter-evidence of empirical experience. This is a case for intellectual honesty, as well as for the relevance of evidence in answering the problem of evil, but it operates, once again, by means of highlighting the corresponding malpractices in its opposition. Schopenhauer’s best response to Leibniz, therefore, is to critically interrogate him, which, if successful, will demonstrate how the classic responses given by Schopenhauer’s predecessors—who assumed alternative standards of perfection, and who assumed that simple honesty and candour would settle the matter—are able to have purchase after all.

4. The worst of all possible worlds

In one relatively short passage, Schopenhauer overtly challenges Leibniz by arguing that, on the contrary, our world is the worst of all possible worlds. In a sense, only this could be Schopenhauer's pessimism proper, because it is the only argument of his that explicitly addresses optimism proper. Optimism, taken in its original, narrowly Leibnizian sense, argues that the conditions of our world are optimal, hence its name. They are optimal conditions in the sense that the greatest effects are achieved by means of the simplest laws. By countering that this is really the worst of all possible worlds, it follows that, for Schopenhauer, the conditions of life are pessimal, that is, as bad as they possibly can be. Schopenhauer's argument is not a precise mirror image of Leibniz's, however, for he is not concerned to show that the world is scant in effects, but plentiful in complex laws—although, to the Leibnizian, this would be a truly abominable contraption. His claim is rather that any world worse than the actual one would not be possible. At first sight, as we shall now see, Schopenhauer's argument is not very convincing.

'[A]gainst the palpably sophistical proofs of Leibniz that this is the best of all possible worlds,' Schopenhauer says, 'we may even oppose seriously and honestly the proof that it is the *worst* of all possible worlds' (*WWR* II 583). To this end, Schopenhauer first gives the definition of possibility under which he is operating: 'possible means not what we may picture in our imagination, but what can actually exist and last'. His next step is to list examples of the many things in nature which are really only on the very brink of existence, constantly in danger of toppling over into non-existence. Here are just a few:

For not only if the planets ran their heads against one another, but also if any one of the actually occurring perturbations of their course continued to increase, instead of being gradually balanced again by the others, the world would soon come to an end. Astronomers know on what accidental circumstances [...] all this depends [...] Again, powerful forces of nature dwell under the firm crust of the planet. As soon as some accident affords these free play, they must necessarily destroy that crust with everything living on it [...] The earthquake of Lisbon, of Haiti, the destruction of Pompeii are only small, playful hints at the possibility. An insignificant alteration in the atmosphere, not even chemically demonstrable, causes cholera, yellow fever, black death, and so on, which carry off millions of people [...] The animals have received

barely enough in the way of organs and strength to enable them with the greatest exertion to procure sustenance for their own lives and food for their offspring [...] Consequently, the world is as bad as it can possibly be, if it is to exist at all. Q. E. D.

WWR II 583-4

Any alteration for the worse, however seemingly minor, would prove fatal for the world. Presumably, for Schopenhauer, a better world than ours would be one in which there was more room for manoeuvre; in which missteps, though they might lead closer to oblivion, do not lead directly into it. It is better, he argues, to be living on a plane surface of possibility than on a knife's edge.

The trouble with Schopenhauer's position is that there does not appear to be an argument for why there is not, in fact, at least a little room for manoeuvre in the actual world:

He wants to take "possible" worlds as meaning something like "viable" worlds (as opposed to, say, worlds whose description contains no contradiction). But his insertion of "actually" here threatens confusion. The question should not be how many viable worlds there actually are—presumably the answer is one—but how many non-actual worlds would be viable.

Janaway 1999: 322

The difficulty that the above question poses for Schopenhauer is that, even granted the dubious assumption that possibility equates to viability, it is not obvious that worse non-actual worlds are not viable. To pick an example which might appeal to Schopenhauer, for any given war in the actual world, is the non-actual world in which the fighting lasts just one day longer not also viable? The normal answer to this question would be that such a world is viable, which would imply the viability of at least one, possibly more, worse non-actual worlds. The fact that Schopenhauer's argument commits him to the conclusion that such a change in the world would necessarily spell its destruction, because any worse world at all is unviable, serves to demonstrate the absurdity of his position.

To be a little more charitable to Schopenhauer, the examples he gives in order to demonstrate the impossibility of a worse world suggest that his re-definition of possibility is not simply as any kind of viability, but only as that which could be called structural

viability. The passage quoted above, for example, envisages various worlds in which different constants and balances in nature, as opposed to specific events, are tampered with or defied. Therefore, a world that is identical to the actual one except for the fact that one more planet collides with another may be viable; however, a world in which the laws governing the motion of the planets are such that the planets cannot but collide with one another is not viable. Schopenhauer predicts that if any structural laws were changed in any way for the worse, then more broadly destructive and catastrophic events would occur, and therefore that any structurally worse non-actual world is also structurally unviable—*ergo*, not possible. He is therefore offering a (wholly speculative) precursor to the 'fine-tuned universe' hypothesis that is now advocated by some modern physicists, according to which the laws of the universe improbably fall between very narrow parameters for any sustainable existence at all.³⁷

However, not all of Schopenhauer's examples are derived from the more convenient field of physics. In fact, he offers a selection from such diverse fields as epidemiology, meteorology, physiology, ecology, and more. It is here that even the argument from structural viability potentially loses its force. For example, Schopenhauer mentions the meagre, but just barely sufficient provisions that nature has given each animal to aid its own personal survival, but it is not clear what difference is made to the viability of an entire world whether it were simply one animal that is under-equipped for individual self-preservation or, as a rule, all animals were under-equipped for individual self-preservation. Clearly, this would be a world without sustainable sentient life, but this is not to say that it would not be a structurally viable world.³⁸ Admittedly, other scientific fields have comparable notions to the physicists' fine-tuned universe: James Lovelock's biophysiological conception of the natural world argues that the earth itself should be viewed as if it were an organism, with delicate internal balances between its constituent parts, and explains recent and impending environmental catastrophes as the result of artificial disruptions to these balances (Lovelock 1991: 21-2). Likewise, Schopenhauer notices how easily small qualitative changes in the environment can have large-scale

³⁷ For example, Martin Rees in his *Just Six Numbers* (1999), where it is argued that the universe is 'fine-tuned' across six dimensions, including the ratio between gravity and electromagnetism, the binding strength in nuclei, and the number of spatio-temporal dimensions.

³⁸ Unless Schopenhauer were to make the supplementary point that the world depends on sustainable sentient life. As a committed idealist, it is not inconceivable that he would (see *WWR* I 380: 'With the complete abolition of knowledge the rest of the world would of itself also vanish into nothing').

qualitative effects: 'A very moderate increase of heat would dry up all rivers and springs' (*WWR* II 583). But the point is that, in all the fields of science, there are surely too many laws and constants for Schopenhauer to seriously suggest that changes for the worse in any one of them, however slight, would spell disaster—given that disaster here means (or, for the sake of consistency, should mean) not just widespread extinction, for example, but the unviability of any existence. Yet Schopenhauer is committed to this suggestion, because if the world were still viable even if just one of its laws were somehow slackened, then a worse non-actual world is entirely viable, which is precisely what he denies.

Schopenhauer's argument for the worst of all possible worlds nevertheless has potential force, but in order to discover it one needs first to go back a step in his overall argument against Leibniz. For the force of the argument for the worst of all possible worlds may in fact be dependent upon another of Schopenhauer's objections to Leibniz, which targets directly the type of standard of perfection that Leibniz advocates. The implicit standard of perfection that Schopenhauer assumes in his argument for the worst of all possible worlds, that is, the standard of structural viability, is, I will argue, a credible instance of the type of standard of perfection that Schopenhauer suggests as an alternative to Leibniz's standard.

The objection to Leibniz's standard of perfection occurs just before Schopenhauer's argument of the worst of all possible worlds, in the context of a general objection to a certain kind of optimism:

To this world the attempt has been made to adapt the system of *optimism*, and to demonstrate to us that it is the best of all possible worlds. The absurdity is glaring. However, an optimist tells me to open my eyes and look at the world and see how beautiful it is in the sunshine, with its mountains, valleys, rivers, plants, animals, and so on. But is the world, then, a peep-show? These things are certainly beautiful to *behold*, but to *be* them is something quite different. A teleologist then comes along and speaks to me in glowing terms about the wise arrangement by virtue of which care is taken that the planets do not run their heads against one another; that land and sea are not mixed into a pulp, but are held apart in a delightful way; also that everything is neither rigid in continual frost nor roasted with heat; likewise that, in consequence of the obliquity of the ecliptic, there is not an eternal spring in which nothing would reach maturity, and so forth. But this and everything like it are indeed mere *conditions sine quibus*

non. If there is to be a world at all [...] then of course it could not be constructed so unskillfully that its very framework would threaten to collapse. But if we proceed to the *results* of the applauded work, if we consider the *players* who act on the stage so durably constructed, and then how, keeping pace with this, desire and suffering come out ever more strongly, and increase, till at last human life affords no other material than that for tragedies and comedies, then whoever is not a hypocrite will hardly be disposed to break out into hallelujahs.

WWR II 581

It can be seen how the argument for the worst of all possible worlds, which appears only a couple of pages later, echoes this objection in its reference to the delicate and precarious balance of the world. The balance alone, Schopenhauer argues, is not a sufficient cause for admiration. But the real import of this passage is the distinction that it draws between the value of beholding, on the one hand, and the value of being, on the other. The comparison of actors on a stage to the audience of a show expresses the same idea. Through this distinction, Schopenhauer registers his disapproval of those who treat as redemptive merely the act of beholding features of the world, while they suspend consideration of what it is to be that which one beholds. This singles out those philosophers who argue for optimism on the grounds of an aesthetic standard of metaphysical perfection, which arguably includes Leibniz. Even the defenders of Leibniz who argue that all other goods are maximised in confluence with the primary good of harmonious order classify this primary good itself as an 'aesthetic good' (Brown 1988: 572). After all, the initial connection to the moral and physical goods that are supposed to coincide with the metaphysical good of order is our awestruck contemplation of the order itself. By contrast, however, Schopenhauer is implicitly aligning his standard of perfection with an (as yet unspecified) non-aesthetic metaphysical good. Schopenhauer is unwilling to locate the value of the world in its orderly appearance alone.

Before going into any further detail about the way in which this general objection to aesthetic standards of metaphysical perfection relates to Schopenhauer's argument for the worst of all possible worlds, it might be asked why exactly the value of being should be of any greater concern to us than that of beholding. The reading advocated by Robert Wick in his essay on Schopenhauer's critique of aesthetic optimism adeptly summarises the moral point that Schopenhauer could well be making:

The Schopenhauerian criticism would be that the optimistic assurance of being a participant in the supreme moral task that natural beauty can inspire, or of simply feeling the magnificent presence of the infinite universe here and now, conflicts with the screaming horror and subjective reality of those who are in excruciating pain [...] Schopenhauer's remarks imply that such attitudes undermine a person's ability to empathize realistically with the suffering that exists, since the compensatory great good or alternatively, greater metaphysical consolation, that one projects, renders the suffering less terrible by absorbing it into a more positively-valued, cosmic whole.

Wicks 2009: 123

Optimism on aesthetic metaphysical grounds is obstructive to the correct moral attitude because the latter presupposes a consideration of the subjective being of that which is beheld, which is a consideration that is notably absent in the outlook of the former. Wicks' argument that Schopenhauer subscribes to this view is convincing and almost certainly correct. However, it may not be serviceable in the current context, where the objective is to retrieve from Schopenhauer a functional rebuttal of the kind of standard exemplified by Leibniz's argument for the best of all possible worlds. For Leibniz would presumably straightforwardly disagree that morality is centrally a matter of empathy (or related notions)—in fact, for Leibniz, 'our *virtue* and perfection consist' in an 'imitation of that which God imparts to the universe', insofar as we 'resemble God in miniature not only through our knowledge of order but also through the order which we can ourselves impart to things within our grasp'; and, in doing so, 'our *felicity* consists in the pleasure we take in it' (Leibniz 1969: 552). According to Leibniz, the goodness of a person consists, in short, in her intellectual and spiritual reflection of the orderliness of the universe. Hence, an optimally orderly world would still be morally best.

It might help Schopenhauer's case, however, to remind ourselves at this point of what we ultimately seek from the debate, which Leibniz claims to be able to offer us: reconciliation with the world. It seems that in this case a target source of value should indeed be that which is available to the players on the stage, and not merely to the audience. For in reality we are both, of course, and therefore we cannot be indifferent to the kinds of needs associated with either—if not on noble empathetic grounds as Wicks has suggested, then simply out of the original personal longing to be reconciled to the

world. In Schopenhauer's words, then, are we still able to 'applaud the work' in our capacity as subjective beings within it? Schopenhauer answers no, we cannot, not necessarily because to think otherwise is morally obstructive, but because when we encounter the world as beings subject to the world, rather than merely its beholders; when we consider the results of the order of the universe, as Schopenhauer emphasises in the passage above, as opposed to merely the order itself, we come away far less impressed by it. In fact, from the perspective of a being within it, increased knowledge about the world only confirms the world's fundamental awfulness; and not only does suffering become more apparent to the observer who views the scene in this way, but the observer herself is also subjected to a kind of suffering as a result, according to Schopenhauer. Immediately before the passage in which he criticises aesthetic optimism, he remarks that 'in this world the capacity to feel pain increases with knowledge, and therefore reaches its highest degree in man, a degree that is higher, the more intelligent the man' (*WWR* II 581).

Contrast this with Leibniz's assumption that pleasure and happiness (*et cetera*) are the result of contemplating the world's harmony and order, and we find that the two views are close to a pair of opposites. On the one hand, the perfect possible order of Leibniz's world is reflected in the observer, who, in an intellectual sense, becomes correspondingly well-ordered, and who derives from this her happiness, as well as her love of God and of others. On the other hand, Schopenhauer's world is full of torment for those within it, and it induces torment in those who properly reflect upon it in this regard. Leibniz's contemplative audience successfully derives value from the world by beholding its harmonious order, whereas Schopenhauer's players try and fail to derive value from what they see and experience.³⁹

One might interject that it is ultimately arbitrary which of these two ways one chooses to try to find the world good—Leibniz has his, successfully, and Schopenhauer his, unsuccessfully. If anything, on account of his success, one might favour Leibniz. Except, in most if not all other contexts, the marvellous order of a system is ultimately secondary to the subjective effects it has upon those whom it governs, that is, whenever it governs people and animals as well as mere objects. It would, for example, be unacceptable to an overall admiration for a brutal regime on the grounds of its perfect orderliness, even

³⁹ This is the clearest exception to the general rule, proposed in Chapter I, that Schopenhauer entertains the same value as the optimist, for the sake of argument, but denies that the world actually corresponds to it. Here Schopenhauer seems to be suggesting an appropriate way to look at the world, rather than an alternative description of the world itself.

in Leibniz's sense of order. Moreover, this is perhaps not only unacceptable, but truly impossible when one is at the receiving end of the brutality—which, according to Schopenhauer's worldview, would include all of us. Yet there is no reason why the goods that are supposedly confluent with the world's orderliness, which Leibniz takes to be fit to reconcile us to the world, would not for the same reasons be confluent with the orderliness of such a regime. After all, the same kind of intellectual beauty, pleasure, even love (or small-scale equivalents thereof) would presumably be available to the mere beholder of the orderly regime. Such a comparison is not without precedent, for Leibniz himself sees it, but rejects it: 'Our end is to banish from men the false ideas that represent God to them as an absolute prince employing despotic power, unfitted to be loved and unworthy of being loved' (Leibniz 1952: 127). The difference here, however, is that Leibniz's *solution* to this problem is comparable to the love of a certain kind of despotism.

Leibniz's best of all possible worlds may not be devoid of value for the audience, therefore, especially if they have a peculiar eye for order, but experience shows that it is so for the players. This, then, is the sense in which we might read Schopenhauer's claim that Leibniz's proofs are 'palpably sophistical'. They are founded upon an aesthetic standard of metaphysical perfection, which is a type of standard that is ultimately empty for those of us who are yearning for reconciliation as beings in the world. On the other hand—and here is the purpose of our detour—Schopenhauer's argument for the worst of all possible worlds employs an implicit metaphysical standard that is contrastingly non-aesthetic, which, I propose, is structural viability itself. Admittedly, Schopenhauer argues that the world displays a bare minimum of structural viability, but, in this, his implied concern is for the threat of non-existence, which faces every being in the world at every turn:

[I]f an animal loses a limb, or even only the complete use of it, it is in most cases bound to perish. Powerful as are the weapons of understanding and reason possessed by the human race, nine-tenths of mankind live in constant conflict with want, always balancing themselves with difficulty and effort on the brink of destruction. Thus throughout, for the continuance of the whole as well as that of every individual being, the conditions are sparingly and scantily given, and nothing beyond these. Therefore the individual life is a ceaseless struggle for existence itself, while at every step it is threatened with destruction. Just because this threat is so often carried out, provision had to be made, by the incredibly great surplus of seed, that the destruction of individuals should not

bring about that of races, since about these alone is nature seriously concerned.

Consequently, the world is as bad as it can be, if it is to exist at all.

WWR II 584

If one were to imagine the best of all possible worlds according to Schopenhauer's standard, it would be the one in which the security of one's own existence, as well as everyone else's, was metaphysically guaranteed. The best of all possible worlds for Schopenhauer is the most possible of all worlds, if possibility is taken to mean structural viability. This, presumably, would reconcile the world to its inhabitants—perhaps, without the constant threats of non-existence, the question of reconciliation would never even arise among them. Moreover, the value of this possible world would not depend upon beholding the world, but upon merely being in it.

Schopenhauer may have been hyperbolic in his claim that our world turns out to be the worst of all possible worlds when it is judged by this standard, for we have demonstrated that, even according to structural viability, there are worse possible worlds; however, the merit of his argument remains as an applied instance of a metaphysical standard of perfection that is non-aesthetic. The demand that Schopenhauer hereby puts upon the world should not be underestimated on account of his tendency toward hyperbole; as beings in the world, perhaps we really ought to care more about the security of our existence than about the order itself that determines this security, however finely balanced this order may be. It is likely that Schopenhauer's standard of structural viability is only one among many other possible non-aesthetic metaphysical standards of the world's perfection—the worldly happiness and justice that Voltaire's *Candide* consistently fails to encounter on his travels might be another—but it is a considerable one, and the argument for the worst of all possible worlds can therefore reclaim its force in this regard. The real triumph, perhaps, is overcoming the aesthetic standard in the first place, which gives Schopenhauer's alternative standard, along with those of other philosophers, the space to genuinely compete.

5. The remainder problem

Leibniz argues that there are matters about which he is entitled to remain silent. Once again, Pierre Bayle provides the reason why Leibniz feels that it is necessary to point this out:

[Bayle] confesses that the 'Dualists' [...] that is, the champions of two principles, would soon have been routed by *a priori* reasons, taken from the nature of God; but he thinks that they triumph in their turn when one comes to the *a posteriori* reasons, which are taken from the existence of evil.

[...] He treats the matter with abundant detail in his *Dictionary*, article 'Manicheans' [...], which we must examine a little [...]: "The surest and clearest ideas of order teach us," he says, "that a Being who exists through himself, who is necessary, who is eternal, must be single, infinite, all powerful, and endowed with all kinds of perfections." This argument deserves to have been developed more. "Now it is necessary to see," he goes on, "if the phenomena of nature can be conveniently explained by the hypothesis of one single principle." I have explained it sufficiently by showing that there are cases where some disorder in the part is necessary for producing the greatest order in the whole. But it appears that M. Bayle asks a little too much: he wishes for a detailed exposition of how evil is connected with the best possible scheme for the universe. That would be a complete examination of phenomena: but I do not undertake to give it; nor am I bound to do so, for there is no obligation to do that which is impossible for us in our existing state. It is sufficient for me to point out there is nothing to prevent the connection of a certain evil with what is best on the whole. This incomplete explanation, leaving something to be discovered in the life to come, is sufficient for answering the objections, though not for a comprehension of the matter.

Leibniz 1952: 214

There are clear doctrinal reasons why Leibniz refuses to be pushed in the direction suggested by Bayle, that is, the direction of whether what can be observed *a posteriori* sits comfortably with his *a priori* rational theology. Leibniz declines to answer *how* evil is connected with the best of all possible worlds, because such knowledge is beyond the ken of any finite being, but he can be confident *that* it is, in virtue of the logical consequences of the nature of God, which goes unchallenged. Indeed it is God alone who could answer

the question of how exactly the two are connected—perhaps, Leibniz suggests, we are enabled to do the same when our ‘existing state’ is finally exchanged for ‘the life to come’ in God’s kingdom.

As in previous cases, it can be said with confidence that Schopenhauer would side with Bayle on this matter. His own expectations of what an overarching thesis about the world ought to achieve are similar to those of Bayle, and he is likewise suspicious of such theses when they cannot be borne out by experience of the world:

If we find a document the script of which is unknown, we continue trying to interpret it until we hit upon a hypothesis as to the meaning of the letters by which they form intelligible words and connected sentences. Then there remains no doubt as to the correctness of the deciphering, since it is not possible for the agreement and consistency, in which all the signs of that writing are placed by this explanation, to be merely accidental. Similarly, the deciphering of the world must be completely confirmed from itself. It must spread a uniform light over all the phenomena of the world, and bring even the most heterogeneous into agreement, so that the contradiction may be removed even between those that contrast the most. This confirmation from itself is the characteristic stamp of its genuineness; for every false deciphering, even though it suits some phenomena, will all the more glaringly contradict the remainder. Thus, for example, the optimism of Leibniz conflicts with the obvious misery of existence [...]

WWR II 184

This last image of the remainder recurs in Schopenhauer’s discussions of optimism. Elsewhere, and specifically in the context of the problem of evil, he remarks:

[I]he contradiction between the goodness of God and the misery of the world [...] is the inexhaustible theme of a controversy, lasting nearly a hundred years, between the Cartesians, Malebranche, Leibniz, Bayle, Clarke, Arnauld, and many others. The only dogma fixed for the disputants is the existence of God with his attributes, and they all incessantly turn in a circle, since they try to bring these things into harmony, in other words, to solve an arithmetical sum which

never comes right, but the remainder of which appears now in one place, now in another, after it has been concealed elsewhere. But it does not occur to anyone that the source of the dilemma is to be looked for in the fundamental assumption, although it palpably obtrudes itself. Bayle alone shows that he notices this.

WWR I 406n.; see also PP I 8

The remainder is figuratively used in its mathematical sense here, as opposed to meaning simply what remains, which is how it is found in the previous quotation. However, the same function is served: that something is left unaccounted for when metaphysics works outwards from *a priori* first principles, and simply expects—or hopes—that experience will conform to it.

Schopenhauer believes with Bayle that any metaphysics—particularly if it proposes to offer some variety of metaphysical comfort—must be able to defend itself *a posteriori* as well as *a priori*. In other words, a necessary condition of even considering a defense of apparent evil, apart from the condition that its arguments and principles can be assembled in a rationally coherent manner, is that it attempts to make concrete sense of the evidence brought against it. Insofar as Leibniz does propose underlying principles which unite the various phenomena of the world, as Schopenhauer requests, he meets the first condition. However, it is obvious that Leibniz falls short of the second. In fact, by his own admission, he does not aspire to go beyond the first, upon which he concentrates the sum total of his efforts. Leibniz's argument does not even simply ignore the second condition, but actively resists meeting it. That evil *could* be connected to the best of all possible world in the way that Leibniz suggests can be confirmed *a priori* from first principles about God. However, neither that, nor how evil *is* thus connected with the best of all possible worlds can be confirmed *a posteriori*. Schopenhauer, however, takes exception to this silence that Leibniz's view ultimately tends towards, when confronted with actual instances of evil and suffering. He believes that certain instances contradict the thesis that this is the best of all possible worlds, and that the former should be taken seriously, as opposed to cleaving to a dubiously rationalistic faith in the latter. In short, the remainder must be addressed.

The ingeniousness, perhaps even the cunning, of Schopenhauer's point, however, is that his own philosophy, founded ultimately upon pessimistic principles, will not suffer from the occurrence of what can only appear as a remainder for Leibniz's philosophy and others like it. For, the evident sufferings and evils of the world will instead be the direct

fulfilment of these pessimistic principles. Therefore, the theoretical advantage of pessimism in general, in the context of the problem of evil, is that the undeniability of evil will never force the pessimist to remain agnostic, or plead ignorant, as to how the proposed principles that govern and unite the world actually relate to the world's phenomena:

[A]fter all of them [the optimists] have completed their demonstrations, and have sung their song of the best world, there finally arrives behind the system [...] the question of the origin of evil [...] In contrast, if the existence of evil is already woven together with that of the world in the foundation of a system, then it need not fear this spectre.

WN 444

If anything, then, the resolve of the pessimistic philosopher should be strengthened by the problem of evil. And, as the previous chapter demonstrated, Schopenhauer offers a way of accounting for the occurrence of happiness and pleasure within the terms of his pessimistic philosophy, which is the negative conception of happiness. There is therefore no inverse equivalent of the remainder problem of Leibniz's optimism to be found in Schopenhauer's pessimism. Of course, this is just to say that pessimism has a response to the problem of evil ready-to-hand, so to speak, and not that only pessimism can issue a response. It is not that optimism *per se* actively evades *a posteriori* scrutiny, rather only certain kinds of optimism.⁴⁰ Furthermore, a ready-to-hand response is not even unique to thoroughgoing pessimism: Bayle's point was that this could easily be boasted of Manichean dualism. Nevertheless, over those particular optimisms that do actively evade the *a posteriori*, the greatest among them being advocated by Leibniz, pessimism maintains a constant advantage. Certainly, Schopenhauer thought as much of his own philosophy:

[I]here is the error, common to [...] all [philosophers] who have ever lived, of placing our fundamental nature in knowledge instead of in the will [...] These, then, were the fundamental errors against which nature and the reality of things protested at every step and to save which the *spiritus animales*, the materiality of animals, the occasional cause, the seeing of all things in God, pre-established

⁴⁰ See Chapter IV for Rousseau's immanent and *a posteriori*-amenable variety of optimism.

harmony, monads, optimism, and all the rest of it, had then to be invented. With me, on the other hand, where things are tackled at the right end, everything fits in automatically, each thing appears in its proper light, no fictions are required, and *simplex sigillum veri* ['Simplicity is the stamp of truth'].

PP I 76

For everyone else, the remainder waits disconcertingly in the background. One might enquire at this point, however, how the request that *a priori* metaphysics be consonant with *a posteriori* experience is justified in the first place. Leibniz certainly feels free to deny it by reference to his doctrinal commitments, but on what grounds precisely can Leibniz's justification for the right to remain silent be overruled? Some of the debates that have occurred in twentieth century philosophy of religion will be helpful here. For, the attempt has been made (or remade, as the case may be) by later philosophers to shift the problem of evil from a merely 'aporetic' formulation, where ways are devised in which to make the relevant divine attributes logically compossible with the existence of evil, to an 'evidentialist' formulation, where the question is asked as to whether our answers to the problem of evil cohere with our experience of the world.⁴¹ One would be right, I will now argue, to see Leibniz's formulation as representative of the aporetic paradigm and Schopenhauer as an early precursor to the evidentialist response.

A pioneer of the evidentialist formulation of the problem of evil is William Rowe. The first premise of the problem of evil, he states, can be formulated thus: 'There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse' (Rowe 1992a: 127). Successful theodicians have traded on the fact that this first premise cannot be proven with complete certainty, which therefore dissolves the problem. For in order to verify the truth of this claim, one would seemingly have to match the omniscience of the being that it mentions, hence Leibniz's appeal to our merely finite knowledge in his evasion of Bayle's *a posteriori* challenge. Rowe, however, argues that the premise can nevertheless be 'rationally supported', which implies a different epistemic standard from complete certainty. As long as an overwhelming reason which arises from the appearance of the world can be adduced for believing something, it is rationally supported, without necessarily being certain. For example, the belief that a general election

⁴¹ See Adams & Adams (1992: 2-3).

will take place in Britain in May 2015 is rationally supported, and the reason one might give is that the Fixed-term Parliamentary Act of 2011 mandates it. Yet one cannot be certain about this belief, at least not until May 2015 arrives, because a collapse of government could bring the election forward, as well as if the House of Commons votes in favour of it with a two-thirds majority. Rowe argues that there is no reason why the same epistemic standard of rational support that applies here—and, as it happens, in most other contexts—should not apply when considering the problem of evil. This is the evidential formulation of the problem of evil in essence, and once it is adopted in this form, the force of the problem becomes obvious, Rowe believes:

In the light of our experience and knowledge of the variety and scale of human and animal suffering in our world, the idea that none of this suffering could have been prevented by an omnipotent being without thereby losing a greater good or permitting an evil at least as bad seems an extraordinarily absurd idea, quite beyond our belief.

Rowe 1992a: 131

That is, the belief that there really is a greater good, rather than that a greater good always remains a logical possibility, has no rational support among the observable scene of suffering. If suffering appears in experience as unredeemed, then we have reason to conclude that it really is unredeemed. There is, therefore, a resemblance to Schopenhauer's view that optimistic theodicies, such as Leibniz's argument for the best of all possible worlds, are just too incongruent with experience to credit. Only if a wildly unachievable standard of knowledge is imposed—that of complete certainty—could the reality of vain suffering be sceptically denied; and, moreover, the argument is then won by this imposition alone. If the realm of theology insists on the standard of complete certainty, and in doing so diminishes the relevance of experience, which never offers such certainty, then theology must do as Schopenhauer advises and finally cut its ties with philosophy (*PP* I 187-90). Similarly, Rowe develops a position which he calls 'friendly atheism', which is part olive-branch, part ultimatum. His own atheism, he states, is based upon the rational support that can be given to a belief in the unmitigated nature of much suffering, a belief which compromises belief in God. However, he accepts that theists may adduce their own rational support in favour of their beliefs, based upon the appearance of the world, though

in doing so these theists must also submit to rational support as the correct standard of knowledge (Rowe 1992a: 136).

There is another condition to be put upon the evidential formulation of the problem of evil, one which, again, there is evidence to suggest that Schopenhauer would agree with. Stephen Wykstra argues against Rowe that we may not be in a position to rationally support the claim that there exists suffering in the world that God could prevent. For Rowe's argument is that the claim can gain rational support from the way that the world appears, but Wykstra counters that there are times when claims about the way in which something appears are uninformative. Take, for example, a person with a cold that has removed her sense of smell. If she sniffs a bottle of milk and claims that it does not appear to have gone sour, we still have no reason to believe that the milk has not gone sour; the milk will never appear to have gone sour to her while she is deprived of the relevant sense, and so she is not a qualified judge (Wykstra 1992: 152). What she lacks is what Wykstra calls the 'condition of reasonable epistemic access' or 'CORNEA', for short. The condition is as follows:

On the basis of cognized situation *s*, human *H* is entitled to claim 'It appears that *p*' only if it is reasonable for *H* to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if *p* were not the case, *s* would likely be different than it is in some way discernible by her.

Wykstra 1992: 152

CORNEA basically states that the knower must be in a position to be able to tell the difference between states of affairs when there really is a difference. The problem of evil, Wykstra argues, does not satisfy CORNEA: there is no reason to assume that if there is an overall state of affairs that defeats the challenge of evil, then the world would appear as if there is an overall state of affairs that defeats the challenge of evil. Many evils will appear to be meaningless and preventable, but this is not to say that they *are* meaningless and preventable. The evidential formulation of the problem, which depends upon appearances as a guide, is therefore undermined.

Rowe's response to Wykstra is to applaud the criterion of CORNEA. However, he argues, CORNEA not only does obtain, but *must* obtain in the problem of evil:

[T]he mere assumption that O⁴² exists gives us no reason whatever to suppose *either* that the greater goods in virtue of which he permits most sufferings are goods that come into existence far in the future of the sufferings we are aware of, *or* that once they do obtain we continue to be ignorant of them and their relation to the sufferings.

Rowe 1992b: 164-5

In other words, to not provide CORNEA would entail a world that is justified but that cannot appear as justified to anyone. This itself, Rowe points out, would be a kind of evil incompatible with God. Denying that CORNEA obtains, therefore, is not an advisable route for the theist. And while it does obtain (whether on theistic grounds or not), we are, once again, permitted to draw conclusions about the way that the world really is from our experience of the appearance of the world.

Schopenhauer certainly subscribes to the fundamental stipulation made by CORNEA, that if the world really is relevantly different to how it appears, then we would be capable of noticing this difference:

[L]ife is essentially a condition of want, distress, and often misery, where everyone has to fight and struggle for his existence and therefore cannot always put on a pleasant face. If, on the contrary, man were that which all optimistic religions and philosophies would like to make him, namely the work or even the incarnation of a God, in fact a being that in every sense ought to be and to be as he is, what a totally different effect would inevitably be produced by the first sight, the closer acquaintance, and the continued intercourse with every human being from that which is now produced!

PP II 305

If the world were as the optimist says it is, then it would appear differently; the people in the world would appear differently, Schopenhauer believes. But perhaps it is more pertinent to say conversely that, because the world appears as it does, the optimist is without license to say that it is actually different. For, recall Schopenhauer's stipulation

⁴² 'O' is Rowe's shorthand for the omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent God.

upon the task of philosophy that ‘the deciphering of the world must be completely confirmed from [the world] itself’ (*WWR* II 184), in just the same way that one might go about deciphering the script of a foreign text. This is in fact a perfect condensation of the evidentialist position on the problem of evil. To the evidentialist, the devout aporetic theodist, who insists on logical grounds that things are not what they seem, puts herself in the absurd position of a cryptographer who is presented with a text in an initially mysterious language, and although, with some reflection and experimentation, she has developed a way in which to make perfect sense of it all, she maintains, in spite of herself and all appearances, that there is still a different way—which, after all, is always a logical possibility—and she maintains this only in order to receive, or perhaps just so as not to conclusively rule out, a message that she finds more suitable. The appeal of the content eventually derived from the text, rather than the appropriateness of the method by which it is derived, has dubiously been given first priority. Leibniz, when he commits himself to silence over the matter of how evils in the world are redeemed, commits himself to an equivalently absurd approach.

With the assistance of some contemporary terminology, then, it can be seen how Schopenhauer might ground his disapproval of Leibniz’s attempt to resist *a posteriori* evidence, thereby forcing Leibniz to confront the remainder that his optimistic philosophy leaves behind. There is passage in *The World as Will and Representation*, however, in which Schopenhauer invokes the image of the remainder for a third time, and it forces us to reconsider what exactly the remainder represents for Schopenhauer:

If the world were not something that, *practically* expressed, ought not to be, it would also not be *theoretically* a problem. On the contrary, its existence would require either no explanation at all, since it would be so self-evident that astonishment at it and enquiry about it could not arise in any mind; or its purpose would present itself unmistakably. But instead of this it is indeed an insoluble problem, since even the most perfect philosophy will always contain an unexplained element, like an insoluble precipitate or the remainder of a quantity that is always left behind by the irrational proportion of two quantities.

WWR II 579

The last sentence is crucial. It raises the question of how Schopenhauer could be so apparently critical of Leibniz for having left behind a remainder. Until now, the remainder

seemed to represent a lump of evidence, composed of concrete instances of unredeemed suffering and evil, for which Leibniz, among other optimists, could not provide an account. But now we see that the remainder is always left behind, no matter how perfect the philosophy. The passage continues:

Therefore, if anyone ventures to raise the question why there is not nothing rather than this world, when the world cannot be justified from itself; no ground, no final cause of its existence can be found in itself; it cannot be demonstrated that it exists for its own sake, in other words, for its own advantage. In pursuance of my teaching, this can, of course, be explained by the fact that the principle of the world's existence is expressly a groundless one, namely a blind will-to-live, which, as *thing-in-itself*, cannot be subject to the principle of sufficient reason or ground; for this principle is merely the form of phenomena, and through it alone every why is justified. But this is also in keeping with the nature and constitution of the world, for only a blind, not a seeing, will could put itself in the position in which we find ourselves.

WWR II 579

Schopenhauer here indicates a helpful and inventive way in which his own philosophy does not suffer from the problem of the remainder. The problem is resolved by offering the remainder a place within his philosophy, rather than trying to suppress it. In fact, Schopenhauer effectively gives the remainder a name: the will-to-life. Schopenhauer's philosophy *is* that the world is not rationally and intelligently constructed, by virtue of its foundation upon the central insight of the blind impulse of the will-to-life. Moreover, this fact, he points out, is borne out by our experience of the world. We experience the world not as if it were all rationally planned for the best, but as if it were a haphazardly convened chaos, with just about enough order to sustain its existence at all. The irrational appearance of the world is not to be put down to our own intellectual or cognitive shortcomings, as if its apparent irrationality would be dissolved if only we knew better, as Leibniz has argued, but rather to the fact that fundamental reality is itself inherently non-rational. In good evidentialist conscience, the appearance is an accurate guide to the reality. Schopenhauer follows up by saying: "Therefore, the explanation of the world from the *νοῦς* of Anaxagoras, in other words, from a will guided by *knowledge*, necessarily demands for its

extenuation optimism, which is then set up and maintained in spite of the loudly crying evidence of a whole world full of misery' (*WWR* II 579). The optimistically biased assumption that rational sense can be made out of the appearance of the world should therefore be dropped, and with this all rationalistic apologetics for that appearance.

What does this say about the remainder in the context of Leibniz's philosophy? Obviously, Leibniz's problem cannot be the mere fact that there is a remainder. It must lie in how Leibniz's philosophy relates to the remainder. If we take a second look at the two other passages in which Schopenhauer speaks of the remainder (quoted earlier), it is encouraging that Schopenhauer never actually denies that the remainder should be present, which might have been our first impression. He only says that the particular philosophies that he names (except for Bayle's, which he exonerates) 'glaringly contradict' the remainder, or try in vain to hide and conceal it. In light of the admission that the remainder cannot be removed, then, Schopenhauer's criticism must be directed at the elaborately embarrassed way in which Leibniz *et al* handle the remainder. They do so because they cleave to the assumption for which Schopenhauer cites Anaxagoras as the paradigm: that the world has been rationally selected one way or another. For the reasons outlined above, Schopenhauer would have preferred if Leibniz had only bitten the bullet and given in to the evidence that life presents, which favours blindness and not intelligence. Otherwise, the debate is inherently interminable—just as it has so far proven to be—for it attempts to stifle the remainder, though the remainder will never completely slip from view.

6. Conclusion

The critics of Leibniz's theodicy that came before Schopenhauer were united in drawing attention to our experience of the world, and to the perils that pervade it. Seemingly, however, Leibniz had already sidestepped these issues by advocating the best possible ratio between the simplicity of natural laws, on the one hand, and the variety of natural phenomena, on the other, as the standard of metaphysical perfection. If the sufferings of the world are not minimised as this ratio is maximised, then they are at least of secondary importance when it comes to judging the world; and if things seem out of balance, this is only because of the restrictions of a finite viewpoint (really, things are different).

Schopenhauer assists the earlier critics of Leibniz, and earns them as his legitimate predecessors, by directly attacking both the standard of metaphysical perfection advocated

by Leibniz and the inherent resistance Leibniz's theodicy has to *a posteriori* arguments. The standard of perfection, it has been shown, is faulty to the extent that harmonious order, which is ultimately an aesthetic good, is itself secondary in importance to goods that might reconcile us to the world as beings who are subject to the results of that order, rather than as mere beholders who somewhat implausibly view the order of the world as if from the outside. Structural viability—the implied standard on display in Schopenhauer's argument for the worst of all possible worlds—would be a good candidate for one such non-aesthetic alternative measure of metaphysical perfection.

With regards to Leibniz's denial of the ultimate relevance of *a posteriori* arguments, originally stated in response to Pierre Bayle, Schopenhauer's argument is that philosophy's answers should be confirmed from the world itself, and therefore that if the world really were as Leibniz or other optimists claim, then the difference would be apparent to some degree or other. Instead, the appearance of the world points us towards pessimistic principles, which are undoubtedly confirmed by the pervasive suffering that motivates the problem of evil, and to the overall conclusion that the arrangement of the world is not the product of rational selection, but of a non-rational force which we know all too well.

Chapter IV: Against Rousseau's Optimism—Original Goodness and Original Sin

1. Introduction

There are good reasons for examining in detail Schopenhauer's views on Rousseau's optimism, in spite of the fact they are not expressed in much detail by Schopenhauer himself. Rousseau is not vulnerable to the ways in which Schopenhauer would typically challenge the optimist. Indeed, part of Schopenhauer's own unshakeable admiration for Rousseau is that he 'drew his wisdom not from books but from life, and intended his doctrine not for the professorial chair but for humanity' (*BM* 183), the converse of which is a neat distillation of the rationalistic dissimulation that Schopenhauer discerns in Leibniz, among other optimists.⁴³ Unlike Schopenhauer's other opposition, Rousseau does not prevaricate; in fact, he makes a point of not doing so, which makes him a harder target, and thus a more important one. And yet, in spite of every good reason for doing so, investigating an issue about which Schopenhauer says very little directly is naturally difficult. The only viable approach, it seems, is an indirect one. For, Schopenhauer spends a far greater amount of time and effort constructing a positive philosophical case for the contrary doctrine, original sin. It is from this, Schopenhauer's well developed positive account, that it is possible to determine the basis of his far less developed negative argument against original goodness.

In the following I will present Rousseau's account of original goodness, the target of Schopenhauer's criticism (section 2). As with Leibniz before, I will do so with the support of some of Rousseau's sympathetic readers. After briefly summarising what similarities Schopenhauer shares with Rousseau in spite of this account, I will give my interpretation of Schopenhauer's contrary doctrine (section 3). Here, I will demonstrate how Schopenhauer's objections to the assumption of original goodness can be read from his philosophical account of original sin.

⁴³ See Chapter III.

2. Original goodness and the origins of evil

Rousseau's attempts to make sense of evil and suffering stand out from all the others that Schopenhauer criticises. Yet, the single explicit comment Schopenhauer's makes about Rousseau's optimism is as short as it is damning:

Indeed, the fundamental characteristic and *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* [first false step] of Rousseau's whole philosophy is that he puts in place of the Christian doctrine of original sin and of the original depravity of the human race an original goodness and unlimited perfectibility thereof, which had been led astray merely by civilization and its consequences; and on this he establishes his optimism and humanism.

WWR II 585

Its brevity is perhaps a sign of reluctance, for Schopenhauer otherwise admires Rousseau: 'Rousseau [...] was undoubtedly the greatest moralist of modern times [...] He is the enemy of all prejudice, the pupil of nature; he alone was endowed by nature with the gift of being able to moralize without being tedious, for he hit upon the truth and touched the human heart' (*BM* 183; see also *WN* 337). Rarely is praise of this kind extended by Schopenhauer to someone whom he has nevertheless categorised as an optimist; the other notable exception is Spinoza.⁴⁴ But Schopenhauer is duty-bound to pull Rousseau up for seriously countenancing the original goodness of humankind. Schopenhauer treats 'Pelagianism', defined so broadly as to include even the *implicit* denial of original sin, as the telltale sign of optimism, as well as one of its worst excesses. In the context of philosophy, Schopenhauer identifies Pelagianism in Spinozism, Leibniz-Wolffianism, and Hegelianism; in religion, he identifies it in Paganism, Islam, Judaism, and, of course, in certain wings of Christianity, where Pelagianism proper belongs (*WWR* 604-5, 623; *PP* II 387-93). Schopenhauer was correct to have also detected an element of Pelagianism in Rousseau's philosophy. In a letter of 1762 to Archbishop Beaumont, Rousseau discloses that the natural goodness of human beings is the 'fundamental principle of all morals' and the basis

⁴⁴ Of Spinoza: 'Hence for him the world with everything in it is wholly excellent and as it ought to be [...] In short, it is optimism [...] In spite of all this, Spinoza remains a very great man' (*WWR* II 644-45). Schopenhauer never derides Kant as an optimist, or even classifies him as one; however, as will become clear in this chapter, Kant concurs with the basis of Rousseau's optimism.

for 'all my writings' (quoted in Cohen 1997: 102n.4). That Rousseau's first step is as Schopenhauer describes is therefore beyond contention; the question will be whether it is his first *false* step, and how so.

In essence, Rousseau's claim is that the evidently sorry state of the world can be explained without the need to attribute inherent and irremovable flaws to human beings. Or, negatively stated, it is that one cannot automatically infer any natural vices from the vicious state of affairs in which human beings can admittedly be found. It is at least possible, Rousseau believes, if not probable, that there is an alternative story to be told.⁴⁵ 'That men are actually wicked,' Rousseau says, 'a sad and continual experience of them proves beyond doubt: but, all the same I think I have shown that man is naturally good' (Rousseau 1993: 118). The threat that this poses to Schopenhauer's position is that, if successful, it would severely weaken the *a posteriori* element of his argument against optimism.⁴⁶ Contrary to the Schopenhauer's evidentialism, the world as it currently appears would not constitute sufficient evidence to justify the belief that the world is intrinsically bad—and not for rationalistic-transcendent reasons, but for the simple reason that adducing evidence to the contrary remains a possibility. Schopenhauer is confident of the validity of the inference that Rousseau challenges; however, in truth, the nature of the world, whether on the whole it is good or it is bad, must be ascertained by means other than its present appearance.

Rousseau elaborates this position in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. The observable vices of human beings, he argues, may be conceived as historically corrupted manifestations of natural qualities which, in themselves, are at least morally neutral, if they are not morally positive. In other words, humankind was originally good. For example, '*amour-propre*' is the malformed excrescence of '*amour-soi*'. Each of these terms roughly means self-love, but the former is the proud kind, characterised primarily by an interest in gaining the high regard of others—whether or not such regard is grounded in reality—whereas the latter is honest, non-aggressive self-preservation:

Amour-propre must not be confused with love of self [*amour-soi*]: for they differ both in themselves and in their effects. Love of self is a natural feeling which leads every animal to its own preservation, and which, guided in man by reason

⁴⁵ The following reading of Rousseau is largely influenced by Cohen (1997) and Neiman (1997 and 2002), but also by Starobinski (1988).

⁴⁶ See Chapter III.

and modified by compassion, creates humanity and virtue. *Amour-propre* is a purely relative and factitious feeling, which arises in the state of society, leads each individual to make more of himself than any other, causes all the mutual damage men inflict on one another, and is the real source of the “sense of honour”.

Rousseau 1993: 73n.

Rousseau also numbers compassion among the natural dispositions of humankind. In fact, this is part of Schopenhauer's reason for holding Rousseau's moral philosophy in such high esteem. Schopenhauer, too, believes that compassion is a natural disposition—albeit an inexplicable one which is proportionally variable from person to person. Furthermore, Schopenhauer similarly claims that egoism, the impulse to self-preservation, is both innate and ultimately morally neutral. ‘[M]y foundation is supported by the authority of J.-J. Rousseau’, Schopenhauer says of his own moral philosophy (*BM* 183). Rousseau and Schopenhauer are also in agreement that the innate compassionate ability of human beings is fatally overlooked by the Hobbesian account of the state of nature (see *BM* 183-4). Compassion, Rousseau counters, has ‘been bestowed upon mankind to moderate, on certain occasions, the impetuosity of *amour-propre*’ (Rousseau 1993: 73).

However, Rousseau argues, non-natural distinctions and divisions are established between human beings once they enter into society amongst themselves, most notably hierarchical distinctions of class. It is a seemingly inevitable moment in all human histories. Then, and only then, the natural course of compassion is gradually forced towards a complete halt. Moral innocence contracts as social civilisation expands. ‘It is plain’, Rousseau therefore says, ‘that [compassionate] identification must have been much more perfect in a state of nature than it is in a state of reason’ (Rousseau 1993: 73). Rousseau also adds, with a large dose of irony, that philosophical thought especially, through its conceptual analyses and abstractions, closes our hearts and minds to the suffering of others (Rousseau 1986: 104; 1992: 75).

The *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* gives a rough outline of the history of civilisation in order to make its case. According to Rousseau's history, humankind begins to deviate from the state of nature with the appearance of basic claims to property, the use of tools and weapons, and the tricks and cunning employed in hunting. It proceeds through the origins of the family unit, the development of agriculture, the art of working metals, and the shift from revenge to punishment handed down by law. Finally this history leads us

to the complex systems of civil distribution, the outward parade of wealth and status, and the oppression of one social stratum by another. In this final stage, where the divisions between human beings have been fully perfected, greed, pride and callousness reign. Rousseau modestly stresses that his history, as well as the state of nature from which it proceeds, is merely hypothetical: 'it is by no means a light undertaking [...] to form a true idea of a state which no longer exists, perhaps never did exist, and probably never will exist [...] Let not my readers therefore imagine that I flatter myself with having seen what appears to me so difficult to discover' (Rousseau 1993: 44). This causes no problems for Rousseau so long as his aim is only to argue that vice is compatible in principle with a bedrock of morally neutral human nature. He is not at all confident about the specifics of this history, but neither does he resist empirical evidence out of some convenient humility before God's divine plan. If anything, he is finally clearing the ground for an empirically informed optimism, for which he provides an initially stark historical-anthropological form.

The question is, what relevance does this have to Rousseau's alleged optimism?⁴⁷ After all, the actual culminating circumstances of Rousseau's hypothetical history are still very unhappy. But the optimistic note in this history is that, by design, it leaves room for the rectification of our current, intolerable situation. If human beings managed to get themselves into their mess—through no other forces than those brought about by a series of actions which they chose to perform—then it should be possible for them to get themselves out of it too. This means a return to original goodness, perhaps even an advance upon it, for if there are any permissible spoils of civilisation, then they might help original goodness to manifest itself in greater and unknown ways. In this spirit, Rousseau remarks in his 'Preface to *Narcissus*': 'I lay bear [evil's] causes and, above all, by showing that all these vices belong not so much to man, as to man badly governed, I point out something that is both most consoling and most useful' (Rousseau 1986: 106).

Take, for example, the case of the tragedy of the Lisbon earthquake, over which Rousseau and Voltaire famously clashed. One can trace back some of the devastation to human mistakes, which were freely made:

⁴⁷ Starobinski (1988: 15) makes the point that Rousseau is not unambiguously optimistic, given comments such as: 'I therefore say that a people's morals are like a man's honor; they are a treasure to be preserved but which, once lost, cannot be recovered' (Rousseau 1986: 107-8). It is sufficient for our purposes that Rousseau at least provides a possible legitimate foundation for optimism, or that his thought can be so constructed as to pose a threat to certain unambiguous pessimists.

Without departing from your subject of Lisbon, admit, for example that nature did not construct twenty thousand houses of six to seven stories there, and that if the inhabitants of this great city had been more equally spread out and more lightly lodged, the damage would have been much less, and perhaps of no account.

Rousseau 2001: 212⁴⁸

A comment such as this could be viewed as cold and indifferent, but all the same it emphasises that the evil of a natural disaster is not inevitable—which, once realised, might be comforting in its own way. Destruction on the scale of the Lisbon earthquake would not have been possible had the population not been so concentrated and so poorly located, which is characteristic of the reckless progress of civilisation. Gaining knowledge of this does not undo the destruction, of course, but it does not leave us stranded and at the mercy of nature either. In fact, in this way, a useful connection might be established between moral evil and natural evil: when we act incorrectly, whether individually or collectively, there are bad consequences, which ought to warn us off acting in such a way again. Admittedly, these bad consequences are not always immediately apparent, but so long as the appropriate lessons are learned, even if only eventually, then our sufferings could function as an effective natural corrective to our sins.⁴⁹

Rousseau's historical approach therefore manages to explain evil, without denying it, whilst also instructing against it. Susan Neiman puts the point in this way:

A historical explanation offers the right sort of comprehensibility. If the introduction of evil was necessary, we face a conflict between theoretical and practical reason that seems intolerable. If it was simply accidental, we must conclude that the world, at a crucial point, makes no sense. The introduction of history, by contrast, does justice to all of reason's interests. We need not ignore practical reason's demand to change the world, nor theoretical reason's need to interpret it.

Neiman 1997: 148

⁴⁸ From Rousseau's notorious letter of 1756 to Voltaire. Naturally, Schopenhauer took Voltaire's side of the debate (*WWR* II 584-5).

⁴⁹ This line of argument is more characteristic of the educational theory put forward by Rousseau in *Emile*, rather than the position he maintains in the second *Discourse*. See Neiman (2002: 53-7).

This makes the manner in which Rousseau appealed to Kant very obvious, which is Neiman's intention. Unlike in Leibniz, no transcendent allusions are necessary in Rousseau's account. It is, therefore, an example of the 'authentic' form of theodicy, not the 'doctrinal' form, to use Kant's terms;⁵⁰ a first step towards fulfilling Kant's hope for an immanent theoretical interpretation of the origins of evil. Historically speaking, in fact, Rousseau's work seems to have been the very motivation for this hope. Moreover, the evil of the world, according to Rousseau's interpretation, is amenable to practical solutions: evils can be resolved; different kinds of evils can even be related to one another in such a way as to make them cooperatively intelligible. The elegant consonance of theoretical and practical reason in this fashion is an enormous gift to Kant.

We have, then, the value of Rousseau's account clearly before us. The threat posed by Schopenhauer's variety of philosophical pessimism still looms, but only in the background; for, prior to being swiftly bypassed, it has been inadvertently summarised by Neiman. 'If the introduction of evil was necessary,' she explains, 'we face a conflict between theoretical and practical reason that seems intolerable'. In Schopenhauer's philosophy, it has been seen, the evidence that motivates the problem of evil is accepted as part of the very fabric of the world.⁵¹ It is not merely a historical occurrence, and it is certainly not an accidental one. Of course, suffering *appears* as if it were accidental: 'It is true that each separate piece of misfortune seems to be an exception, but misfortune in general is the rule' (*PP* II 290). But here Schopenhauer is only piling woe upon woe: suffering is necessary, and therefore permanent, yet it appears accidental, and is therefore never fully understood—thus combining the worst of both worlds where Rousseau's explanation combines the best. Hence, the world is conceived by Schopenhauer in such a way as to never be amenable to a change that might bring about an end to evil and suffering in general, nor compensate for them. Responsive 'change' of any kind comes in the form of a radically ascetic escape. This is hardly a *resolution* to the evils of the world—as is indicated by the very meaning of the word escape—and it is incumbent only upon lone and rare individuals, once they have realised this hopelessness for themselves.⁵² What

⁵⁰ In his 1791 essay 'On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy' (Kant 1996: 31). The ending of this essay is very reminiscent of Rousseau, making reference as it does to the moral innocence of small, remote and unspoiled human societies.

⁵¹ See Chapter III.

⁵² See Chapter VI for more details.

Rousseau wrote to Voltaire therefore also applies to Schopenhauer: 'it seems you expect to placate me a good deal by proving to me that everything is bad' (Rousseau 2001: 211).

Hence, a simple comparison of Schopenhauer and Rousseau in this regard is sufficient to make a case against Schopenhauer. In contrast to Schopenhauer, Rousseau offers an account in which human suffering does not enter the world at any fundamental and irremovable level, and therefore offers the chance of worldly redemption. Yet, insofar as his reasoning is not in any way resistant to *a posteriori* evidence, but quite the opposite, Rousseau also has a more approvable theoretical approach than Leibniz—our last optimistic custodian of the problem of evil—or at least one which Schopenhauer himself has granted legitimacy. *Prima facie*, the choice between Rousseau's view and Schopenhauer's is not too difficult, given what is gained by seeing the world in the way that Rousseau suggests, and how little one's intellectual integrity is compromised by doing so. But this is all only so long as the assumption of original goodness, upon which Rousseau's whole history of civilisation is founded, can also be granted legitimacy. We know that for Schopenhauer it cannot, but we do not understand why as yet.

3. Original sin

Apart from the one abrupt remark, which has been noted, Schopenhauer does not tackle Rousseau's assumption of original goodness head-on. Instead, his reply can be found in his argument for the contrary doctrine, original sin—or more accurately, the philosophical counterpart of this doctrine. In order to locate the precise point at which Rousseau and Schopenhauer are in disagreement here, that is, where the significance of their dispute over the original worth of humankind truly lies, it is worth emphasising first the ways in which the two philosophers are still closely allied.

First, both philosophers put a premium on intellectual honesty, if not honesty in general. Correspondingly, dishonesty is regarded by both to be a principal vice of human beings. As previously noted, it is the fact that Rousseau is not prepared to dissimulate over the problem of evil and suffering that earns him Schopenhauer's respect, in spite of his optimism. Starobinski (1986: xi-xii) singles out the agonising disparity between appearance and reality, which is exploited and partly engendered by human beings, as the primary motivating force behind Rousseau's entire philosophy, conceiving of Rousseau's social, political and educational theories as suggested methods for alleviating this disparity. For

Schopenhauer, cunning, as a basic form of dishonesty, is even morally equivalent to violence: 'As regards the *doing* of wrong generally, it occurs either through *violence* or through *cunning*, it is immaterial as regards to what is morally essential' (*WWR* I 337). Moreover, dishonesty debases a main constituent of the social fabric that bonds humankind, the institution of truth-telling and trust, whereas violence only debases physical strength:

The deep horror everywhere excited by cunning, perfidy, and treachery, rests on the fact that faithfulness and honesty are the bond which once more binds into a unity from outside the will that is split up into the plurality of individuals, and thus puts a limit to the consequences that arise from that dispersion. Faithlessness and treachery break this last, outer bond, and thus afford boundless scope for the consequences of egoism.

WWR I 338-9

Apart from the metaphysical aspect of this passage, created at Schopenhauer's mention of the will, he is in agreement with Rousseau: truthfulness is one of the precious few defences human beings possess against the destructiveness of their own egoism.

Rousseau's honesty leads on to the next feature that the two philosophers have in common with respect to the question of suffering and evil. Rousseau does not attempt to demonstrate that the current state of affairs is not as bad as it seems. Recall that in Rousseau's view, '[t]hat men are actually wicked, a sad and continual experience of them proves beyond doubt', even if he adds that the actual state of human beings is not also the necessary state of human beings. Rousseau therefore maintains that there is a real gap between how the world is, on the one hand, and how it ought to be, on the other. This is not something common to all optimists, and an important subdivision can therefore be made. For example, Leibniz's argument for the best of all possible worlds logically commits him to the view that the world as it is cannot possibly be improved upon. Similarly, Alexander Pope, in his poem *An Essay on Man*, pens the memorable lines, 'And, spite of Pride and erring Reason's spite,/ One truth is, "Whatever is, is right"' (Pope 2001: 203)—the ideal creed for optimism of the kind that denies any distinction between how the world is and how it should be. For this reason, Pope becomes the target of Voltaire's poem *The Lisbon Earthquake*, the subtitle of which is, *An Inquiry into the Maxim, 'Whatever is, is right'*, and he is named by Schopenhauer as one of the co-founders of philosophical optimism,

alongside Leibniz, Shaftesbury, and Bollingbroke (*WWR* II 584).⁵³ Pope's motto is also a clear forerunner to Hegel's '*What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational*' (Hegel 1945: 10), which encapsulates the same variety of optimism. On the other hand, insofar as Rousseau preserves the gap between what is and what ought to be—and, once again, in spite of his overall optimism—Rousseau shares something with Schopenhauer, who, as a pessimist, is presumably committed to this gap. It follows that the distance between their two positions is again slightly reduced: it shrinks from whether such a gap exists, to whether this gap can ever possibly be closed.

Finally, each in his own way, both Schopenhauer and Rousseau hold human beings responsible for their sufferings; neither account is dependent upon outside or supernatural influence. Furthermore, because the problem for humankind originates with humankind, it ends there too—if it ends at all. We know how this looks for Rousseau, but for Schopenhauer it is formulated in ways such as the following:

While the Old Testament made the world and man the work of a God, the New saw itself compelled to represent that God as becoming a man, in order to teach that holiness and salvation from the misery of this world can come only from the world itself. It is and remains the will of man on which everything depends for him.

WWR I 326

For all his manifest depravity, we do not know of a higher being than the human. But in alluding to what is symbolised by God 'becoming a man', Schopenhauer refers not only to the high status of human beings, but also to the ascetic solution to the problem of life that is represented by Christ. As he goes on to say in the rest of this passage: 'Sannyasis, martyrs, saints of every faith and name, have voluntarily and gladly endured every torture, because the will-to-live had suppressed itself in them; and then even the slow destruction of the phenomena of the will was welcome to them'.⁵⁴

⁵³ Neiman (2002: 33), by contrast, argues that Pope's position is already a departure from Leibniz in the direction of Rousseau: 'With his very title [*An Essay on Man*] Pope signaled a shift of focus from God's nature and responsibilities to our own. In doing so, he began to push the problem of evil out of the realm of metaphysics and theology into the world of ethics and psychology, and therewith to a set of questions we can recognise as our own [...] The absence of original sin, and the cheerful description of our initial state of nature, foreshadowed Rousseau's'.

⁵⁴ See Chapter VI.

At this point, however, we arrive at the relevant contrast between Schopenhauer and Rousseau; it can partly be read off from the divergence of their respective solutions. Though it is agreed that human beings suffer at their own hands, it is, according to Rousseau, only because of flaws inculcated over a stretch of time in which a series of bad collective decisions were made with regards to the use of their natural endowments—endowments which, with some effort, might one day be rediscovered in a better form. On the other hand, for Schopenhauer, judging by the nature of his solution to the problem of human suffering, the opposite of this is required, that is, a thorough retreat from our natural dispositions. Worse still, according to Schopenhauer, this is the only possible way out. As with Rousseau before him, Schopenhauer founds his solution upon a judgement about the origins of suffering within humanity; only, in contrast to Rousseau, this origin is traced back to humanity's very roots, that is, to the original sin.

The philosophy of original sin

Leibniz vividly points out the horror, the absurdity and the unfairness implied by the doctrine of original sin, as well as that of salvation through grace:

[T]he sole cause why all these men are wretched to all eternity is God's having exposed their parents to a temptation that he knew they would not resist; as this sin is inherent and imputed to men before their will has participated in it; as this hereditary vice impels their will to commit actual sins; and as countless men, in childhood or maturity, that have never heard or have not heard enough of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, die before receiving the succor for their withdrawal from this abyss of sin. These men too are condemned to be for ever rebellious against God and plunged into the most horrible miseries, with the wickedest of all creatures, though in essence they have not been more wicked than others, and several among them have perchance been less guilty than some of that little number of elect, who were saved by a grace without reason, and who thereby enjoy an eternal felicity which they have not deserved.

For once, Schopenhauer agrees with him. There is a distinction, Schopenhauer says, between taking the doctrine of original sin literally, '*sensu proprio*', and taking it figuratively, '*sensu allegorico*', but in both cases there is cause for horror. 'Taken *sensu proprio*, the dogma here is revolting;' Schopenhauer remarks, 'for not only does it cause a young man scarcely twenty years old to suffer endless torture [...] but there is also the fact that this almost universal damnation is really the effect of original sin and thus the necessary consequence of the Fall' (PP II 365). This is Leibniz's point, and the passage continues in a similar vein. When the doctrine is taken *sensu allegorico*, that is, as a metaphor for a philosophical truth about human nature, Schopenhauer is still in agreement with Leibniz about its horror, but now only to a limited extent. Schopenhauer would not deny that the world according to *sensu allegorico* original sin is also horrifying, only, Leibniz ultimately treats any kind of horror at the doctrine of original sin as the sign of an objectionable misunderstanding. More specifically, Leibniz objects to the way in which it misrepresents God as a capricious and indifferent autocrat. The doctrine has to be understood in its proper theological context, which is that of the best of all possible worlds. Leibniz's aim, as he states it, is therefore to relieve the seeming horror of original sin; God will then become an object of love once more, as is only appropriate (Leibniz 1952: 129). Schopenhauer, however, pleads to the contrary: the terribleness of the doctrine is an all too accurate reflection of the terribleness of human beings and their world. '[O]riginal sin and salvation constitute the essence of Christianity', Schopenhauer says, but, he adds, 'Religion has only a truth that is suited to the people, one that is indirect, symbolical, and allegorical. Christianity is an allegory that reflects a true idea, but in itself the allegory is not what is true' (PP II 389).

What exactly, according to Schopenhauer, is the hard philosophical truth for which original sin is the religious allegory? We might say that Schopenhauer's answer to this question has to meet a minimum of three conditions, each of which corresponds to a salient feature of the doctrine of original sin as we know it. Firstly, in order to be equivalent, the philosophical formulation of the doctrine must show that human beings are constantly involved in some transgressive form of behaviour. Secondly, it must show that there is a necessary connection between this transgression, on the one hand, and the mere fact of coming into existence, on the other. That is, the way in which human beings are corrupt cannot be incidental, or historical as in Rousseau: it must be inescapable from the moment they exist. Finally, the philosophical equivalent of the doctrine of original sin must contain a corresponding explanation for how the transgression of a single individual can be transferred to another individual, as is represented in myth by the inheritance of Adam's

sin. This is usually the hardest part of the doctrine to support, both metaphysically and morally.

Schopenhauer's many scattered remarks about original sin can now be gathered together, in order to discover the ways in which it is intended to meet the above criteria. A good place to start is a remark Schopenhauer makes about Plotinus, whom Schopenhauer thinks prefigured the early Christian doctrine of original sin (and who certainly influenced it):

Of special interest is the eighth book [of the fourth *Ennead*] which explains how [the soul] fell into this state of plurality through a sinful striving; accordingly, it bears a double guilt, namely that of its having descended into this world, and also of its sinful deeds therein. For the former it atones through temporal existence in general; for the latter, which is less important, it atones through metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls. This is obviously the same idea as the Christian original sin and particular sin.

PP I 58

A great deal is revealed here. Firstly, there are two distinct kinds of sin: the original and the particular. The first consists in the descent into individuated phenomenal existence. Just to become part of the plural world is a 'sinful' act, according to Schopenhauer. Particular sins, on the other hand, are those carried out within the phenomenal realm, and they are therefore logically posterior to the original sin. Interestingly, the atonement for original sin is also phenomenal existence, and Schopenhauer admits that atoning for particular sins is 'less important' than atoning for the original sin. Clearly, all of these ideas are in need of further explanation. However, the supposed connection between sin and mere existence is obvious at least: the emergence into phenomenal existence at all is itself a transgression of some kind.⁵⁵ Schopenhauer was fond of expressing this thought in the words of one of his

⁵⁵ In his 1794 essay 'The End of All Things', Kant considers four 'repellent, partly disgusting parables' which philosophers of a pessimistic persuasion have historically drawn upon when envisaging the world (Kant 1996: 224). Schopenhauer was very fond of one of the examples named: the penitentiary (for example, *PP* II 302). But another of Kant's images surpasses even Schopenhauer in its diabolical sharpness and potency: that of a cloaca, the combined anus and vagina distinctive of female birds and reptiles. Kant attributes the image vaguely to 'a Persian wit', and for the most part focuses on its excretive connotations—which, as a theme in itself, Schopenhauer has no qualms about exploiting: 'It appears just as foolish to embalm corpses as it would be to carefully preserve our excreta' (*WWR* I 277). However, what is remarkable about the

favourite poets, Felipe Calderón: “The true sense of tragedy is the deeper insight that what the hero atones for is not his own particular sins, but original sin, in other words, the guilt of existence itself: “*Pues el delito mayor/ Del hombre es haber nacido* [For man’s greatest offence/ Is that he has been born]” as Calderón [...] frankly expresses it’ (*WWR* I 254, 355; II 603).

Something else significant can be drawn from Schopenhauer’s comment about Plotinus, which leads on to the next point to be made about Schopenhauer’s philosophical conception of original sin. Schopenhauer describes the soul’s initial journey according to Plotinus as a fall, and, apart from the obvious reference to the Fall of humankind found in Christian dogma, this description betrays the fact that the soul, or that which comes into the world, still exists in some form prior to entry. It goes from some nascent existence as part of a state of oneness to existence in the individuated multiplicity of the phenomenal world. This is not just a part of Plotinus’ philosophy, for it has an obvious equivalent in Schopenhauer too. The will, in its metaphysical sense, which is identifiable with the entirety of nature, pre-exists the individual will of a human being; it is the former from which the latter emerges (*WWR* I 127-30). Although this metaphysic functions in many different ways in Schopenhauer’s philosophy, we might take it here to state at a minimum that each individual within the world was not created *ex nihilo*. There is at least something out of which all individuals arise, to which they remain connected.

On the basis of his metaphysics, therefore, Schopenhauer regards the belief that individuals are created *ex nihilo* to be mistaken in itself. He also thinks that this belief is entailed by the denial of original sin, hence he takes exception to the denial of original sin as well:

[T]he rationalists look down on the profound mysteries of Christianity [...] For example, they consider that the doctrine of original sin is a superstition because their plain and homely Pelagian intellect has happily made out that no one can be responsible for what another did six thousand years before him. For the rationalist confidently follows his *light of nature* and so really and quite seriously imagines that forty or fifty years ago, namely before his papa in his nightcap had

image of the cloaca specifically is that it represents the precise coincidence of birth and waste. Schopenhauer was attracted to the poignant symbols created by nature, such as the bull-dog ant’s fight with itself (*WWR* I 147), and the polar separation of the head from the genitals in human beings (*WWR* I 330)—the cloaca would almost certainly have amused him in the same way, as a natural metaphor for that part of the doctrine of original sin in which corruption and existence coincide.

procreated him and his simple mama had safely brought him forth, he was simply and absolutely *nothing* and arose out of nothing precisely at that moment. For only thus *can* he not be responsible for anything. The sinner and original sinner!

PP II 35

Schopenhauer associates the denial of original sin and the belief in *ex nihilo* creation not only with the Pelagian branch of Christianity, which, in the above passage, he implies has infected rationalistic philosophy, but also with Judaism and Islam:

Augustinism with its dogma of original sin and everything connected therewith is, as I have said, the real Christianity easily understood. *Pelagianism*, on the other hand, is the attempt to reduce Christianity to crude and shallow Judaism with its optimism.

The contrast between Augustinism and Pelagianism which permanently divides the Church, could be traced to its ultimate ground, namely to the fact that the former speaks of the essence-in-itself of things, whereas the latter speaks of the phenomenon, taking this however, to be the essence. For example, the Pelagian denies original sin, for he argues that the child has not done anything at all and must be innocent. Thus he does not see that, as a phenomenon, the child certainly does begin to exist, but not as thing-in-itself.

[...] The centre and heart of Christianity consist of the doctrine of the Fall, original sin, the depravity of our natural state, and the corruption of man according to nature [...] But Christianity thus shows itself to be pessimism and is, therefore, diametrically opposed to the optimism of Judaism as also of Islam [...]

PP II 389

Schopenhauer traces the optimism of Judaism, or more correctly that of the Old Testament, back to where 'a God *Jehovah* creates this world of misery and affliction *animi causa* and *de gaieté de coeur*, and then applauds himself with a πάντα καλὰ λίαν [(And God saw) every thing (that he had made, and, behold it) was very good (Genesis 1: 31)]' (PP II 301).

The two objections that Schopenhauer has to religions based upon God's *ex nihilo* creation seem to be, first, that the misery of the world is incompatible with its being raised from nothing by a truly intelligent creator,⁵⁶ and second, that the *ex nihilo* creation of individuals functions as a way of shirking responsibility for that which, in truth, one has arisen from. As quoted above, 'only thus *can* he not be responsible for anything'. This second objection is strikingly moral, and depends upon the success of Schopenhauer's metaphysics; that is, the objection can stick to those who believe in creation *ex nihilo* only if creation *ex nihilo* is already proven to be metaphysically false. The overall question seems ultimately to be one of identity, in that Schopenhauer believes that it is both metaphysically and morally incorrect to identify only with one's individual form, or, as he says above, to mistake the phenomenon for the essence. Instead, one should identify with what one is in oneself, which, for Schopenhauer, is the will that is common to all. In less metaphysical terms, the mistake is to identify oneself with just the part of nature that one is, rather than with nature itself as a whole, of which one is just a part. Feeling responsible for more than one's own individual actions and one's own individual self begins with considering oneself in the latter fashion, that is, as identifiable with the whole, which for Schopenhauer turns out to be the view that is both metaphysically and morally sound.⁵⁷

By combining the reverse sides of these two objections to belief in the *ex nihilo* creation of individuals, a belief which is implied by denial of the doctrine of original sin, we begin to understand why coming into existence at all is itself a form of moral transgression for Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer wants the denier of original sin to admit to the fundamental miserableness of the world *and* to take responsibility for it. This means taking responsibility for ourselves as something that, in truth, ought not to be:

[A]s St. Paul [...], Augustine, and Luther teach, works cannot justify, since we all are and remain essentially sinners. This is due to the fact that, since *operari sequitur esse* ['What we do follows from what we are'], if we acted as we ought to act, we should also necessarily be what we ought to be [...] However, since we are what we ought *not* to be, we necessarily do what we ought *not* to do [...] Although the guilt lies in the conduct, in the *operari*, yet the root of the guilt lies in our *essentia et existentia*, for the *operari* necessarily proceeds from these [...]

WWR II 604

⁵⁶ See Chapter III.

⁵⁷ See Chapter VI.

Hence Schopenhauer equates Adam, and by extension the Fall and original sin, on the one hand, with affirmation of the will-to-life and with the unrelenting whole of nature, on the other:

Considering not the individuals according to the principle of sufficient reason, but the Idea of man in its unity, the Christian teaching symbolizes *nature*, the *affirmation of the will-to-live*, in *Adam*. His sin bequeathed to us, in other words, our unity with him in the Idea, which manifests itself in time through the bond of generation, causes us all to partake in suffering and eternal death.

WWR I 405

He also goes on to say, quite plainly, ‘The doctrine of original sin (affirmation of the will) and of salvation (denial of the will) is really the great truth which constitutes the kernel of Christianity’ (WWR I 405); and then later, ‘This original sin itself is in fact the affirmation of the will-to-live; on the other hand, the denial of this will, in consequence of the dawning of better knowledge, is salvation’⁵⁸ (WWR II 608). In stating that we are sinful from birth, Schopenhauer argues, Christianity articulates the fact that to come into a world that ought not to be—to be a natural part of that world—is, by extension, to be a thing that ought not to be. Acts committed within the world are tainted by the very first transgression of coming into existence at all, because each act affirms the individual who performs it, and in doing so, also affirms nature and the will-to-life. Hence, they become particular sins which issue from the original.

This obviously leaves the question of what makes it the case that the world ought not to be, the answer to which appears to have been assumed, but has not yet been explicitly stated. But, of course, Schopenhauer’s point is that the world which is the manifestation of the will-to-life is *palpably* a world that ought not to be. The intention of the previous chapters has been to demonstrate the different aspects of this fact: the world governed by the will-to-life is, in the first place, one in which suffering is inevitable, interminable, and, out of necessity, deceptively concealed. It is furthermore a world in which such suffering can never be compensated for by any amount of pleasure or happiness; nor can anything in our experience of the world furnish us with an overall purpose for all this suffering or an

⁵⁸ See Chapter VI for Schopenhauer’s conception of salvation.

end-in-itself. The inherent non-rationality at the foundation of all things must therefore be acknowledged, and it is called the will-to-life. Ironically, this can only be known after the will-to-life has already begun to manifest itself. If human beings had a purpose, and if there were ever a ground upon which to claim that humankind represents the pinnacle of all that exists, then it would be found in the attainment of this knowledge that the world ought not to be:

[W]e have no ground for assuming that there are even more perfect intelligences than those of human beings. For we see that this intelligence is already sufficient for imparting to the will that knowledge in consequence of which the will denies and abolishes itself [...] If this inner essence is once grasped, as it soon would be by those most perfect intelligences, what would be left for them but mere repetition and its tedium throughout endless time? Thus, even from this point of view, we are referred to the fact that the aim of all intelligence can only be a reaction to a will; but since all willing is an error, the last work of intelligence is to abolish willing, whose aims and ends it has hitherto served.

WWR II 610

For this reason, Schopenhauer rejects the complacent excuse for immoral behaviour ‘“*that it is natural to man*”’ as being ‘by no means adequate, but the proper rejoinder should be: “just because it is bad, it is *natural*; and just because it is *natural* it is bad.” To understand this aright, we must have grasped the meaning of the doctrine of original sin’ (PP II 304). To merely be a part of nature is, on account of its inherent savagery, the original sin; it is worse still to just go along with what is natural. If one has sufficient insight to see nature for what it really is, then the correct reaction, is to reject it. Salvation consists in acknowledging and uprooting original sin, which means rejecting the reality of one’s insular individuality, rejecting nature and one’s place in it, and by rejecting these, assuming final responsibility for them. At this point in the discussion, however, we are ahead of ourselves, which was difficult to avoid given the inextricability of the doctrine of original sin from that of grace.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ See Chapter VI.

There is one final feature of interest in Schopenhauer's account of original sin. For Schopenhauer, original sin is just one of a number of expressions of the same fundamental truth, which he has attempted to articulate philosophically rather than religiously. Original sin mythologises this truth through the story of a line of procreation stretching back to the transgression of the first man and woman. However, it must be noted, sexuality is not an integral part of Schopenhauer's philosophical account. It is easy, of course, to see how and why it is tailored in: procreation is the means by which new individuals are brought into the world and thereby condemned to the same general fate. '[T]ied up with the satisfaction of that strongest of all impulses and desires', Schopenhauer says, 'is the origin of a new existence, and hence the carrying out of life afresh with all its burdens, cares, wants and pains, in *another* individual' (*WWR* II 568)—or as Jorge Luis Borges pithily remarked, in a similar mood: 'mirrors and copulation are abominable, since they both multiply the numbers of man'.⁶⁰ The difference, however, between the religious doctrine of original sin, on the one hand, and Schopenhauer's philosophical account, on the other, is that for Schopenhauer it is not essentially a matter of transmitting an initial transgression: the transgression is a timeless aspect of the world, so long as the world exists. It is not transferred from one individual to another, but rather every individual is the repeated manifestation of it.

In fact, Schopenhauer explicitly disapproves of the part of the inheritance myth in which original sin is first created and then transmitted. This part of the myth, he argues, bears traces of the *ex nihilo* creationism characteristic of the Old Testament:

[Christianity] represents the guilt not as being established simply by existence itself, but as arising through the act of the first couple. This was possible only under the fiction of a *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*, and was necessary only on account of the Jewish fundamental dogma [i.e. Genesis 1: 31], into which that doctrine was here to be implanted.

WWR II 604

Original sin is therefore an imperfect expression of the truth that Schopenhauer aims to articulate, even though it is still an acceptable expression overall. However, just prior to the

⁶⁰ From his short story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (Borges 1993: 5-21). Magee (1997: 413) records Borges' deep admiration for Schopenhauerian philosophy.

above comment, Schopenhauer says: "The innermost kernel and spirit of Christianity is identical with that of Brahmanism and Buddhism; they all teach a heavy guilt of the human race through existence itself, only Christianity does not proceed in this respect directly and openly, like those most ancient religions" (*WWR* II 604). Earlier he has also stated:

[I]n Christianity the doctrine of original sin, in other words of atonement for the sin of another individual, has taken the place of the transmigration of souls and of the expiation by means thereof of all the sins committed in a previous life. Thus both identify, and indeed with a moral tendency, the existing person with one who has existed previously; transmigration of souls does this directly, original sin indirectly.

WWR II 506-7

What is expressed by Christianity in original sin is also expressed, and better expressed, by Buddhism and Brahmanism in the doctrine of metempsychosis. The reason why the message of the latter two religions is more direct, Schopenhauer points out, is that the past individual for whose sin one must atone is not represented by these religions as being fundamentally distinct from oneself, which is closer to the truth. To extend Schopenhauer's point, some interpretations of metempsychosis approximate more than others the dynamic between monistic pre-existence and pluralistic phenomenal existence that is to be found in Schopenhauer's philosophy. For, spiritual rebirth in these religions can also be taken as symbolising the way in which the same singular entity manifests itself in every embodied life, and so while each manifestation perishes, its essence lives on in others. Furthermore, and finally, metempsychosis includes forms of life other than human beings: it is a part of the atonement process that one may be reborn as an animal. This throws into relief the anthropocentrism of the religious doctrine of original sin, which again is not something integral to the pure form of Schopenhauer's philosophical equivalent. The world *as a whole* ought not to be, and not just human beings, thus the coming into existence of any life—of any thing, even—is also to be regarded an irreparable error.

To briefly summarise, let us review the ways in which Schopenhauer has met the conditions for equivalence to the original sin, which were laid out earlier. The second condition, which was to have an explanation for how existence and moral transgression are inextricably bound, takes logical priority. These two are bound quite simply by the fact that coming into existence is itself a moral transgression, insofar as existence is participation

and complicity in a world that fundamentally ought not to be. That the world ought not to be is dependent upon Schopenhauer's other pessimistic proofs about the nature of the world. Meeting the first condition now follows from meeting the second, given that all action within existence reaffirms the first transgression of coming into existence at all, from which it follows that one is constantly and repeatedly involved in transgressive behaviour. Finally, the transgression is 'inherited' to the extent that every new existent, by virtue of coming into existence at all, commits the transgression for herself. However, it is perhaps better to say that literal transmission through generation is actually a weakness of the doctrine of original sin, and that it is absent in the pure form that Schopenhauer tries to articulate. Instead, every new life realises once again the essential fate of all existents: to enter into, and thereby perpetuate, a world that ought never to have been.

Original sin as objection to Rousseau

How does Schopenhauer's philosophical account of original sin function as an objection to Rousseau? There is an obvious way that it cannot do so, which we might start by mentioning. It could be argued that Rousseau was all too aware of the potential vicissitudes of individuation, and that he in fact designed his account specifically to argue against their necessity. With an appreciable degree of success, Rousseau's aim was, among other things, to refute the Hobbesian view of the natural human being. One might take Schopenhauer's philosophically pure version of original sin only to be equivalent to the violent interplay of egoism found in Hobbes. After all, the reasons given by Schopenhauer for why the world ought not to be are in large part to do with the fact that, once individuated, the beings of the world tussle and vie to increase their share of it. For Schopenhauer, following Rousseau, egoism in itself may be a morally neutral incentive; however, its onset in a world of many egos is incredibly destructive. Hence, now echoing Hobbes: 'without [...] checks and in view of the infinite number of egoistic individuals, the *bellum omnium contra omnes* would be the order of the day, to the undoing of all' (*BM* 133).⁶¹ Therefore, on pain of begging the question, if Schopenhauer's conception of original sin is to have any traction as an objection to Rousseau's original goodness, then it must differ in some significant

⁶¹ There is also no denying the similarities between Hobbes' and Schopenhauer's political philosophies, which Schopenhauer himself admits (*WWR* I 333).

respects from Hobbes' egoistic account of human nature. Fortunately, there are such differences, and furthermore, in the course of exposing them, the force of Schopenhauer's opposition to Rousseau is finally revealed.

First we must outline Rousseau's simple but effective objection to the Hobbesian view. Rousseau argues that Hobbes can conclude that the state of nature is not conducive to peace only 'in consequence of having improperly admitted, as part of savage man's care for self-preservation, the gratification of a multitude of passions which are the work of society' (Rousseau 1993: 72). For example, the inclination to dominate another individual into subservience has as its condition the kind of social and political relations that are absent by definition from the state of nature; here one must recall Rousseau's hypothetical history leading away from the state of nature, in which these interpersonal relations develop. Hobbes therefore does not have in mind a true state of nature when he describes his natural human being, but instead assumes a very rudimentary and unstable society, hence the fear and the bellicose egoism that he expects to find among its members.

Of course, Rousseau does not intend to argue that human beings in a state of nature are devoid of all desires. Rather, his intention is to draw attention to an important distinction between two kinds of desire:

The passions [...] originate in our wants, and their progress depends on that of our knowledge; *for we cannot desire or fear anything, except from the idea we have of it, or from the simple impulse of nature.* Now savage man, being destitute of every species of enlightenment, can have no passions save those of the latter kind: his desires never go beyond physical wants.

Rousseau 1993: 61, my emphasis

On the one hand, there are desires that operate on an instinctual level, which are not led by a prior conception of the object of desire; on the other, there are desires that depend upon prior beliefs and judgements. Rousseau argues that the corrosive kind of egoism can exist only as a form of the latter type of desire. This because such egoism involves judgement, which may be about one's worth in terms of relative status, for example, or the appropriate size of one's share in the distribution of resources. By contrast, the set of natural needs constitute only a benign form of egoism, *amour-soi* as opposed to *amour-propre*, which has no requirement to be bloodthirsty, cruel, or aggressive. Rousseau does not, for example, deny the natural need for food, procreation, or rest. What he objects to in Hobbes' conception

of the state of nature is the presence of 'social bases of motivation', as one commentator puts it.⁶² The problem for Schopenhauer, then, if he has followed Hobbes' lead, is that his philosophical account of original sin describes the simultaneous creation of the individual, on the one hand, and of evil and suffering, on the other, where the former must take responsibility for the latter. According to Rousseau's argument, however, there is a small yet significant space between these two moments, and so the individual is not automatically responsible for a world that ought not to be—the world that ought not be in fact lies in her future, depending upon the choices of civilisation.

Just as Rousseau scrutinises the creature that Hobbes truly had in mind when he conceived of his fearful natural human being, let us now, on Schopenhauer's behalf, scrutinise what it is that Rousseau imagines in its stead. This creature is barely, if at all distinguishable from a non-human animal: 'I see him satisfying his hunger at the first oak, and slaking his thirst at the first brook: finding his bed at the foot of the tree which afforded him a repast; and, with that, all his wants supplied' (Rousseau 1993: 52). The fact that the creature has no idea of its own mortality, 'the knowledge of death and its terrors being one of the first acquisitions made by man in departing from an animal state' (Rousseau 1993: 61), is also animalistic. For Schopenhauer, certainly, awareness of personal mortality sets apart human life from merely animal life (*PP* II 295-7). He admits that in this respect 'the animal's life contains less suffering' (*PP* II 296), which works in favour of Rousseau's point. The animal's imprisonment in the present moment, due to the restrictions of its cognitive horizons, gives it a peaceable disposition, which Schopenhauer suggests is a source of the vicarious pleasure that human beings derive from observing unperturbed animals and from spending time with pets. Moreover, the fear of death is just one of presumably many prospective and speculative evils that the animal consciousness is protected from by means of its own limits. But, of course, none of this gives us a reason to conclude that the animal is carefree—nor, importantly, the animalistic human being. Rousseau himself attributes to his natural human an instinctive aversion to pain and hunger, and the physical needs that Rousseau lists, for 'food, a female, and sleep', are also perennial sources of suffering according to the Schopenhauerian account.⁶³ 'Evils press on the animal [...] with their own actual weight', even if it is true that 'for us [human beings] they are often increased tenfold by fear and foresight' (*PP* II 296).

⁶² See Cohen (1997: 113-5).

⁶³ See Chapter II.

Schopenhauer makes it unmistakably clear that the suffering of animals is sufficient to warrant his pessimism:

[W]e wish to consider *human existence* the inner and essential destiny of the will. Everyone will readily find the same thing once more in the life of the animal, only more feebly expressed in various degrees. He can also sufficiently convince himself in the suffering animal world how essentially *all life is suffering*.

WWR I 310

At the top of the scale of suffering is that of the intelligent human being, and thus far Schopenhauer's view is still comparable to Rousseau's. In the last sentence, however, he urges that the suffering of animals is an independently significant factor in how the world should be evaluated. While it can be admitted that some sufferings, such as the fear of death, are only created by means of the ability for long-term judgement, unique to the socially intelligent human being, other varieties of suffering are merely amplified in developed human life, which is to say that they can and must be found in the lives of animals, too. Without the cognitive foresight of the human being, what remains of the life of the animal are the steady constants of need, fear and pain, which are not to be glossed over, for they are bad enough on it own. There is no reason why Rousseau's animalistic natural human would be exempt from this; we should therefore not expect Rousseau's state of nature to be as idyllically calm as he has depicted it to be.

Rousseau's counterargument to Hobbes, then, though admirably elegant, dispenses with Hobbes' position without necessarily dispensing with Schopenhauer's. For, unlike Hobbes, Schopenhauer's pessimism about human egoism does not necessarily operate on the (inchoately) rational and interpersonal level, that is, on the basis of rudimentary human society. In fact, Schopenhauer carefully selects his terms for precisely this reason:

The chief and fundamental incentive in man as in animal is *egoism*, that is, the craving for existence and well-being. The German word *Selbstsucht* (passion for self) involves a false secondary notion of disease. The word *Eigennutz* (self-interest), however, denotes egoism insofar as this is under the guidance of the faculty of reason; by means of reflection, this faculty enables egoism to pursue its purposes *systematically*. Thus we can call animals egoistic, but not self-interested [*eigennützig*]. I will therefore retain the word *egoism* for the general

concept. In the animal as in man this egoism is most intimately connected with their innermost core and essence; in fact, it is really identical with essence.

BM 131

Here it could not be more obvious that Schopenhauer's conception of egoism is purged of Rousseau's social bases of motivation, in order to encompass a wider spectrum of life, inclusive even of the lowest animal needs. His distinction between *Eigennutz* and *Selbstsucht* even resembles Rousseau's distinction between *amour-soi* and *amour-propre*. If the *Eigennutz* variety of egoism is still capable of raising concern, and Schopenhauer argues that it should, then Schopenhauer still has a level available to him upon which to meet Rousseau. Although the clash of egos is sufficient for the misery of the world, it is not necessary; individual human and animal lives are enough of a source of misery to themselves. The world is a place that ought not to be *independently* of social interaction.

At this point, the objection may be raised that things have now been arranged in such a way that Rousseau and Schopenhauer are no longer engaged in a debate at all, but are in fact talking at cross-purposes. Rousseau's point is that human beings are at least morally neutral in the state of nature: the social and cognitive conditions of either corruption or compassion do not obtain, therefore natural human beings live in a kind of pre-moral state. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, argues that within this state of nature, suffering is a constant, because it is necessarily entailed by any egoistic needs, from the most basic and instinctive kind to those that require a mastery of complex beliefs and judgements. In short, Rousseau seems to be talking about how naturally good (or bad) people are, and Schopenhauer, on the other hand, seems to be talking about how naturally unhappy (or happy) they are. As a result of the way in which Schopenhauer evades the force of Rousseau's criticism of Hobbes, Schopenhauer appears to have forfeited the possibility of using his arguments as criticism of Rousseau in return. Therefore, one still has to answer the question of how Schopenhauer might have expected his account to contradict Rousseau. Indeed, one even might ask why the two philosophers' accounts could not be accepted, exactly as they are, as complimentary parts of a wider description of the state of nature—one side paying attention to the natural moral status of human beings, the other paying attention to their natural hedonic status.

It is noticeable, however, that Rousseau's account includes its own firm opinion with regards to the natural well-being of humans in the state of nature. Rousseau's position is underpinned by the broadly Socratic attitude that it is mostly moral decrepitude that has

historically had a negative effect on human well-being. He argues that: 'the greater part of our own ills are of our own making, and that we might have avoided them nearly all by adhering to that simple, uniform, and solitary manner of life which nature prescribed' (Rousseau 1993: 56). Famously, to the individual who suggests that there is a preponderance of pain over pleasure in the world,⁶⁴ Rousseau suggests that if this calculation is repeated, but it is based upon the state of nature instead of the corrupted state of civilisation, then 'his inquiries would clearly have had a different result, and man would have been seen to be subject to very few evils not of his own creation' (Rousseau 1993: 118). Of course, Rousseau cannot go so far as to argue that the state of nature is conducive to the happiness he associates with virtue, for positive virtue is as little possible in the state of nature as is positive wickedness; however, by arguing for the impossibility of wickedness in the state of nature, Rousseau leaves himself room to argue that human beings are spared many, if not most woes. As they stand, then, Rousseau's and Schopenhauer's accounts are incompatible because each includes a contrary position with regards to the natural human being's potential for happiness or unhappiness. Rousseau argues negatively for the absence of unhappiness, because for him unhappiness is dependent upon the immorality of civilisation, whereas Schopenhauer's argument is for a positive relation between desire and suffering—an argument which we are by now very familiar with.⁶⁵ It is easier now to see how Schopenhauer's argument, if it is successful, would lead him to contradict Rousseau. Rousseau's expectation is not only of a morally neutral natural human being, but a happy one at that. For Schopenhauer, by contrast, the essential facts about being human—facts which Rousseau himself admits when he refers to their instinctual desires—already preclude happiness, and invite suffering.

Schopenhauer also criticises the validity of the inference that state of nature theorists make about the natural moral disposition of human beings:

The question has been asked what two men would do each of whom had grown up quite alone in the wilderness and who met each other for the first time. Hobbes, Pufendorf, and Rousseau have given opposite answers. Pufendorf believed they would affectionately greet each other; Hobbes on the other hand, thought they would be hostile, whilst Rousseau considered that they would pass each other by in silence. All three are both right and wrong; for

⁶⁴ See Chapter II.

⁶⁵ See Chapter II.

precisely here the *immeasurable difference of the inborn moral disposition of individuals* would appear in so clear a light that we should have, as it were, its rule and measure. For there are those in whom the sight of man stirs feelings of hostility in that their innermost being exclaims “not-I”. And there are others in whom that sight at once arouses feelings of friendly interest and sympathy; their true nature exclaims “I once more!”. There are innumerable degrees between the two.

PP II 229

This position flows from Schopenhauer's conception of moral character, which views moral character as eternally static, and therefore attributes permanent moral differences to each and every individual in order to explain the differences in their behaviour.⁶⁶ Even without the aid of his moral philosophy, however, Schopenhauer's point exposes a dubious assumption shared by all state of nature arguments: that the natural moral disposition of human beings is a constant universal. The truth is, Schopenhauer points out, everyone is egoistic to some degree or other, and everyone also has the potential for compassion and even malice, again, to some degree or other. Thus, the unique admixture in any individual should not be ignored, nor should it be universalised.

One might reasonably ask whether this helps Schopenhauer's case. Has Schopenhauer not in fact cut out the ground from underneath his feet? For original sin, or its philosophical equivalent, seems to be dependent upon the same universalising tendency to which Schopenhauer has just now objected. It cannot be denied that Schopenhauer's philosophical account of original sin makes *all* existents guilty of some moral transgression. However, once again, the type of moral transgression must be emphasised, because it is not identifiable with the innate disposition of one being to attack another, and vice versa, as found in Hobbes. Rather, it is the transgression of existing at all as part of a world that ought never to have been. It cannot be denied that coming into existence is legitimately universalisable for all existents; this is mere tautology. And, Schopenhauer thinks, if one has listened to his other arguments about the will-to-life, one also cannot deny that the world ought not to be, from which it follows that no part of it ought to be either. While the moral dispositions of human beings when they come to interact with one another cannot

⁶⁶ See *BM* 187-98.

be universalised, the unhappiness and vain misery of the world, for which we are ourselves ultimately responsible, can be.

4. Conclusion

Rousseau is a formidable opponent in Schopenhauer's general rejection of optimism; he ranks higher in Schopenhauer's estimations than Leibniz, in virtue of his sound moral theory, his worldly outlook, which roots his philosophy in life and the world, and his intellectual honesty and integrity. Nevertheless, Rousseau's assumption of original goodness, in spite of his immanent method of showing that it is compatible with human depravity, is unacceptable according to Schopenhauer. In the light of Schopenhauer's positive account of the contrary doctrine of original sin, I have attempted to show that Schopenhauer's dissatisfaction with Rousseau lies in the implication that human beings are not ultimately responsible for a world that constitutionally ought not to be. This has required a distinction between, on the one hand, the variety of 'natural' egoism described by Hobbes, which Rousseau convincingly rejects, and on the other, the variety of egoism that grounds Schopenhauer's claim that the world ought not to be, which is rooted in affirmation of the individuated will-to-life.

Chapter V: Eternal Justice

1. Introduction

Why is it that in this world the innocent suffer and the guilty prosper? Schopenhauer may have been critical of Leibniz and Rousseau's respective attempts to solve this problem, as seen in the preceding two chapters, but he was not insensitive to the problem itself. His solution is eternal justice: we would not suffer if we did not deserve it; and if we deserve it, then we do indeed suffer. In the following, I will review the way in which Schopenhauer supports this doctrine by means of his metaphysics of the will-to-life (section 2). I will also respond to some recurring objections in the literature on Schopenhauer's account of eternal justice. These objections concern the appropriateness of Schopenhauer's use of the term 'justice'; the question of whether eternal justice solves the problem that it addresses on the level of the individual; and the extent to which Schopenhauer's metaphysics of eternal justice may in fact be more suited to a metaphysics of cruelty (section 3). Finally, I will ascertain the sense in which Schopenhauer can propose that his conception of eternal justice is a justification for suffering (section 4), and the implications that this has for his relationship to optimistic justifications for suffering.

2. The metaphysics of eternal justice

Just as he did with original sin, Schopenhauer endeavours to give a 'description of eternal justice, which is not mythical but philosophical' (*WWR* I 357). He must account for the distinctive features of eternal justice, which are best observed by means of the contrast with its more pedestrian counterpart, temporal justice. Temporal justice is the term Schopenhauer uses for justice of the jurisprudential kind, founded upon and executed by human institutions, conventions and judgements (*WWR* I 334-350). It is therefore a phenomenon subject to practical failures, just like any other human enterprise. Injustices can be mishandled and misjudged by temporal justice; it is even possible for injustices to remain entirely undetected. One can corrupt the figures responsible for temporal justice, and the whole system itself can be corrupted, in which case temporal justice is itself just as capable of committing injustices as it is capable of rectifying them. Eternal justice, on the

other hand, is unfaltering and infallible. It preserves an exact balance between all injury and punishment, independently of human laws, but with law-like necessity. Also unlike temporal justice, '*eternal justice* cannot be retributive', Schopenhauer points out, because 'the concept of retaliation implies time'. For the same reason, eternal justice 'cannot [...] admit respite or reprieve' (*WWR* I 350). Its verdict is final and necessarily inescapable.

Schopenhauer states that for eternal justice to be secured 'the punishment must be so linked with the offence that the two are one' (*WWR* I 351). If it can be shown that this is the case, then it would certainly account for the instantaneous and automatic nature of eternal justice, although further elaboration would seem to be required in order to show that this ensures justified commensurability between the punishment and the offence. Schopenhauer believes that his metaphysics already supports the claim that offence and punishment are one. In fact, he says, 'that such an eternal justice is actually to be found in the inner nature of the world will soon become perfectly clear to the reader who has grasped in its entirety the thought that we have so far developed' (*WWR* I 351). His core metaphysical thesis is that will is the common monistic reality shared by all natural phenomena, and it follows from this that all of the suffering that is inflicted in the world is ultimately also self-inflicted:

Deceived by the knowledge bound to its service, the will here fails to recognise itself; seeking enhanced well-being in *one* of its phenomena, it produces great suffering in *another*. Thus in the fierceness and intensity of its desire it buries its teeth in its own flesh, not knowing that it always injures only itself, revealing in this form through the medium of individuation the conflict with itself which it bears in its inner nature.

WWR I 354

Like many of Schopenhauer's philosophical interpretations of religious doctrine, in eternal justice the offence committed by the individual is conditioned by the cognitive mistake of identifying one's essence in one's own individuality alone. This mistake is, of course, a perfectly ordinary one; it is the 'natural standpoint' of the human being, Schopenhauer says. Nevertheless, it is an injurious mistake, he argues, as a result of which a person 'is ready to annihilate the world, in order to maintain his own self, that drop in the ocean, a little longer' (*WWR* I 332). In the wider picture, because of the monism underlying this illusory plurality, all such injury inflicted by individuals leads to the will's metaphysical self-injury.

The same natural standpoint also leaves us perplexed at the moral intelligibility of the world. All that there is to be observed on the phenomenal surface is the cruelty of one person and distress of another:

He sees one person living in pleasure, abundance, and delights, and at the very same time another dying in agony of want and cold at the former's very door. He then asks where retribution is to be found.

WWR I 352

It sees the wicked man, after misdeeds and cruelties of every kind, live a life of pleasure, and quit the world undisturbed. It sees the oppressed person drag out to the end a life full of suffering without the appearance of an avenger or vindicator.

WWR I 354

However, on the condition of ridding oneself of the natural standpoint—by no means an easy feat—knowledge of the hidden metaphysical self-injury is supposed to be able to alleviate the perplexity: those who are cruel are not quite so undisturbed as they appear, and, perhaps more troublingly, those who suffer are not quite so innocent. ‘The former is mistaken in thinking he does not share the torment, the latter in thinking he does not share the guilt’ (WWR I 354).

The universal balance of eternal justice is therefore struck because the agent responsible for a given offending act is also in some sense its recipient, who therefore gives and receives harm in equal measure. There is no way to pervert this balance: whereas in temporal justice the punishment can be delayed, weakened, or evaded, in eternal justice the occurrence of the punishment is necessarily simultaneous with the occurrence of the offence. We must be very clear, however, about who—or what—is the responsible agent. It is tempting to think that it is the individual herself who is responsible; that in the very act of doing harm, the individual unwittingly dictates her own punishment, which is instantly enacted. But this is only indirectly true, that is, insofar as it occurs within a wider metaphysical reality in which it is the will-to-life itself that is both responsible for and recipient of all injuries. It is of course possible to express this from the perspective of the individual, for every individual is related to the metaphysical will as one of its manifestations. However, given that Schopenhauer's point is that belief in the reality of the

individual is the very mistake that obscures from view the workings of eternal justice, the most accurate expression of its operation is ultimately to be given at the level of the unindividuated will in itself.⁶⁷ Hence, Schopenhauer does talk a great deal about how the individual figures in eternal justice; for example, he says that if an individual were to become conscious of eternal justice, then ‘the tormented person would see that all the wickedness that is or ever was perpetrated in the world proceeds from that will which constitutes also *his* own inner being, and appears also in *him*’ (WWR I 354). But, at the mention of the will, even statements such as this imply that eternal justice happens at the level of a deeper reality than that of the individual, or more accurately, that it ultimately happens *to* that deeper reality. Schopenhauer’s comments in general about eternal justice are consistent with this. For example:

[I]n all that happens or indeed can happen to the individual, justice is always done to it. For the will belongs to it; and as the will is, so is the world. Only this world itself—no other—can bear the responsibility for its existence and its nature; for how could anyone else have assumed this responsibility?

WWR I 351-2

Here, any justice that is done to the individual derives from the justice being done to the will (or the world) as whole, because the individual is a manifestation of the will and is therefore directly identifiable with it.

If one were not clear about the fact that it is the will-to-life itself that is subject to eternal justice, then little sense could be made of such claims as the following, which Schopenhauer makes as part of his discussion:

According to the true nature of the world, everyone has all the sufferings of the world as his own; indeed, *he has to look upon all merely possible sufferings as actual for him*, so long as he is firm and constant in the will-to-live.

WWR I 353, my emphasis

⁶⁷ ‘Eternal justice is withdrawn from the view that is involved in the knowledge following the principle of sufficient reason, in the *principium individuationis*; such a view altogether misses it’ (WWR I 535).

[S]ince the will is the in-itself of every phenomenon, the misery inflicted on others and that experienced by himself, the bad and the evil, always concern one and the same inner being, although the phenomena in which the one and the other exhibit themselves stand out as quite different individuals, *and are separated even by wide intervals of space and time.*

WWR I 354, my emphasis

The last quotation in particular, if it is to be understood at all, should put to rest a particular form of the misapprehension that we are trying to avoid. For one might otherwise have imagined that an injury inflicted by a person is also inflicted upon the injurer insofar as *at that time* the injurer and the injured party are in fact directly connected by means of the will. We might only have in mind here such a crude example as that a person who is torturing another person is also somehow having some deep and hidden part of herself tortured too. However, given that according to Schopenhauer great (although ultimately only apparent) intervals of time may elapse between the individual who injures and the individual who is injured, it is possible, for example, that the former individual has long ceased to exist before the injury that they inflict upon the latter individual has even occurred. Imagine a vicious and cruel leader who erects an empire which is ruled by a set of severely Draconian laws. Many generations after he has perished, loyalist descendants of the emperor's former acolytes have managed to preserve his regime precisely, without ever daring to assume the role of emperor themselves—his throne is left empty, but his surviving image, as a perversely Godlike founder, is sufficient to render both him and his laws unimpeachable. Say that one unfortunate subject of this empire now falls victim to its laws and is sentenced to a slow and torturous execution as punishment for what, under normal circumstances, would be considered a minor misdeed. According to Schopenhauer's view of eternal justice, the late emperor is still the victim of the cruelty that he has systematically inflicted upon his subject, in spite of his now nonexistence. This is because the will is not to be thought of merely as the means by which any harm is transferred back to the individual in which it appears to have originated; the will is the originator and the receiver of all harms, and only insofar as every individual has her essence in the will, her essence, too, is the originator and receiver of all harms.

At this point we might have raised the difficult question of commensurability. For it would seem that a condition of any form of justice is that the severity of each its punishments is commensurate with the nature of the offence for which the punishment is

handed down. Is the infliction of the very same harm that an offender has wrongfully inflicted upon another person truly a punishment commensurate with her offence? Of course, some might straightforwardly answer yes, an eye for an eye is the best form of justice, or even the only real form; however, it is certain too that many would oppose this, Schopenhauer included.⁶⁸ Fortunately, here, there is in fact no need to answer the complex question of what constitutes a commensurable punishment, so long as it is remembered that the form of justice under examination is a highly peculiar one, which ultimately serves and is served by a single being alone: the metaphysical will-to-life itself. John Atwell has argued that, as a result of the peculiarities of Schopenhauer's account, eternal justice actually reduces to the neutralisation of wrong. It is not technically concerned with the correction of wrong, which we might normally expect of an account of justice. Following Schopenhauer's own image of an animal biting into its own flesh, Atwell says: 'An analogy would be the person whose hand severely pinches his foot, hence, one might say, he as the hand is the tormentor and he as the foot is the tormented—so, in a sense, he has no right to complain' (Atwell 1990: 196). '[H]arm is "justified" by being seen as not-wrong' (Atwell 1990: 196-7), he concludes. The question of a commensurable punishment cannot be raised if there is no wrong in the first place. Hence, the world is still ultimately something that ought not to exist—what ought to be in an absolute sense is the non-existence of the world—nevertheless, *on the assumption that the world does exist*, things are not as they ought not to be. There is no reason to complain of the justice or injustice of a world full of self-inflicted suffering, there is no metaphysical wrong-doing in such a world, though one might well rue the very existence of such a world.

3. Problems and solutions

Some astute critical observations have been made in regard to Schopenhauer's conception of eternal justice.⁶⁹ The three that I will discuss below are: that the term 'eternal justice' is a misleading misnomer (Hamlyn 1988: 287; Atwell 1990: 195-7); that it is problematic that

⁶⁸ 'Retaliation of evil for evil without any further purpose cannot be justified, either morally or otherwise, for any ground of reason, and the *jus talionis*, set up as an independent, ultimate principle of the right to punish, is meaningless' (*WWR* I 348).

⁶⁹ Although, as Atwell (1990: 192n.) points out, eternal justice is for the most part either completely overlooked by commentators (Copleston, Gardiner, Magee), or treated as a patent absurdity (Fox 1980: 170n.).

eternal justice fails to work at the level of the individual (Simmel 1986: 68; Hamlyn 1988: 281; Atwell 1990: 197, 199-201); and that experience of the pain of a victim is actually part of the cruel person's reward, not a part of her punishment (Simmel 1986: 69-70).

'Eternal justice' as a misnomer

Eternal justice is, as we know, a highly extraordinary variety of justice. It might therefore be asked whether it goes beyond mere extraordinariness, and is in fact no kind of justice at all. Atwell, having pointed out that eternal justice is really only the neutralisation of apparent wrong, is concerned about this. '[I]n sum,' he remarks, 'right and wrong, just and unjust, and the like have nothing to do with the matter. Hence, the label "eternal justice" is inappropriate—on the level of the will-to-live' (Atwell 1990: 197). He does not consider this to be a major objection, and is content to continue to use the term 'eternal justice' just for the sake of argument, with the proviso that 'something like, say, "eternal self-harming" is more apt' (Atwell 1990: 197n.). Similarly, D. W. Hamlyn points out: 'there cannot, in the nature of the case, be injustice if things are considered at this level. Equally, and *a fortiori*, there cannot be cause for complaint [...] But does [eternal justice] not, in that case, constitute a misleading metaphor, and one which is meant to cover or have application to a range of different phenomena[?]' (Hamlyn 1988: 287). In contrast to Atwell, Hamlyn believes that there is a better reason for retaining the term than for the sake of argument, which will soon be reviewed. There are, in fact, more potential reasons to add to this one. Curiously, each of the following reasons is sufficient irrespective of whether or not it shows that Schopenhauer's conception of eternal justice really is any kind of justice traditionally conceived. We therefore reach the surprising conclusion that it would not matter if eternal justice turned out not to be a kind of justice.

The first solution to the misnomer problem requires that we be clear about what Schopenhauer's aim is when he discusses eternal justice. A clue here is that he claims his 'description of eternal justice [...] is not mythical but philosophical' (*WWR* I 357). This can be taken as a sign that Schopenhauer intends to excavate in philosophical terms the doctrine of eternal justice itself, testing the extent to which it can make any claims to truth. Indeed, it would be naïve to think that Schopenhauer uses the term 'eternal justice' in complete ignorance of its meaning as a religious dogma—it cannot be a term that he innocently assigns to a state of affairs entailed by his metaphysics. Eternal justice, in its

original meaning, is the divine and incontrovertible law kept by God, which ensures the world's moral balance in spite of its unbalanced appearance—it is, in fact, a typically theodicean notion. Myths and dogmas such as this, according to Schopenhauer, are instances of morally instructive wisdom, which, though they may lack complete accuracy and/or clarity, capture something of the truth, and therefore have the ability to correctly orient our cognitive and moral attitude towards the world. They are potent truths held to the standard of practical serviceability. When Schopenhauer is discussing the Vedic proverb '*tat tvam asi*', 'this thou art', for example, which he regards as an alternative expression of eternal justice, he states: 'the myth makes intelligible the ethical significance of conduct through figurative description in the method of knowledge according to the principle of sufficient reason, which is eternally foreign to this significance. This is the object of religious teachings, since these are all mythical garments of the truth which is inaccessible to the crude human intellect' (*WWR* I 355).

Therefore, just as before with original sin, metempsychosis, *tat tvam asi*, and also later with grace, the discussion of eternal justice takes the religious doctrine itself as its object, with the aim of understanding it in philosophical terms—and without necessarily taking all of its traditional aspects seriously and literally. Schopenhauer's metaphysics, he notices, conveniently demonstrate the grain of truth upon which such a dogmatic belief is founded, as described above, and therefore lends it some rational credence. The 'misleading metaphor' over which Atwell and Hamlyn put a question mark is therefore shifted from the explanation on to the explanandum, where it will longer cause any problems for Schopenhauer. Eternal justice would have been an unwise choice of label had Schopenhauer been naming a new and original principle of his own, but really he is understanding and assessing an age old one—admittedly, in a tone of great admiration—in which case it would be a mistake to omit the name it goes by.

The second possible reason why Schopenhauer is justified in using the term 'eternal justice' is related to the first. The term is not just worth retaining because the doctrine it stands for has become the object of investigation; it is also worth retaining because religious-dogmatic expressions of truth can do something their philosophical counterparts cannot, according to Schopenhauer. As already noted, religious myths and doctrines morally instruct, and perhaps even directly exert moral pressure upon their believers, which philosophy does not do. One might object that so-called practical philosophy does such a thing, but Schopenhauer ultimately denies this category:

In my opinion, however, all philosophy is always theoretical, since it is essential to it always to maintain a purely contemplative attitude, whatever be the immediate object of investigation; to inquire, not to prescribe. But to become practical, to guide conduct, to transform character, are old claims which with mature insight it ought finally to abandon.

WWR I 271

Schopenhauer is of course not claiming that philosophy has nothing of interest to say about morality; the quotation above is in fact his prefatory remark to a long discussion of diverse moral matters. His claim is rather that understanding moral philosophy will not make a person moral, a conclusion which is in fact a consequence of his own moral philosophy.⁷⁰ ‘We should therefore be just as foolish to expect that our moral systems and ethics would create virtuous, noble, and holy men,’ Schopenhauer says, ‘as that our aesthetics would produce poets, painters, and musicians’ (WWR I 271). To understand religious doctrines, on the other hand, because they contain overt or concealed commands and duties—in short, because they *do* prescribe—will help a person become moral in practice, so long as the doctrines themselves are moral. Or conversely, if a religious doctrine is not reflected in a person’s practice, then it is reasonable to claim that the person has not understood it.⁷¹ Given that a religious doctrine such as eternal justice can do something valuable that bald philosophical examination cannot, it makes sense to do everything to leave the doctrine intact. That is, there are positive reasons not to analyse the doctrine out of existence. Schopenhauer is admittedly ambivalent in estimating the worth of religion, as the indecisive conclusion of the long opening dialogue of his essay ‘On Religion’ makes plain (PP II 359-60), but his actual treatment of religious doctrines in general, at least those of which he philosophically approves, speaks much louder. In spite of having a good explanation for their wisdom, he never seeks to supplant religious doctrines, or banish them from discussion as useless superstitions. On the contrary, with the appropriate caveats, their wisdom and their purpose are spoken of highly.

Hamlyn’s explanation for Schopenhauer’s use of the term ‘eternal justice’ also comes from the moral perspective:

⁷⁰ See Chapter VI.

⁷¹ As Wittgenstein says of theological language: ‘*Practice* gives the words their sense’ (Wittgenstein 1998: 97e).

Should we, therefore, applaud or criticise Schopenhauer for his use of that metaphor [of eternal justice]? [...] Is eternal justice simply the necessary fulfillment of a law, but in this case not the law of the State but a natural law which holds because of the will's place in nature? The answer to this last question, it may be suggested, is that while it is that, it imposes upon us a moral obligation not to rail against our fate. *Moral* obligation? It is clearly pointless to rail against our fate, if Schopenhauer is right, but is it more than that? The truth is that if Schopenhauer's account of the nature of reality and of the merely phenomenal character of the *principium individuationis* is right, it is certainly wrong, in some sense of that word, to rail against the will.

Hamlyn 1988: 287

This is because, as we know, Schopenhauer's metaphysics entails that when one rails against the will, one rails against oneself, which, Hamlyn further remarks, might in fact pass over from being merely wrong into being absurdly comical: 'it is simply comic to think of someone railing against himself, while thinking that blame is being laid elsewhere' (Hamlyn 1988: 287). In fact, this supplements the thesis that Schopenhauer is approximating as best he can the original religious doctrine of eternal justice in philosophical terms. Though one would not ultimately be railing against oneself, it might be regarded as equally comical to rail against the wisdom of God's holy law; it seems just as pointless to complain about the apparent injustices for which one is in fact responsible, as it is to complain about the decisions of an absolutely perfect being—if not more so. Once Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will is granted, the right to complain is forfeited, just as it is if the divine creator is granted.

There might be a little discomfort here. Does Schopenhauer's metaphysics really converge upon, and philosophically support, such a distinctly theodicean dogma? Humility before the law of God sounds far more Leibnizian than it does Schopenhauerian. Fortunately, this too can be resolved, and it results in a third and final reason why Schopenhauer might want to retain the term 'eternal justice'. By now, we should be familiar with the move found in Schopenhauer of resembling the opposition up to a point, in order to obtain a rhetorical or ironic effect. We found, for example, that his privative description of happiness resembles early theological privative explanations of evil, and that he even draws attention to this fact in relation to his opposition of Leibniz, who is an heir to the privative theological tradition (*PP* II 291-2). In similar fashion, his claim that the suffering

minority outweighs the happy majority counterposes the—again Leibnizian—claim that the saved minority might possibly outweigh the damned minority.⁷² Eternal justice seems to work no differently. The extent to which Schopenhauer resembles theodicy in his notion of eternal justice is that it is ultimately mistaken and futile, even obnoxious, to complain about the world. However, the crucial difference is that it misses out the additional theodicean claim that the order against which one rails is good. Schopenhauer's inversion is that it makes no sense to bemoan a world that is constitutionally bad, one which is guilty of inflicting the very sufferings it cannot abide. As Susan Neiman, a proponent of this view, puts it:

Belief in Providence presumes that we are innocent long after we've begun to look very suspicious [...] [Schopenhauer] argued that their innocence, like individuality itself, was merely illusion. In reality, he thought tormentor and tormented are one. This is consolation so black it begins to be funny. Are you dismayed by a world full of innocent suffering? Don't despair: it's not so innocent.

Neiman 2002: 199

This reading certainly makes good sense of claims such as: 'If we want to know what human beings, morally considered, are worth as a whole and in general, let us consider their fate as a whole and in general. This is want, wretchedness, misery, lamentation, and death. Eternal justice prevails; if they were not so contemptible, their fate as a whole would not be so melancholy' (*WWR* I 352). Of course there is eternal justice, Schopenhauer argues: every human being, despicable as she is, suffers and dies.

There is, therefore, a series of reasons why Schopenhauer would use the term 'eternal justice' as he does. His description can always be taken as a philosophical investigation into the religious doctrine of eternal justice itself. The term might also be kept on out of Schopenhauer's general reverence for the persuasive practicality of religious doctrines. And finally, not describing his position as a form of eternal justice would spoil the opportunity for some deliciously ironic moral intelligibility. It will not matter to any of these reasons that eternal justice actually reduces to neutralisation of harm, and that it is not even strictly speaking a form of justice.

⁷² See Chapter II.

Eternal justice for the individual

Concerns have been raised about the extent to which eternal justice does, or rather does not do, justice to the individual. '[H]ow about on the individual level?' Atwell asks, 'Is every wrong-doer punished (made to suffer) in proportion to the wrong (or suffering) he inflicts on another? And is every sufferer guilty to the degree of the suffering inflicted upon him by another?' (Atwell 1990: 197). Thinking in the same vein, Georg Simmel objects that:

Adding the aggregate of culpability and the aggregate of suffering into two sums is possible only through abstracting from the actual distribution of culpability and suffering, from the fact which indicates the most essential injustices of existence. Even if in the world as a whole or in its metaphysical meaning positive and negative values were equalised, it would still be possible that the culpable deed was done by one person and the consequent suffering was undergone by another [...]

Simmel 1986: 68

Hamlyn, too, notices the difference between, on the one hand, eternal justice as Schopenhauer describes it and, on the other, justice for the individual:

On the face of it [...] it seems a different matter to claim that differences even at the level of punishment and offence are only apparent from claiming that suffering is the product of an eternal justice. If the underlying reality is will, and if the world is simply its objectification, then it is again a truism that "as the will is, so is the world". But is it a truism that "if we could lay all the misery of the world in one pan of the scales, and all its guilt in the other, the pointer would certainly show them to be in equilibrium" [WWRI 352]?

Hamlyn 1988: 281

Hamlyn later remarks that to accept the inevitability of the seemingly unjust appearance of the world, because that is the way the will willed it, is not necessarily the same as accepting

its justice; and also that Schopenhauer's conception of eternal justice contains no reference to fairness, but then neither does his conception of temporal justice (Hamlyn 1988: 284-6).

Atwell, at least, believes that Schopenhauer is able to mitigate his remarks about the justice done to the individual, to an extent. He points out first, as has been rehearsed above, that the essence of Schopenhauer's conception of eternal justice is that the world in some sense chooses itself. Atwell then cites passages such as the following, in support of the claim that the inhabitants of the world are thereby implicated too:

[W]ith the strictest right, every being supports existence in general, and the existence of its species and of its characteristic individuality, entirely as it is and in surroundings as they are [...]; and in all that happens or indeed can happen to the individual, justice is always done to it.

WWR I 351

Noticeably, the second part of this quotation is one of the claims Hamlyn admits to having trouble with (Hamlyn 1988: 282). From the first part, however, Atwell deduces that 'every being bears in itself all of existence [...] Every being can then be regarded as the cause of all suffering and the recipient of all suffering, [etc.]' (Atwell 1990: 197). It follows, he argues, that:

If I were not the way I am, the world would not be as it is; and since I am the way I am, the world has to be as it is; hence the way I am is both necessary and sufficient for the way the world is; and since I am wholly responsible for the way I am, I am wholly responsible for the way the world is, consequently, for everything that happens to me.

Atwell 1990: 198

Atwell's point here seems not necessarily to be that Schopenhauer is right about eternal justice, but rather the more minimal claim that we should not be surprised that this is Schopenhauer's line of argument if we have comprehended his metaphysics: 'The point I am urging once again is that the afore cited argument fits and indeed is implied by Schopenhauer's most central metaphysical thesis, so that the argument cannot properly be regarded as fallacious (absurd or perverse) without objection to the metaphysical thesis' (Atwell 1990: 198-9).

The trouble with Atwell's solution is that the claim 'If I were not the way I am, the world would not be as it is' may not sit as comfortably with Schopenhauer's metaphysics as he implies. The logical consequence of this claim is that if I were to change, and become not the way I am, then the world would change too—not just *my* world, as Schopenhauer is happy to state about the mystical transition to relative nothingness entailed by negation of the will,⁷³ but *the* world, which is taken here to mean either the metaphysical will itself or its phenomenal manifestation. One wonders about how happy Schopenhauer, or anyone, should be if he is tied into this claim. Of course, Atwell is only trying to account for the claims that he has cited, which Schopenhauer indisputably makes, such as 'every being supports existence in general'. However, this last claim is equally compatible with the reverse of Atwell's understanding of it: if the world were not the way it is, then I would not be the way I am. Bear in mind that for Schopenhauer eternal justice is a corrective to the mistaken view that one's essence lies in one's own individuality, upon which is founded the world's apparent moral unintelligibility. He is effectively urging us to see beyond our phenomenal individuality and identify directly with the metaphysical will-to-life itself—had we personally the capability of such a singular and profound insight. It follows from this that 'every being supports existence in general' insofar as every being *is* existence in general, only at a hidden fundamental level. In turn, this indeed entails that if the world (read: the will) were not the way it is, then I would not be the way I am. This can be meant in the trivial sense that a change in the metaphysical will just is a change in me, for I am in some sense the metaphysical will (Atwell's formulation, which goes in the reverse direction, can be made trivially true in this way too). But it is also true in the non-trivial sense that my phenomenal existence would not have the life and character that it does were it not underpinned by the kind of metaphysical reality that it is—my life could be much happier, for example, if the will were different. Importantly, understanding 'every being supports existence in general' as every being *is*, in some sense, existence in general does not have the same awkward consequence that Atwell's understanding does.

It does, however, undermine Atwell's support for how eternal justice extends to individuals. Saying that eternal justice is done to the individual insofar as the individual is identifiable with the will, the real subject of eternal justice, puts us back at square one—eternal justice does not ensure justice for the individual as an individual. Hence, Simmel's formulation of the objection targets precisely this point; it challenges the lack of immanent

⁷³ See *WWRI* 411-12 and Chapter VI.

justice in the world. '[T]he question of the distribution of positive and negative values can only be raised for the world of representation,' he says, 'it is vacuous and meaningless in regard to what we really are, to the absolute unity of being' (Simmel 1986: 68). It is how guilt and suffering are distributed that matters to the individual, not how the abstract quantity of each balances out. Because eternal justice does not ensure that guilt and suffering are justly distributed among individuals, such that suffering comes only and proportionately to those who are manifestly guilty, it does not ensure justice for the individual.

At this point, however, we might become wary of the very intractability of this problem for Schopenhauer. It feels as if he is being challenged to justify a claim he never made. We can explain Schopenhauer's references to the individual in his account of justice, and even the extent to which of 'all that happens or indeed can happen to the individual, justice is always done to it'. Justice is always done to it to precisely the same degree that justice is always done to the metaphysical reality with which the illusory individual is ultimately identifiable, the will-to-life. If one seeks a further reason why Schopenhauer continues to describe what happens to the will-to-life as a kind a justice, then there are three to choose from in the preceding section. What Simmel is asking for is in fact characteristic of temporal justice: the fair and proportionate righting of wrongs. Somewhat understandably, he also expects eternal justice to be able to achieve this flawlessly. But, of course, it cannot: eternal justice does whatever it does do without error—that is Schopenhauer's claim—but it simply does not do individual justice. Temporal justice resolves its injustices all on the same level, that of appearance; its offences, and the individual offenders, are just as real as its punishments (all are ultimately mere appearances). It *does* act for the individual as an individual. Eternal justice resolves injustices at a deeper metaphysical level than the one upon which they occur; these injustices, as well as the individuals subject to them, are shown to be unreal with respect to that deeper reality, and it follows that there is no need, or better, there is no *way* to right their wrong. One cannot right a wrong that never really existed in the first place. In fact, it might justifiably be asked in the face of Simmel's objection, if Schopenhauer's account eternal justice was ever intended to metaphysically secure the correct distribution of suffering and guilt at the individual level, then what is the intended purpose of temporal justice at all? Temporal justice becomes merely an unnecessary and inadequate shadow of eternal justice. Schopenhauer would have been wasting his time in even discussing it, except perhaps as a study of why it has developed so far in spite of its utter superfluosity. Hence, his earnest

discussion of temporal justice can be taken as a sign that it was never his within aims for eternal justice to act for the individual as an individual. The demand for eternal justice for the individual can therefore finally be dismissed as beside the point.

Eternal justice and cruelty

Schopenhauer believes that his metaphysics is a readymade elucidation of some form of the doctrine of eternal justice; Simmel counters that what Schopenhauer offers is as much a metaphysics of cruelty as it is a metaphysics of justice, if not more so. In support of his claim, Simmel makes a point about the psychological nature of cruelty:

[Schopenhauer] claimed that feeling the other's suffering is the just and instantaneous penitence for cruelty, when in reality it is in the cruel act itself [...] Though pleasure in the pain of others seems to constitute the distance between man and man in an extreme and unconditional way, it is actually only possible through abandoning that distance, thereby indicating the removal of the barrier between I and Thou [...]

Simmel 1986: 70

This is the claim that empathy is as much a quality of the sadist as it is of the virtuous. There is no joy to be had in sadism if one is unable to feel the other's pain to some degree. Schopenhauer appears to believe, on the contrary, that cruelty is characterised by a highly amplified sense of distance: the 'distinction [between oneself and others] is in the eyes of many so great, that the suffering of another is a direct pleasure for the wicked, and a welcome means to their own well-being for the unjust' (*WWR* I 372). However he also shows some signs of being partially persuaded by Simmel's point. For example:

[T]he facial stamp of very bad people already bears the stamp of inward suffering [...] From [...] inner torment, absolutely and directly essential to them, there finally results even that delight at the suffering of another which has not sprung from egoism, but is disinterested; this is *wickedness* proper, and rises to the pitch of *cruelty* [...] The calling to mind of sufferings greater than our own stills their pain; the sight of another's suffering alleviates our own [...] The

suffering of another becomes for him an end in itself; it is a spectacle over which he gloats; and so arises the phenomenon of cruelty proper.

WWR I 363-4

Schopenhauer's characterisation of the cruel person as disinterested is of particular note. Given that in the same passage he describes the pronounced voraciousness of the cruel person's will, it might seem like a curious word to choose. However there is clear sense in which the cruel person overcomes egoism, and is to this extent disinterested in her behaviour. As Julian Young points out, Schopenhauer describes cruelty and malice as 'diabolical' (*BM 135*) because 'normal human wickedness [is] the expression of a kind of ignorance' whereas cruelty 'cannot be inflicted out of the ignorance of insensitivity' (Young 1987: 63). In a way, the egoist only causes harm out of a kind of disbelief in the sufferings of others, through an unwarranted promotion of her own well-being, but the truly cruel individual knows full well that she causes suffering—that is the whole point of being cruel. Hence, Schopenhauer himself interprets quests for revenge, in which it is possible for the avenger to drive herself to self-destruction, as a perverse and misguided intimation of the truth of eternal justice, and therefore as a partial transcendence of mere egoism (*WWR I 359*).

Simmel is still dissatisfied, however. The portrait Schopenhauer paints of the cruel person is psychologically crude: 'his assumption that a cruel person suffers from an indomitably strong will, the pain of which he tries to mitigate by making others suffer, is a grotesque utilization of the concept of "companionship in misfortune."' This psychological deduction of cruelty seems to me to be a far-fetched banality' (Simmel 1986: 69). For a better account of cruelty, Simmel thinks, Schopenhauer should look to his own conception of eternal justice:

The pleasure in one's own pain and in the pain of the other works here to create a uniform phenomenon. Thus, the question of metaphysical unity [...] can be legitimately raised again. Schopenhauer's doctrine of eternal justice based on the identity of I and Thou is, therefore, of permanent importance because it is based on an unerring homing instinct.

But as an answer to the problem of the distribution of happiness and suffering, the concept of metaphysical unity [...] is wanting.

Simmel 1986: 71

For Simmel, the interesting thing about the metaphysical unity described by eternal justice, the part which he thinks is lacking in Schopenhauer's account of cruelty, is that the cruel person not only knows or empathises with the sufferer, but actually recognises the suffering as her own. The sadist does not just want to see suffering; on some level, she want to suffer herself, from which she derives pleasure directly. In which case, eternal justice is a reward, an incentive, for her cruelty. On Schopenhauer's model, the cruel person only seeks to improve her lot comparatively, but according to Simmel, she seeks to intensify her feelings absolutely, to achieve an actual rise in her pain, from which it follows, if she is genuinely able to take pleasure in her own pain (and is to this extent also a kind of masochist), that she will increase her pleasure too.

As the last comment in the quotation above shows, however, Simmel is still under the impression that with eternal justice Schopenhauer intends to describe a kind of justice in the recognisable sense, where happiness and suffering are correctly distributed among individuals. His steadfast belief that eternal justice is, or should be, concerned with individuals as individuals has affected his views about its potential relation to cruelty too, and not for the better. For, to equate the way in which the cruel person identifies with the suffering of her victim, on the one hand, with kind with the identification to which Schopenhauer is referring in his account of eternal justice, on the other, is surely a mistake. This latter identification is so strong—in fact, so exactly perfect—that it ultimately nullifies all wrongs. No injustice even takes place at this metaphysical level. There is therefore no room for cruelty at this level either, assuming that cruelty involves one being's cruelty to another distinct being.

Simmel is correct, however, that Schopenhauer's metaphysics in general can assist his proposed model of cruelty. Furthermore, the insight that Simmel's model contributes is certainly worth exploring. For it may be true that the lure of cruelty is actually the pleasure in pain that one not only witnesses in another, but that one also feels for oneself in some way. Schopenhauer could certainly provide the metaphysical bond that might make this possible; however, a supplementary lesson must also be learned from his explanation of the contrary phenomenon, compassion. He states as an essential condition of compassion: '[...] at every moment we remain clearly conscious that *he* is the sufferer, not *we*; and it is precisely in *his* person, not in ours, that we feel the suffering, to our grief and sorrow. We suffer *with* him and *in* him; we feel his pain as *his*, and do not imagine that it is our ours' (*BM* 147). We need only replace 'grief and sorrow' with sadistic 'joy and glee' and we have

an equivalent condition to put upon the attitude of the cruel person, alongside the condition of having some kind of access to the person's suffering. Which is to say, cruelty must assume a degree of distance, even if it is only apparent, just as much as it assumes a perverse kind of intimacy. Cruelty therefore only partially realises the strong metaphysical unity expressed by eternal justice. According to eternal justice, the cruel person—unbeknownst to her—precisely *is* the object of her apparent cruelty.

4. Eternal justice as a justification for suffering

In Schopenhauer's eyes, eternal justice constitutes its own justification for suffering:

The world is precisely as it is, because the will, whose phenomenon is the world, is such a will as it is, because it wills in such a way. The justification for suffering is the fact that the will affirms itself even in this phenomenon [i.e. the life-affirmer]; and this affirmation is justified and balanced by the fact that the will bears the suffering. Here we have a glimpse of *eternal justice* in general [...]

WWRI 331

There are a number of questions one might have about this, although they can be summarised in just two. Firstly, in what way precisely is eternal justice supposed to function as a justification for suffering? Schopenhauer goes into no detail whatsoever about this, perhaps with the expectation that the answer will be self-evident in the account itself. However, we might reasonably be concerned that the term 'justification' is being used in just as loose or unorthodox a sense as the term 'justice' appears to have been. Secondly, if eternal justice is a justification for suffering, then what, if anything, sets it apart from optimistic justifications for suffering, which Schopenhauer firmly rejects?

In order to answer the first question, one first has to obtain a clear idea of what a justification of suffering would be. In a sense, suffering is a very odd thing for which to provide a justification at all. If suffering is understood as a naturally occurring phenomenon, just one of many possible sensations encountered in the world, then it makes as little sense to give its justification as it does to give a justification for mountains, or for the colour blue. A justification is constituted by a reason that can be given in support of something, such as a reason for acting in a certain way, or for holding a certain belief. It is

hard to see how one can give any reason for a natural phenomenon, other than in a purely causal sense; but a cause does not justify, it only explains. On the other hand, we know by now that Schopenhauer's views on suffering form part of a historical lineage of philosophical responses to suffering, in which the demand for a justification for suffering makes far greater sense; for this history at least begins in a theological context, where even natural phenomena can enter the realm of reasons. God, it is said, has created suffering, along with mountains and the colour blue, and because creation is an act, we are able to ask for the reason that justifies it. Mountains and the colour blue do not typically bother us, so we feel no need to examine their reasons for being, but suffering does. Hence, Leibniz answers that out of the infinitely many possible worlds, God select ours on the basis of its optimal conditions. According to Rousseau, most suffering is accounted for by our own descent into moral corruption; and furthermore, with appropriate training and education, all suffering is nature's inbuilt corrective to our practical and moral errors. Each of these philosophers is motivated by the condemnation of creation and/or the wisdom of its creator; by stating reasons, both attempt to remove the grounds upon which such a complaint is lodged. Their concept of justification is therefore a thick one: not only must there be a reason for suffering, but it must be good reason. God's actions must be both justified and just.

Schopenhauer's world may not have been selected by God, but there is a sense in which it is selected. Indeed, according to Schopenhauer's metaphysical voluntarism, the world selects itself. This is explicitly at the centre of his account of eternal justice:

The will is free; it is almighty. The will appears in everything, precisely as it determines itself in itself and outside time. The world is only the mirror of this willing; and all finiteness, all suffering, all miseries that it contains, belong to the expression of what the will wills, are as they are because the will so wills.

WWR I 351

Of course, we know *what* the will wills, in the most abstract sense: it is the will-to-life; it wills life. But we may not yet be clear what kind of will this is, that is, how it entails that the world selects itself, and in what sense this selection is free. Later on, Schopenhauer makes things marginally clearer:

As a result of [the] necessity [of the principle of sufficient reason], motives, like all causes, are only occasional causes on which the character unfolds its nature, and reveals it with the necessity of a natural law. For this reason we positively denied freedom as *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae* [...] In truth, real freedom, in other words, independence of the principle of sufficient reason, belongs to the will as thing-in-itself [...] But the only case where that freedom can become immediately visible in the phenomenon is the one where it makes an end of what appears [...]

WWR I 402

The will is not free to choose precisely *how* it manifests, nor is it free to choose its nature—it always is the will-to-life—but it is free to choose *whether or not* it manifests. In other words, the appearance that the will assumes in the course of its endless task of pursuing and preserving life is causally necessitated throughout; it has no control over what performing this task will look like or entail. Nevertheless, it does reserve control over whether or not to perform this task at all, whether to pursue life—whether to will or not to will. There is, however, only one phenomenon of the will through which it is possible to exercise this freedom, the one to whose vision Schopenhauer alludes in the above quotation, and that is the human being:

[J]ust what the Christian mystics call the *effect of grace* and the *new birth*, is for us the only direct expression of the *freedom of the will*. It appears only when the will, after arriving at the knowledge of its own inner nature, obtains from this a *quieter*, and is thus removed from the effect of *motives* which lies in the province of a different kind of knowledge. The possibility of freedom that thus manifests itself is man's greatest prerogative, which is for ever wanting in the animal [...]

WWR I 404

The right kind of insight into the world, which is possible only through the human intellect, according to Schopenhauer, confronts the will with an image of itself from which it can only recoil.⁷⁴ The will is therefore free to the extent that it can freely persist or desist, depending upon the cognitive conditions of its phenomena.

⁷⁴ See Chapter VI.

The fact that in Schopenhauer's philosophy the world freely chooses itself, in some sense, begins to allow his account of eternal justice to function as a justification for suffering. By freely choosing to will—which is to say, by manifesting itself at all—the will-to-life has invited upon itself all that is entailed by willing, which necessarily includes suffering. And, by extension, the individual who affirms the will-to-life, and who therefore does not exercise her prerogative as a potential expression of the will's freedom to cease, invites her own suffering in the same way. Hence, as quoted above, '[t]he justification for suffering is the fact that the will affirms itself even in this phenomenon [the life-affirmer]; and this affirmation is justified and balanced by the fact that the will bears the suffering'. Suffering is not directly chosen, but it is part and parcel of choosing life at all. Therefore, suffering is justified, insofar as it is just to suffer when suffering is a necessary concomitant of that which one has freely chosen to do. Stated negatively, sufferers are unable to justify whatever feelings of indignation they might have for their suffering, that is, they cannot produce reasons for it other than pure distaste, while they continue to affirm the will:

The world stands out as a mirror of this affirmation, with innumerable individuals in endless time, and endless space, and endless suffering, between generation and death without end. Yet no further complaint of this can be made from any direction, for the will performs the great tragedy and comedy at its own expense, and is also its own spectator.

WWR I 331

There is, however, a potential hitch with this solution to how Schopenhauer's conception of eternal justice is supposed to function as a justification for suffering. One might object that a reason has been given for suffering here only to the extent that a reason has been given for affirming the will-to-life, of which suffering is the necessary concomitant. If one can state why one affirms the will, then one can state why one suffers. But of course, no reason has been given for affirming the will-to-life. Indeed, no reason *can* be given, according to Schopenhauer's philosophy. The will is blind striving; it is the unconditioned drive within oneself. There are reasons to will one thing or another, these are our motives, but there is no reason to will *per se*. And if a reason cannot be given for why one wills, it follows that a reason cannot be given for why one invites the suffering that is necessarily a part of willing either.

It can in fact be conceded quite happily that the terms of Schopenhauer's philosophy cannot support eternal justice as a justification for suffering in this sense. No reason can be stated for one's suffering, just as no reason can be stated for one's willing. There is still more that Schopenhauer is able to say in support of the claim that the suffering one receives in return for willing is justified. For, affirming the will-to-life alone, it might be argued, is sufficient for deserving the suffering necessarily bound up with affirming the will-to-life, with or without a reason for affirming it. That is, it is just—or not unjust—that the will should suffer from freely affirming itself, even if no rational end to which it suffers can possibly be stated. Suffering is simply what the will gets for what it does, whether or not it does what it does for a reason. This renders Schopenhauer's justification for suffering different from Leibniz's and Rousseau's in some crucial respects, but similar in certain respects too. There can be no final reason for suffering, as is found in obtaining the best of all possible worlds (Leibniz), or in nature's correction of moral evil (Rousseau). There is nothing that could finish the sentence, 'If there were no suffering, then...?', where this gap is filled by some greater, justifiable good. But, all the same, it stands to reason that someone who—or something that, if we are speaking at the level of the will-to-life itself—freely performs an act should suffer its consequences, and should not complain of them. Schopenhauer expresses this line of thinking at various points in his discussion of eternal justice, both at the level of the individual and with respect to the individual's relation to the will-to-life as a whole:

He himself in the vehement pressure of will, which is his origin and inner nature, grasps the pleasures and enjoyments of life, embraces them firmly, and does not know that, by this very act of his will, he seizes and hugs all the pain and miseries of life, at the sight of which he shudders.

WWR I 352

[T]he tormented person would see [if he realised the doctrine of eternal justice] that all the wickedness that is or ever was perpetrated in the world proceeds from that will which constitutes also *his* own inner being and appears also in *him*. He would see that, through this phenomenon and its affirmation, he has taken upon himself all sufferings resulting from such a will, and rightly endures them so long as he is this will.

WWR I 354

Without being able to give a reason for suffering itself, therefore, Schopenhauer still has grounds upon which to claim that there is ultimately no reason to complain about suffering, and this much he shares with Leibniz and Rousseau. If Schopenhauer's account enters the realm of reasons at all, it is via this entrance. The sheer metaphysical necessity of the circumstances described by eternal justice, where all suffering is ultimately self-inflicted, issues a reason to adjust one's expectations of affirmation of the will-to-life such that suffering should strike us as no surprise and as no injustice.

If our first question asked what Schopenhauer has in common with other justifications for suffering, then our second question asks, by contrast, how it can be significantly disassociated from them. In his criticisms of optimistic philosophies, Schopenhauer hardly ever fails to register a strong sense of moral disapproval:

[O]ptimism, where it is not merely the thoughtless talk of those who harbor nothing but words under their shallow foreheads, seems to me to be not merely an absurd, but also a really *wicked*, way of thinking, a bitter mockery of the unspeakable sufferings of mankind.

WWR I 326

One might have assumed that the wickedness of optimism lies simply in its willingness to offer a justification for suffering at all, were it not for the fact that Schopenhauer offers his own competing justification. As things stand, it cannot be that the mere attempt to render suffering intelligible is morally objectionable, for Schopenhauer does it himself. There must be something that Schopenhauer rejects in the manner in which optimism offers its justification for suffering. Correspondingly, however, there must be something in the manner of Schopenhauer's justification that he believes is acceptable.

Hamlyn makes a point that is important for solving this problem:

Schopenhauer's thought provides a supreme example of the way in which a metaphysical doctrine has the meaning that it has. It is also evident how different it is from what he thinks so inferior — religion. Metaphysics provides no consolation for our ills, but it may bring an understanding of them.

Hamlyn 1988: 288

Putting aside the comment about the inferiority of religion for now, Hamlyn brings out an aim of Schopenhauer's justification for suffering that is not shared by either Leibniz or Rousseau, or presumably by any instance of metaphysical optimism. For, if Leibniz's and Rousseau's solutions to the problem of our suffering are not in themselves consolations, and overlap to this extent with the religious sphere, then they are most certainly preludes to such consolation. Rousseau, with his historical understanding of the origins of evil, is an ideal example of how a philosophical explanation can clear the ground for an eventual practical reconciliation with the world. And for Leibniz, moreover, the world is already in a state of actual harmony, in which case reconciliation is dependent only upon our seeing the world in the correct way. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, offers neither a prelude to consolation, nor consolation itself in his justification for suffering. Eternal justice makes no attempt to show that the world is, or can ever be made to be, in our best interests. It does not explain that suffering is ultimately for the better, but only that whatever suffering comes our way is perfectly fitting for the kind of beings that we are: 'The truth is that we ought to be wretched, and are so [...] He who keeps this last fact clearly in view beholds the world as a hell' (*WWR* II 577-8). Indeed, the moral intelligibility that eternal justice reveals is closely akin to that of an infernal penitentiary: everyone is a sinner and no sin goes unpunished.

It is therefore the possibility of consolation and resolution that Schopenhauer takes exception to in the manner of his opponents' justifications, which is absent from his own. But what reason does Schopenhauer have for taking exception to it? At least one of the wrongs of such optimism, Schopenhauer believes, is the systematic raising of hopes and expectations for the world:

[O]ptimism is not only a false but a pernicious doctrine, for it presents life as a desirable state and man's happiness as its aim and object. Starting from this, everyone believes he has the most legitimate claim to happiness and enjoyment. If, as usually happens, these do not fall to his lot, he believes he suffers an injustice, in fact that he misses the whole point of his existence; whereas it is far more correct to regard work, privation, misery, and suffering, crowned by death, as the aim and object of our life (as is done by Brahmanism and Buddhism, and also by genuine Christianity), since it is these that lead to the denial of the will-to-live.

There are two distinct criticisms of optimism lodged here, which complement each other. The first is that optimism encourages people to think against the metaphysical grain of life; to embrace their (mistaken) natural inclination to believe that happiness is bound for them. This is not only false, but it leads to further distress. The second criticism is that optimism also distracts from the appropriate way to view life, one which is in alignment with the metaphysical penitentiary described by eternal justice. Schopenhauer shows no signs of objecting to hope and consolation *per se*, but only to false hope and false consolation; in a word, to any justification founded upon faulty and harmful metaphysics. Hence, Schopenhauer is able to call his account of eternal justice a justification for suffering, without thereby committing himself to an act that he has claimed is wicked in some sense. Consolation, where it is disingenuous, is indeed wrong, and given the way that the world is, all metaphysical consolation cannot but be disingenuous; however, justification alone is not sufficient for consolation.

There is a third affront caused by optimism, related to the two mentioned above, which gives us reason to return to Hamlyn's remark that for Schopenhauer religion is inferior to metaphysics. While Schopenhauer undoubtedly believes that philosophy is far more clear-sighted and precise than religion, part of his reason for despising optimism so strongly is its direct contradiction of the central insights of (in Schopenhauer's view) the better religions. The two comments below follow directly after Schopenhauer has declaimed optimism as 'wicked' and as 'pernicious', respectively:

Let no one imagine that the Christian teaching is favourable to optimism; on the contrary, in the Gospels world and evil are used almost as synonymous expressions.

WWR I 326

In the New Testament, the world is presented as a vale of tears, life as a process of purification, and the symbol of Christianity is an instrument of torture. Therefore, when Leibniz, Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke, and Pope appeared with *optimism*, the general offence caused by it was due mainly to the fact that optimism is irreconcilable with Christianity.

WWR II 584

What makes this a separate affront from that of merely obscuring the correct moral path, represented in Christianity by ascetic atonement, is that the optimistic philosophy also has the nerve to profess to speak for Christianity, and not against it. Optimism therefore not only distracts from the true doctrine of Christianity, but is a direct perversion of it. Although Schopenhauer's account of eternal justice is heavily irony-laden, in that what was God's good and holy law is rendered in such a way as to state that the corrupt appearance of the world accurately reflects its corrupt constitution, the joke is more specifically on optimistic Christianity. Part of Schopenhauer's project is unquestionably the attempt to reunite Christianity, among other religions, with its original—and valuable—pessimistic significance. In which case, where Leibniz and Rousseau are metaphysical preludes to consolation, Schopenhauer is a metaphysical prelude to condemnation. Hamlyn's claim that metaphysics understands and religion consoles is therefore not quite right: metaphysics is never so neutral, at least not in these prime instances, and consolation is not the exclusive reserve of religion.

5. Conclusion

Schopenhauer's solution to the problem of why the innocent suffer and why the guilty prosper is to highlight how, in the end, the guilty are not as prosperous as we might think, and sufferers are not as innocent as they might seem. This state of affairs is governed by the principle of eternal justice, which, when put into philosophical terms, expresses the fact that each individual is ultimately identifiable with the metaphysical will-to-life, and that to this extent she inflicts all of her sufferings upon herself.

I have argued that Schopenhauer's use of the term eternal justice is not a misnomer, as some commentators claim, for the reasons that Schopenhauer's true aim is an interpretation of the principle itself, which has its own history in religious thought; that in general he appreciates the worth of religious doctrines for their ability to engender a correct moral orientation, and therefore he does not seek to displace them with his philosophical analyses; and that retention of the term highlights the irony of Schopenhauer's philosophical interpretation, which is in some respects at odds with how the doctrine is traditionally received. I have dealt with the objection that Schopenhauer's account of eternal justice fails to do justice to the individual as an individual, on the grounds that this was never within the intended scope of the account, but is rather the domain of temporal

justice. I have also argued that Schopenhauer's metaphysics of eternal justice is not identifiable with a metaphysics of cruelty, in virtue of the distance that cruelty presupposes in conjunction with its perverse form of intimacy. However, I do concede that Schopenhauer's metaphysics in general are capable of providing the foundations for a metaphysics of cruelty, which Schopenhauer himself attempts.

Finally, I have examined Schopenhauer's remark that his conception of eternal justice constitutes its own justification for suffering. It is a justification, I have argued, not in the sense that suffering occurs for some overriding, positive reason, as in the cases of Leibniz and Rousseau, but only in the sense that the will is not unjustly the recipient of the havoc that it brings about by its freely manifesting itself. This is in spite of the fact that the will does so blindly, for no particular reason at all, and might cease if only it were brought to some kind of consciousness of itself.

Chapter VI: Optimism and Pessimism in Schopenhauer's Ethics of Salvation

1. Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to shed some light on Schopenhauer's 'discussion of the ethical significance of conduct' (*WWR* I 378) at the closing and culmination of his philosophy. Rather than focus on his conceptions of justice and compassion, I have chosen to focus on the very final moment of his ethics, the doctrine of salvation through negation of the will-to-life, which is the ultimate source from which the first two derive their ethical significance anyway. I am, naturally, interested in the question of what relevance Schopenhauer's conception of salvation has to his pessimism. However, whereas the general pessimism of Schopenhauer's other views is obvious (excepting, perhaps, in the case of eternal justice), the mere notion of the possibility of salvation raises important questions about the depth of Schopenhauer's pessimism. Our initial inclination might be to think that salvation of any kind must be a cause for optimism.

I will begin with Schopenhauer's dissatisfaction with eudaemonic ethical solutions to the problem of suffering (section 2). This serves as an explanation for why Schopenhauer believes that the only real ethical solution to suffering is a transcendent one. It also helps to dismiss the possibility of a Stoical solution to Schopenhauer's pessimism, as Julian Young recommends. Merely for the purposes of exposition, I will then describe in some detail Schopenhauer's conception of salvation through negation of the will-to-life (section 3). I will then assess whether and in which respects this conception of salvation is either optimistic or pessimistic (section 4), concluding that, though it remains pessimistic in places where one might not expect a doctrine of salvation to be, it is undeniably optimistic with respect to its inclusion of a higher form of consciousness. Finally, I will argue that, at a certain point, Schopenhauer's doctrine of salvation is neither optimistic nor pessimistic in a positive sense (section 5). I will argue for this on the grounds that the mysticism at the foot of which Schopenhauer's philosophy ultimately arrives consciously excludes positive judgements about the goodness or badness of the state in which salvation consists.

2. Stoicism and the failure of eudaemonism

The only intelligible sense of 'practical reason' for Schopenhauer is its eudaemonic sense. Reason allows us to rise above the seductive present moment; to see life from a broader vantage point and devise ways in which to evade unnecessary pain and suffering. This, Schopenhauer remarks, is the privilege of being human, where 'man's mind shows its intrinsic worth and greatness' (*WWR* II 148). He rejects wholeheartedly the Kantian sense of practical reason; the very notion of a categorical imperative Schopenhauer regards as absurd, but he can at least stomach the prudent hypothetical imperatives of eudaemonic practical reason.⁷⁵ And yet the primary merit of Kant's moral philosophy, according to Schopenhauer, is precisely its freeing ethics from eudaemonism. More specifically, it lies in Kant's showing 'quite properly that the kingdom of virtue is not of this world' (*WWR* I 524). Kant represents a dividing line between the ancient and the modern, between the ethics of eudaemonia and the ethics of salvation. According to the former, virtue and happiness are related by the principle of identity: virtue is happiness. But according to the latter, they are related by the principle of reason (*Grund*): happiness, of some variety, is the consequence of virtue, if it factors in at all (*BM* 49). Kant, therefore, did the right thing for the wrong reasons. Eudaemonism fails, but not for the sake of deontology.

By means of a convincing consensus of opinion—quoting from Aristotle, Cicero, Chrysippus, Stobaeus, Epictetus, and Seneca—Schopenhauer concludes that in the ancient world (excepting Plato) the concern in ethics was whether and how 'virtue, entirely alone and of itself, is really sufficient for a happy life'. 'Unless [virtue] can do this,' according to Schopenhauer's ancient philosopher, 'it does not achieve what it ought, and is to be rejected' (*WWR* II 151). Stoicism, Schopenhauer's closest of kin in the world of eudaemonic ethics, along with its parent philosophy of Cynicism, takes eudaemonic practical reason 'to the utmost extreme' (*WWR* II 150). The starting point of Cynicism chimes with Schopenhauer's observations about the nature of desire and attainment:⁷⁶

[T]hey started out from the insight that the motions into which the will is put by the objects that stimulate and stir it, and the laborious and often frustrated efforts to attain them, or the fear of losing them when they are attained, and

⁷⁵ *BM* 52-8. See Cartwright (1999: 252-66) and Guyer (2012: 403-29).

⁷⁶ See Chapter II.

finally also the loss itself, produce far greater pains and sorrows than the want of all these objects ever can.

WWR II 152

As Schopenhauer further points out, the Cynics are separated from other ancient schools by the fact that their aim is the minimisation of pain, rather than the direct pursuit and maximisation of happiness. This approach wisely reflects the fact that happiness is ultimately negative in nature (WWR II 150).⁷⁷ The Cynical solution to the problem of desire and attainment is 'carrying out privation to the farther possible limit' (WWR II 152). The Cynic forgoes as many worldly possessions as possible, the three most prominent Cynics, Antisthenes, Diogenes, and Crates, essentially making vagabonds of themselves, owning only the bare essentials, such as 'lupins, water, a second-hand cloak, a knapsack, and a staff' (WWR II 154). Diogenes in particular preached the word 'that it had been granted to men to live an easy life, but that this remained hidden from those who coveted sweetmeats, ointments, and the like' and that 'he saw Fate looking at him and saying: I am not able to touch this mad dog' (WWR II 153-4n.).

The Stoics, Schopenhauer argues, translated the practice of the Cynics into theory. 'They were of the opinion that *actual* dispensing with everything that can be discarded is not required, but that it is sufficient for us constantly to regard possession and enjoyment as *dispensable*, and as held in the hand of chance' (WWR II 155). By 'changing the practical into the theoretical', therefore, Schopenhauer means that the Stoics turned action into attitude. According to the Stoics, possession itself is not nearly as important as how one possesses. Schopenhauer attributes the same basic deduction of this conclusion to the central proponents of Stoicism (Arrian, Epictetus, Cicero, Seneca): suffering arises from the incongruity between the nature of the world, on the one hand, and our desires and expectations, on the other; only the latter is within our control to change, hence our desires and expectations must be altered in accordance with the world (WWR II 158). At no point is renouncing ownership of objects strictly necessary, and, in fact, to materially dispossess oneself of anything betrays an untrustworthy psychological attachment to it: 'the man who actually has to do without these things in order not to be moved by them, shows in this way that in his heart he considers them as really good things, which we must put entirely out of sight if we are not to hanker after them' (WWR II 156). By comparison to Stoicism's

⁷⁷ See Chapter II for Schopenhauer on the negative nature of happiness.

healthily detached enjoyment of things—‘stoical equanimity’ as Schopenhauer calls it, or in his wrier moments, ‘spiritual dietetics’ (*WWR* II 159)—Cynicism appears like the cold-turkey method of treating addiction, where it might be doubtful, even in the mind of the addict herself, whether she is ever truly cured.

Cynicism and Stoicism agree upon a foundation to which, presumably, Schopenhauer could also assent. The picture of human beings with respect to the nature of their desires and their satisfactions is certainly familiar, and the proposed solution seems eminently reasonable—so reasonable, in fact, that virtue seems to arrive only as a by-product: ‘For the Stoic ethics is originally and essentially not a doctrine of virtues, but merely a guide to the rational life, whose end and aim is happiness through peace of mind. Virtuous conduct appears in it, so to speak, only by accident’ (*WWR* I 86). Indeed, Julian Young argues for a ‘Schopenhauerian solution to Schopenhauerian pessimism’ that consciously resembles Stoicism (Young 1987: 63-8). Firstly, he argues that the Schopenhauerian cycle of ‘goal-plan-execution’, upon which Schopenhauer models the relationship between willing and suffering, can be broken by the everyday forms of aesthetic consciousness that are found in smaller or larger acts of creativity. This includes many ‘inexhaustible passions — gardening, pigeon racing, handicraft of all sorts, cooking, carpentry, tramping, sport, or whatever’, so long as it is an absorbing and loosely intellectual experience, and not merely a timewasting task of ‘small motives’. The significance of these acts is that ‘the repetitive pattern of the life of willing is inapplicable [...] since [...] neither the goal nor the plan exists prior to execution’ (Young 1987: 66). Young feels encouraged that this is compatible with the basis of Schopenhauerian philosophy by the fact that Schopenhauer himself admits (*BM* 146) that small aesthetic experiences, such as simple colours and smells, as well as weighty intellectual ones, afford positive pleasure, or perhaps more accurately, that they afford a kind of peace.

Secondly, Young argues that the temporal dimension of the same ‘goal-plan-execution’ model, which is necessarily orientated in the direction of the future, can be thwarted if one attempts to live in the present, not as an animal or as an ascetic, but through a detached indifference towards what one has currently and what one stands to gain in the future—in short, as a Stoic. Again, Young is encouraged by some of Schopenhauer’s comments, such as his praise for the eudaemonist’s ability to allow the future to borrow from the present, ‘instead of the present from the future as in the case of the frivolous fool, who thus becomes impoverished and ultimately bankrupt’ (*WWR* II 150). This, Young also points out, is the limit of the extent to which Wittgenstein is willing

to follow Schopenhauer's ethical philosophy, quoting the remarks in Wittgenstein's notebooks in which Wittgenstein emphasises the important distinction between *whether* one wants and *how* one wants (Wittgenstein 1969: 77-81).

Though his solution is evidently consistent with certain elements of Schopenhauer's philosophy, Young is keenly aware that it is not by accident that Schopenhauer's ethics do not arrive at any form of Stoicism, and in fact that Schopenhauer ultimately rejects 'eudaemonology' (*Lebensweisheit*) in general.⁷⁸ This he curiously puts down to a personal tendency in Schopenhauer towards perfectionism, in the colloquial sense of the term. Accordingly, Schopenhauer will not accept the merely-good life depicted by Young's eudaemonic solution; hence, failing the possibility of a perfect life, Schopenhauer's solution has to be transcendent salvation through complete resignation from the world. As evidence of Schopenhauer's perfectionism, Young cites the passage in which Schopenhauer claims that weighing happiness against suffering is superfluous because the mere fact of pain decides the matter (*WWR* II 576). Its supposed inference—'this can never be perfect, so it's worthless'—'embodies' Schopenhauer's perfectionist impulse, according to Young (Young 1987: 68). However, in a previous chapter,⁷⁹ the argument from superfluousness has been explained as a consequence of Schopenhauer's metaphysical description of the negative nature of happiness, without recourse to any 'idiosyncratic' impulses on Schopenhauer's part. Schopenhauer's disappointment in Stoicism can also be explained independently of, and with no remote reference to, this alleged impulse. In doing so we find the real reasons that Schopenhauer would presumably give for resisting Young's Stoical solution to Schopenhauerian pessimism.

Schopenhauer's reasons for rejecting Stoicism are multiple, but they also vary in quality. The least convincing is founded upon his reason for rejecting Cynicism. Comparing the conduct of the Cynics to the conduct of the mendicants of Christianity and Brahmanism, Schopenhauer remarks:

⁷⁸ Schopenhauer does attempt a surprisingly extensive eudaemonology in the first volume of *Parerga and Paralipomena* (311-497), but it is prefaced with the proviso that it is possible only upon the suspension of 'the higher metaphysical ethical standpoint to which my real philosophy leads' (*PP* I 313). His eudaemonology does, incidentally, proceed from the quasi-Stoical wisdom that what a person is, which includes her moral character, contributes more to happiness than what she has or what she represents (*PP* I 323).

⁷⁹ See Chapter II.

The fundamental difference between the spirit of cynicism and that of asceticism comes out very clearly in the humility essential to asceticism, but so foreign to cynicism that the latter, on the contrary, has in view pride and disdain for all other men:

*Sapiens uno minor est Jove, dives,
Liber honoratus, pulcher, rex denique regum.*
(Horace, *Epist.* [I.i. 106]).

[It is true that the sage is second only to Jupiter, rich,
and free and honoured and beautiful and a King of kings]

WWR II 155

Schopenhauer takes exception to the disdain with which Cynicism regards the world and others. Judging by the quotation that he selects from Horace, this appears to be related to a conceitedness at having figured out the easiest course of life, perhaps compounded by the fact that it moves in the opposite direction of wealth and status. By contrast, the ascetic does not put herself spiritually above others—though of course she does put herself at some distance from life in general. Later Schopenhauer criticises Stoicism, or at least the disposition of ‘stoical equanimity’, on the similar grounds: it seeks ‘to disarm every misfortune by preparedness for all and contempt for everything; in practice this becomes cynical renunciation which prefers to reject once for all every means of help and every alleviation. It makes us dogs, like Diogenes in his tub’ (WWR II 577). If ever there were a candidate for Schopenhauer’s merely personal aversion to Cynicism or Stoicism, it seems to be this dislike of their shared bad attitude. One especially wonders why Stoicism must lapse back into Cynicism, from which it arose precisely in order not to live the life of a dog, according to Schopenhauer’s own history. Of course, Schopenhauer’s dislike may be aimed at something in the Cynic-Stoic attitude that rests upon genuinely objectionable foundations, and so its conceitedness and contempt is not only unpleasant but also mistaken and unearned, but this would require independent support.

A second unconvincing objection to Stoicism is that if it is successful, then it is too effective:

[T]he stoicism of the disposition which defies fate is [...] a good armour against the sufferings of life and helps us to endure the present; but it stands in the way

of true salvation, for it hardens the heart. Indeed, how can this be improved by sufferings if it is surrounded by a crust of stone and does not feel them?

PP II 320

The notion of improvement by suffering gives us a preview of what Schopenhauer will offer as an alternative to the Stoic response to suffering, but this in itself should worry us. As Young points out, submitted as an argument for favoring transcendent solutions over eudaemonic solutions, it begs the question to object that Stoicism precludes 'true salvation'. '[W]hy should we bother looking for *Erlösung* [salvation] if we live at least reasonably happy lives?' (Young 1987: 66).

As for his more considered objections, Schopenhauer notes: 'If we consider closely and seriously the goal of Stoicism [...] we find in it a mere hardening and insensibility to the blows of fate [...] *This, however, is still not a happy state or condition, but only the calm endurance of suffering which we foresee as inevitable?*' (*WWR* II 159, my emphasis). The Stoic would presumably respond with the claim that there is no distinction: a happy life just *is* the calm endurance of suffering. But, clearly, Schopenhauer believes that more can be offered—indeed that more must be offered. For, according to Schopenhauer, the Stoic lifestyle itself ultimately betrays the non-identity of happiness with endurance of suffering, and for this reason Stoicism arrives at a perverse and misguided surrogate for transcendent ethics. The problem, 'with which the Stoic ethics is affected even in its fundamental idea', is the 'complete contradiction' of 'wishing to live without suffering' (*WWR* I 90). Schopenhauer does not detail the precise nature of this contradiction; it could be the practical contradiction that to wish for anything at all, if this is not wishing in the idle sense, is to invite suffering, according to both Schopenhauer's philosophy and Stoicism itself. But more likely it is the rational contradiction, which is partly based upon the same central insight, that to wish for a life without suffering is to wish for an absurdity, for to live at all, as we know it, is to suffer.

The Stoic will perhaps respond that a life without any suffering is, of course, impossible, but that her goal is only a life of minimal suffering. Schopenhauer claims, however, that, given life's exigencies, with time and in practice these aims become one and the same—the shape of their paths do, after all, naturally converge upon one another. The 'contradiction is revealed', Schopenhauer says, 'in this ethic of pure reason itself by the fact that the Stoic is compelled to insert a recommendation of suicide in his guide to the blissful life' (*WWR* I 90). Suicide is indeed permissible within Stoicism, when the circumstances of

life threaten one's moral and spiritual independence (Zadorojnyi 2007: 216-230), or alternatively when, in Schopenhauer's words, 'the sufferings of the body, incapable of being philosophized away by any principles and syllogisms, are paramount and incurable' (*WWR* I 91). Schopenhauer may regard the latter as an inevitability, not necessarily through the intensity of the pain itself, but through the ineffectuality of mere reason and argument in the face of pain. If a life of minimal suffering is the Stoic's compromised substitute for the final goal of a life without suffering, which she does not ultimately relinquish and finally which manifests itself in the advocacy of suicide, then her attitude either implies a misunderstanding about the reality of normal human life, or it expresses a deeper dissatisfaction with mere endurance of suffering as a form of happiness or inner peace. It therefore suggests to Schopenhauer a yearning for something greater.

Schopenhauer is also sceptical about the feasibility of the Stoic attitude. He is doubtful that deliberative reason can ever regulate desires into such calm indifference. This rests partly upon empirical observations, rather casually stated: 'If such a reflection [that 'pain as such is inevitable and essential to life'] were to become a living conviction, it might produce a considerable degree of stoical equanimity [...] But such a powerful control of the faculty of reason over directly felt suffering is seldom or never found in fact' (*WWR* I 315).⁸⁰ But Schopenhauer also suggests an *a priori* argument, based upon the relationship between willing and resisting:

[The Stoics] left out of account the fact that everything to which we are accustomed becomes a necessity, and therefore can be dispensed with only with pain; that the will cannot be trifled with, and cannot enjoy pleasures without becoming fond of them; that a dog does not remain indifferent when we draw through his mouth a piece of roast meat, or a sage when he is hungry; and that between desiring and renouncing there is no mean.

WWR II 156

With Schopenhauer's general philosophy in mind, a number of possible reasons could be stated for why he thinks this. The first relies upon his conception of reason's relation to the

⁸⁰ Compare: 'a certain degree of this stoicism is not very rare. Often it may be affectation and amount to a *bonne mine au mauvais jeu* ['smile in the face of adversity']; where, however, it is genuine and unfeigned, it springs in most cases from a lack of energy, brightness, sensitiveness, and imagination, all of which are requisite to a great agony of sorrow. The phlegmatic and sluggish temperament of the Germans is particularly favourable to this kind of stoicism' (*PP* II 320).

will. Were the will not the primary essence of human beings, and were reason not correspondingly impotent with respect to the will, then reason may have been able to assume the role of this missing mediator between desiring and renouncing—it certainly does in other philosophies, namely those which Schopenhauer thinks his thesis of the primacy of the will is a significant advance upon (see *WWR* I 292). Secondly, for Schopenhauer, willing is not simply passively preferring. It is premised upon a lack which is strong enough to at least engender some action; to a greater or lesser extent, it is wanting and needing.⁸¹ Roughly speaking, therefore, to acquire the desire for something is to acquire the need for it, and either you need the thing or you do not, hence you either will it or you do not. At the very least, Stoicism is naïve to assume that indifferent and passive preference, if it really is possible, is generalisable in such a way that all willing of the kind that Schopenhauer describes (and himself generalises) can be overcome. Finally, for Schopenhauer, ‘conduct alone is evidence’ of a person’s inner moral state (*WWR* I 383), as will become more prominent later in the chapter. He further points out that the observable conduct permissible under Stoicism is indistinguishable from mere hedonism:

[T]hey believed they came to terms with their principles if, when sitting at a luxurious Roman table, they left no dish untasted [...] they ate, drank, and made merry, yet gave no thanks to God for it all, but rather made fastidious faces, and always bravely assured everyone that they got the devil a bit out of the whole feast!

WWR II 156

Elsewhere Schopenhauer contrasts the outward countenance of the Stoic as represented in art with the representation of the ascetic: ‘the Stoic sage [...] could never obtain life or inner poetical truth, but remains a wooden, stiff, lay-figure with whom one can do nothing. He does not himself know where to go with his wisdom’ (*WWR* I 91). The ascetic, on the other hand, is the image of inner peace (for reasons soon to be detailed).

Overall, therefore, Schopenhauer doubts the sincerity of the Stoics, branding them ‘mere braggarts’ who have ‘sophisticated themselves into all the amenities of life’ and ‘are related to the Cynics in much the same way as the well-fed Benedictines and Augustinians are to the Franciscans and Capuchins’ (*WWR* II 156). The Cynics, notwithstanding their

⁸¹ See Chapter II.

haughty disdain, at least had the courage of their convictions, and also had a way of showing it: they really did get rid of the items that they feared to desire. The Stoic may invoke the observation noted above, that materially dispensing with possessions betrays an unhealthy psychological attachment to them. However, in the Cynics' defence, from a Schopenhauerian perspective, there is no such thing as *mere* psychological attachment; in fact, it is the Stoics' material possession that necessarily betrays material attachment, which is attachment of the real and fundamental kind.

3. Negation of the will-to-life

Broadly construed, Schopenhauer's ethics of salvation, which consists in the final negation of the will-to-life, contains a number of similarities to Stoicism. These are the elements of the inevitability of suffering, which is traceable to the nature of desire; of the role that knowledge plays in removing us from such suffering; and of the spiritually detached nature of this removal. The first of these three elements in Schopenhauer's philosophy has been rehearsed enough,⁸² and differs the least from the Stoic picture; the second and the third, on the other hand, differ in some important respects.

Knowledge and negation of the will-to-life

The type of cognition that guides Stoic equanimity is practical reason. It is, therefore, abstract and conceptual, deliberative and calculating; it guides the will into the easiest, least painful course of life. It does not exert a direct influence upon the will, according to Schopenhauer, but merely presents the will with better or worse options. By contrast, the character of knowledge with regards to Schopenhauer's ethics of salvation is, firstly, intuitive. It might better be described as an insight, which reveals to the subject of knowledge not a rational plan, but a picture, reflecting reality as it is, but not as she has seen or known it before:

⁸² See Chapter II.

Just as we previously saw hatred and wickedness conditioned by egoism, and this depending on knowledge [*Erkenntniß*; cognition] being entangled in the *principium individuationis*, so we found as the source and essence of justice, and when carried farther to highest degrees, of love, that penetration of the *principium individuationis*. [...]

Now, if seeing through the *principium individuationis*, if this direct knowledge of the identity of the will in all its phenomena, is present in a high degree of distinctness, it will at once show an influence on the will which goes still farther. [...] No suffering is any longer strange or foreign to him. All the miseries of others, which he sees and is so seldom able to alleviate, all the miseries of which he has indirect knowledge, and even those he recognizes merely as possible, affect his mind just as do his own. [...] He knows the whole, comprehends its inner nature, and finds it involved in a constant passing away, a vain striving, an inward conflict, and a continual suffering.

WWR I 378-9

The subject transmutes into the 'undimmed mirror of the world' (WWR I 390). The will sees its monstrous reflection and resigns; it is silenced, tranquilised, 'quieted' (WWR I 379).

This leads to the second way in which knowledge in Schopenhauer's ethics of salvation differs from the knowledge of practical reason: it induces a result directly.

[S]ince [...] that *self-suppression of the will* comes from knowledge, but all knowledge and insight as such are independent of free choice, that denial of willing, that entrance into freedom, is not to be forcibly arrived at by intention or design, but comes from the innermost relation of knowing and willing in man; hence it comes suddenly, as if flying in from without.

WWR I 404

The subject neither selectively gathers knowledge, nor decides what to do with it, but rather is struck by it. Schopenhauer therefore compares this transformation to the religious doctrine of election by grace, according to which 'we can never be justified by own actions, but obtain forgiveness for our sins only by virtue of the merits of the Mediator [...] Sinful works and their consequence must be annulled and annihilated at some time either by the pardon of another, or by the appearance of our own better knowledge' (WWR 607-8).

Knowledge characteristic of negation of the will-to-life is, in short, a visionary state that irresistibly comes over us and moves us.

The knowledge associated with negation of the will-to-life has its irresistible effect both in virtue of its form and in virtue of its content. The content of this knowledge is every actual and possible suffering that the subject recognises, which she treats as no different from her own. This, Schopenhauer notes, is an intolerably difficult load to bear:

In this way he now identifies his own lot with that of mankind in general; but this is a hard lot, namely that of striving, suffering, and dying. Therefore, whoever, by renouncing every accidental advantage, desires for himself no other lot than of mankind in general, can no longer desire even this for any length of time. Clinging to life and its pleasures must now soon yield, and make way for universal renunciation; consequently, there will come about the denial of the will.

WWR II 606-7

In this passage, Schopenhauer seems to suggest that the sheer weight or volume of such an extraordinarily broad insight is ultimately overwhelming. No one could continue to live with that kind of burden. Hence, the state of salvation, which consists precisely in giving way to this burden, is not the result of a deliberate choice but is forcefully unpreventable.

Schopenhauer also suggests that no one could continue to affirm life once she has realised, not just how much actual and possible suffering there is, but how affirmation itself relates to that suffering:

Now all this lies just as near to him as only his own person lies to the egoist. Now how could he, with such knowledge of the world, affirm this life through constant acts of will, and precisely in this way bind himself more and more firmly to it, press himself to it more and more closely?

WWR I 379

In this instance, what the subject of knowledge discovers is not just the extent of the suffering, but her essential relation to its creation. She is not, she realises, simply thrown into a world of suffering, but is intimately related to its mechanism—in fact, she is ultimately identifiable with it. Its operation, at least as it is manifested in her, depends upon

her continued affirmation; however, her affirmation in turn depends upon some degree of ignorance of her role in the whole scene of suffering. It is only on the condition that she can falsely disassociate her actions from the suffering of others, and indeed from her own suffering, that she continues to perform them; but with the higher consciousness characteristic of salvation, she knows differently. To rephrase this at the level of the will itself, it only harms itself on the condition that it is alienated from itself through the individuation of the principle of sufficient reason; therefore, by means of the vision of the subject who pierces this individuation, the will is forced to stop.

The will also ceases, Schopenhauer suggests, because of the form in which such an insight is grasped. Bear in mind that the character of the knower here is one who no longer makes distinctions between the significance of her own suffering and the significance of the suffering of others, even when it is merely possible suffering. She does not, therefore, relate to this knowledge in the way one might normally relate to knowledge of the world:

[W]hoever is still involved in the *principium individuationis*, in egoism, knows only particular things and their relation to his own person, and these then become ever renewed *motives* of his willing. On the other hand, that knowledge of the whole, of the inner nature of the thing-in-itself [...] becomes the *quieter* of all and every willing.

WWR I 379

The individual is already cognitively discounted in this form of knowledge. She no longer relates the object of knowledge to her egoistic will, because she is no longer even conscious of her will. This theoretical un-egoism therefore translates into practical un-egoism;⁸³ her will is 'quieted' for the reason that, in not being related to the objects of experience, it is not being presented with anything to which it could possibly respond.

Having noted the two different ways in which the effect of the insight associated with salvation obtains its character, that is, as something which comes over the subject seemingly from the outside, it should further be noted that Schopenhauer himself moves quite freely between these two ways. Take, for example, the following passage, which is noticeably similar to the passage just quoted above:

⁸³ An adaption of Schopenhauer's terms 'theoretical egoism' and 'practical egoism' (WWR I 104).

[Salvation] appears only when the will, after arriving at the knowledge of its own inner nature, obtains from this a *quieter*, and is thus removed from the effect of *motives* which lies in the province of a different kind of knowledge, whose objects are only phenomena.

WWR I 404

In the first half of this sentence, Schopenhauer describes positively what knowledge is gained, that is, of the will's 'own inner nature', while also noting that a 'quieter' is obtained from it; in the second half, however, he describes negatively what kind of knowledge this is, insofar as it is not knowledge of the motivating kind. It is unclear as to which of these actually comes first and is decisive in engendering the irresistible cessation of willing: is it *what* is realised, or *how* it is realised?

Bernard Reginster argues that we should hesitate to answer that it is both, for in tandem these two seem to create a paradox:

Schopenhauer indeed places two apparently conflicting demands upon reflection. On the one hand, reflection allows me to gain the necessary knowledge of the world and its miseries by making me take a pure, objective stance toward it [...] in which I am not actively involved at all [...] On the other hand, if this reflective knowledge of the world and its miseries is supposed to induce resignation in me, then it must affect me (or my will) [...] For unless I came to recognize that the miseries I contemplate are also my own, such contemplation could not affect my will and elicit resignation.

Reginster 2009: 114

This he dubs the 'paradox of reflection' in Schopenhauer. By reflection, Reginster means where 'relief from the "miseries of willing" is actually afforded by the very contemplation of them' (Reginster 2009: 112). He distinguishes it from mere 'diversion'. The point of Reginster's paradox is that knowledge of the world's miseries is supposed to directly induce resignation, not, as noted, by an act of will itself, but by knowledge's overpowering the will entirely; yet this knowledge is not possible unless it first assumes a form of detached objectivity, and the detached objectivity seems to preclude being directly affected by the knowledge obtained, hence the paradox. How can *I* (or *my* will) be affected, if I no longer identify with my individual self?

Reginster's paradox can be resolved in two ways: one at the level of the individual, and the other at the level of the metaphysical will-to-life. At the level of the individual, the paradox does not arise if it is assumed that resignation is induced not by the content of its characteristic knowledge, but by the form. For, as noted, the mere form of the knowledge that induces negation of the will-to-life would be sufficient to induce a direct effect upon the will, without reference to its content. The practical transformation, that is, resignation, follows from the cognitive transformation, that is, reflection, directly and without choice because the form of the cognitive transformation is, as we have seen, such that it precludes all individually motivated action, which therefore constitutes resignation. This is, perhaps, the true meaning of that crucial beam in Schopenhauer's ethics of salvation, the 'innermost relation of knowing and willing in man' (*WWR* I 404). On this level, then, form must take priority over content in resignation.

On the other hand, it may also be that the paradox arises only because Reginster assumes that the content of the insight must directly induce an effect in the individual as an individual. Certainly, it is the individual who actually resigns from life, but one must be aware that resignation in the individual is ultimately the phenomenal manifestation of the will itself rejecting itself. The function of the individual's knowledge is, after all, only the vehicle by which the will catches a glimpse of itself; it is the peculiar circumstance in which the fundamental principle of reality as a whole is given the opportunity to affirm the fundamental principle of reality as a whole, and declines. Contrary to Reginster's assumption, therefore, it is not necessary that the misery of the world directly affects *me* as an individual. What is necessary is that the misery of the world directly affects the will, and I am affected only to the extent that I mediate the self-knowledge by means of which the will is affected. Hence, Schopenhauer often talks about how the metaphysical will is affected by way of talking about how the individual is affected, but really the individual is only a reflection of what is actually happening to the will. Reading Schopenhauer on this level, and in contrast to the first solution, there seems to be no ultimate problem with him speaking as if the content of knowledge is directly effective in resignation. There is, moreover, no tension between these two solutions to Reginster's paradox.

Detachment and negation of the will-to-life

Detachment according to the Stoic model means an indifference to gaining and losing possessions, which should all be treated as if in the hands of fate. It is an attempt to desire in the best possible way, that is, the least potentially painful way—but it is, nevertheless, to desire. According to Schopenhauer's model of salvation, on the other hand, it is desire itself which is uprooted. Take this illustrative analogy:

If we compared life to a circular path of red-hot coals having a few cool places, a path that we have to run over incessantly, then the man entangled in delusion is comforted by the cool place on which he is now standing, or which he sees near him, and sets out to run over the path. But the man who sees through the *principium individuationis*, and recognises the true nature of things themselves, and thus sees the whole, is no longer susceptible of such consolation; he sees himself in all places simultaneously, and withdraws.

WWR I 380

As Reginster puts it, the resignation of the saved person is 'not an *exercise of agency*' but 'something like a *breakdown* or *dissolution of agency*' (Reginster 2009: 106). It is not a matter of making the best choices, but a matter of ceasing to make choices. This, however, I take (as perhaps Reginster does not) to be distinct from the fact that resignation is not itself 'arrived at by intention or design' (WWR I 404). For it is one thing to say that salvation is not within the scope of intentions, but it is quite another to say that this form of salvation leaves us with no intentions at all; one can imagine a form of salvation which one does not arrive at by willing, but the final result of which is still not will-lessness. However, this is precisely how radical the form of detachment described by Schopenhauer is: 'he ceases to will anything, guards against attaching his will to anything' (WWR I 380).

Both sides of the distinction that I draw strengthen Schopenhauer's comparison of his doctrine of negation of the will-to-life to that of grace. For, Schopenhauer stresses, included within the doctrine of grace is the spiritual rebirth of the person, a total transformation of character, as well as the fact that this rebirth is only ever granted from the outside:

[T]he character itself, can be entirely eliminated by the above-mentioned change of knowledge [...] It is [...] that which in the Christian Church is very appropriately called *new birth* or *regeneration*, and the knowledge from which it

springs, the *effect of grace*. Therefore, it is not a question of change, but of an entire suppression of the character [...]

WWR I 403

We 'become quite different from, indeed the very opposite of, what we are' (WWR II 604). This solution seems only fitting, given the nature of the problem: the very essence of the human being is the necessary and constant source of its torment, hence it is the essence itself that must be addressed. It is also this that ultimately gives Schopenhauer's ethics its transcendent, other-worldly character. Such a radical departure from selfhood is, by proxy, a radical departure from the world, for the world and the self are very closely intertwined in Schopenhauer's philosophy—one is ultimately the reflection of the other.⁸⁴

The physical and metaphysical status of the person in which all of this occurs must certainly be peculiar. For, if she was only the manifestation of the will, and if she is now struck by will-lessness, then one might reasonably expect it to follow that she simply dissolves out of existence completely—which, of course, she does not. The will, Schopenhauer notes, still has some claim upon the resigned person, for example: 'His body, healthy and strong, expresses the sexual impulse through the genitals, but he denies the will, and gives the lie to the body; he desires no sexual satisfaction on any condition' (WWR I 380). Therefore, she cannot be free from the will in every sense; it continues, at least, to manifest itself as the instrument of its prior purposes. She seems instead to be free from the kind of willing that falls within the sphere of desire and action—in short, willing in its normal, volitional sense—which does not include her bodily forms and functions. But even still, there is a living tension between the residual presence of will, on the one hand, and of will-lessness of this specified kind, on the other:

He who has reached this point still feels, as living body, as concrete phenomenon of the will, the natural tendency to every kind of willing; but he deliberately suppresses it, since he compels himself to refrain from doing all that he would like to do, and on the other hand to do all that he would not like to do, even if this has no further purpose than that of serving to mortify the will.

⁸⁴ 'From the most ancient, man has been called the microcosm. I have reversed the proposition, and have shown the world as the macranthropos, in so far as will and representation exhaust the true nature of the world as well as that of man' (WWR II 642).

This is, indeed, highly peculiar. The supposedly resigned person is constantly subject to an intense conflict between what she physically is (the remnants of what she was) and what she has spiritually become. She must therefore occasionally be revived from will-lessness even in the volitional sense, for such notions as deliberate self-suppression clearly do not make sense without reference to the will; nevertheless, she is revived only in order to keep in check desires that affirm the body rather than deny it. The will therefore remains, but strictly in the capacity of an enemy to itself, whenever such an enemy is needed; it will only do things that deny the body's gratification—presumably other forms of gratification have already been purged—and will avoid the things that affirm it.

This kind of self-mortification admittedly presupposes another kind of will-lessness, in the sense that the individual in question, in actively denying her will, evidently no longer attaches any value to the fulfilment of her will; in fact, she attempts to assist in its destruction. But, equally, even this presupposes willing of a first-order kind, which, persisting in the body, is what is actively denied in the first place, and also of a second-order kind, which provides the force behind the active denial of the body itself. The willing of this second-order kind does not act directly upon the first-order willing, though its aim is still to act upon it somehow; the body mediates the way in which second-order willing obtains its effect, in that the body is put under such pressure as to challenge willing of the first-order kind.

In fact, however, absolute will-lessness is only ever fully confirmed in death, according to Schopenhauer. The paradoxically ascetic state, which is characterised by a certain kind of will-lessness, but is not free from willing in every sense, is merely a preparation for death, when even the claims of the body finally cease:

[I]f death comes, which breaks up the phenomenon of this will, the essence of such will having long since expired through free denial of itself except for the feeble residue which appears as the vitality of this body, then it is most welcome, and is cheerfully accepted as a longed-for deliverance [...] This last slender bond is now severed; for him who ends thus, the world has at the same time ended.

The comparison to themes in Buddhism and Brahmanism are obvious, as Schopenhauer well notes. The consequence is that will-lessness can never be absolute in an embodied being, but will-lessness of a certain kind—the cessation of all willing except that which is necessary to deny bodily exigencies, which presupposes a general disregard for the self—is nevertheless the necessary preparatory spiritual transformation for ultimate and absolute release in death.⁸⁵

The next best course

It is worth briefly noting that the route to negation of the will-to-life does not always go via knowledge. Up until now, following Schopenhauer, we have presented it as a gradual broadening of perspective, beyond the insight that informs compassionate and noble action, in which one treats another's pain as one's own, to such dimensions that one takes upon oneself all possible suffering of which one can become conscious. The second route Schopenhauer notes is brought about 'by one's own deeply felt suffering, thus not merely by the appropriation of others' suffering and by the knowledge, introduced thereby, of the vanity and wretchedness of our existence' (*WWR* II 630). He gives this route the title of the 'next best course' to salvation (*WWR* II 630).

The examples that Schopenhauer offers of what he means are all circumstances in which someone is confronted with a personally traumatic event so painful and disturbing that his or her will-to-life is annulled. His two prime examples are the monastic conversions of Raymond Lull and of Abbé de Rancé, who are thrown on to the path to salvation in similar fashion: each discovers that something terrible has happened to the object of his love; in Lull's case, that she has been struck by cancer, and in Rancé case, not only that she has died suddenly, but that in order to be fitted into her leaden coffin, her head has been separated from the rest of her body (*WWR* I 394-5; *WWR* II 630-1). Schopenhauer also includes an impressive array of 'gallows-sermons' as examples of the next best course, collected solely from newspaper reports. Confronted with a certain and imminent death, a considerable wisdom can be discerned in the words of these convicts, Schopenhauer argues. One of the condemned writes just prior to his execution, for example: 'I am persuaded that unless the natural heart be broken, and renewed by divine

⁸⁵ Compare Jacquette (1999: 302-14) and Young (2009: 157-8).

mercy, however noble and amiable it may be deemed by the world, it can never think of eternity without inwardly shuddering' (*WWR* II 632). Schopenhauer concurs with this insight, and the behaviour of some of the other convicts he mentions, such as the murderer Mary Cooney who 'kissed the rope which encircled her neck', certainly seem also to be representative of a broken natural heart.

Schopenhauer suggests some less extraordinary versions of the next best course. They are still routes to salvation via personal suffering, but they are (unfortunately) more common. Immediately following his discussion of the gallows-sermons, Schopenhauer notes a distinction, crediting David Strauss, between the wordings of the gospel of Luke and the gospel of Matthew when recounting the Sermon on the Mount (*WWR* I 632). Matthew appends 'in spirit' on to Luke's 'blessed are the poor', and 'after righteousness' on to 'those who hunger'. Schopenhauer concludes that where Luke's version of the Sermon addresses the literally poor, Matthew's version addresses the spiritually poor. Schopenhauer therefore gives greater credence to Luke's version on the grounds that it is referring to the next best course: the pain of poverty and impecuniousness will lead a person to resign from life and thereby be saved with far greater ease than the prosperous. Schopenhauer also notes perhaps the most commonplace next best course of all: the ubiquitous experience of facing one's own death.

[I]f suffering has such a sanctifying force, this will belong in an even higher degree to death, which is more feared even than any suffering. Accordingly, in the presence of every person who has died, we feel something akin to the awe that is forced from us by great suffering; in fact, every case of death presents itself to a certain extent as a kind of apotheosis or canonization.

WWR II 636

It is therefore not wise to wish, as we often do, for a sudden death. Death is rather an opportunity laid out for all to realise the same 'contradiction of the will-to-live with itself', and Schopenhauer goes on to say similar things of old age. If wisdom fails to be drawn from these natural experiences, then '[t]he purpose of existence is missed' (*WWR* II 638).

In contrast to the gradual cognitive and conative dissipation of self described earlier, the next best course must initially go through a strong sense of selfhood; for, a prior affirmation of one's individuality is a main contributing factor in this kind of conversion. It is not by accident that what unites the cases of Lull and Rancé is a sexual attachment, the

highest expression of affirmation of the will-to-life according to Schopenhauer⁸⁶—perhaps this is why their conversions are so rapid by comparison to the slower grind of poverty. But, having said this, the final results of both roads to salvation, knowledge and suffering, are remarkably similar. Those who are subject to the next best course are stunned into the same objective appreciation of the cruel nature of the world: ‘the knowledge of the contradiction of the will-to-live with itself can, through great misfortune and suffering, violently force itself on us, and the vanity of all endeavour can be perceived’ (*WWR* I 394). The means may, in these cases, be suffering, but the end remains knowledge and detachment.

4. Salvation as optimistic or pessimistic

It would stretch a point to say that Schopenhauer's ethics of salvation through negation of the will-to-life is fully optimistic. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that his pessimism is diluted by the chance for salvation offered in his philosophy. Young therefore argues that Schopenhauer cannot be ‘an *absolute* pessimist, a pessimist about all possible worlds’ because he is ‘a pessimist only about this one’ (Young 1987: 53).⁸⁷ This leaves salvation as optimistic in an inter-worldly sense, as it were: it is good to the extent that it transports us from a bad world to a better one. I will postpone assessment of this until

⁸⁶ See *WWR* II 531-560.

⁸⁷ For the purposes of the following discussion, including the next section, I will follow Young's example in speaking in terms of worlds and possible worlds. The state of salvation about which, Young suggests, Schopenhauer is not pessimistic is not strictly speaking a possible world, but is a possible state of conation and cognition. Of course, as already noted above, Schopenhauer's idealism ties the world so close to cognition that the interchangeability of the two is almost legitimised. Indeed, Schopenhauer himself speaks of the ethics of salvation in terms of worlds; for example, recall that for Schopenhauer the value of Kant's ethics is that it showed ‘quite properly that the kingdom of virtue is not of this world’ (*WWR* I 524). But the notion of a possible world cannot be used here in the sense that, for example, Leibniz or David Lewis might use it; that is, as a discrete, self-consistent and self-contained universe. At most, we might use it in a similar way to how Wittgenstein occasionally uses the term ‘world’—which no doubt owes something to Schopenhauer—where will and cognition (and, for Wittgenstein at least, language) are all intimately connected with the world. For example: ‘The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man’; ‘So too at death the world does not alter, but comes to an end’ (*Tractatus* 6.43-6.431/Wittgenstein 1961: 87; recall *WWR* I 382 from above: ‘This last slender bond is now severed; for him who ends thus, the world has at the same time ended’). Something that unites all of these senses of the term ‘world’, however, is a kind of unreachability of one world from another, to some degree or other, which I will discuss in Schopenhauer's case at some length. The vocabulary of possible worlds makes this discussion slightly easier, but I ultimately remain sceptical about its literalness, as well as about the idealist assumption that might underwrite its literalness.

later, when I examine what Schopenhauer says, or could possibly have to say, about the value of other possible worlds. I ask in this section, however, whether or not there is an intra-worldly sense in which salvation is optimistic. Is there anything about it that makes this world good, or is there anything good about this world that makes salvation possible? I will consider only one candidate: the numerous references that Schopenhauer makes to resignation from life as the real purpose of life.

Not all purposes are good purposes, of course, and something is not necessarily good merely because it has a purpose. But in the case of life itself, to have a purpose seems better than to have no purpose at all. Nietzsche's famous articulation of this, 'man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will' (Nietzsche 2000: 599), now looms large in the background of Schopenhauer's ethics of salvation. Although, Nietzsche is already pointing to a hidden purpose that Schopenhauer himself does not admit; for Nietzsche, resignation from life, or the will to resign from life, is the way in which the resigner herself gives (feeble) significance to her otherwise meaningless life, but a number of Schopenhauer's remarks suggest that to him the world and our lives are themselves inherently directed towards salvation through resignation, if only we would allow it. Life therefore comes with its own purpose, according to Schopenhauer, which is, ironically, to ward us off affirming life. Schopenhauer claims, for example, that 'nothing else can be stated as the aim of our existence except the knowledge that it would be better for us not to exist' (*WWR* II 605), and that life has 'two fundamental purposes, diametrically opposed [...] One purpose is that of the individual will, directed to chimerical happiness in an ephemeral dreamlike, and deceptive existence [...] The other purpose is that of fate, directed obviously enough to the destruction of our happiness, and thus to the mortification of our will' (*WWR* II 639). If it were not for the illusory sheen of the purpose of attaining happiness, then the constant messages that life sends us as to its real purpose would be received loud and clear. In a short illustrative dialogue between 'Man' and the 'World-Spirit', Schopenhauer has the World-Spirit finally say as an aside: 'Should I tell him that the value of life consists precisely in its teaching him not to will it? For this supreme dedication life itself must first prepare him' (*PP* II 321).

David Cartwright notes that in this sense, for Schopenhauer, that which 'makes life so deeply problematic, suffering, has telic dimensions' (Cartwright 1998: 121). 'In fact,' Schopenhauer says, 'suffering is the process of purification by which alone man is in most cases sanctified' (*WWR* II 636); it is 'the fleetest animal that bears you to perfection' (*WWR* II 633). For once in Schopenhauer's philosophy, that which is presumably desirable,

salvation, goes with the grain of life—albeit via tremendous pain and in the direction of self-negation. Moreover, Cartwright argues, Schopenhauer's saint is comparable to Nietzsche's *Übermensch* for the reason that both are intended to be 'salvific' in this sense. Both represent 'the ultimate in human accomplishment', and each thereby 'signifies overcoming being human' (Cartwright 1998: 147-8). David Cooper, citing Michael Tanner, stresses too that it is sometimes hard to distinguish the *Übermensch* from the saint: both, seemingly, finally find everything in the world to be dreadful, and, at least outwardly, it is difficult to tell apart their respective reactions; 'where is the real difference between saying 'Yea' to the reappearance of everything [...] and stoic [!] resignation to the fact that the whole show will keep on playing?' (Cooper 1998: 211).

Nevertheless, Cartwright raises some important doubts about the broader 'salvific' potential of both the saint and the *Übermensch*, for '[t]hey seem to redeem only themselves' (Cartwright 1998: 149). Indeed, Nietzsche's Zarathustra claims that 'The Superman is the meaning of the earth' (Nietzsche 1969: 42), and Schopenhauer claims similarly that 'the rest of nature has to expect salvation from man who is at the same time priest and sacrifice' (*WWR* I 381), and in either case it is difficult to see how this can really be so. Schopenhauer, however, argues for his claim on the extremely precarious grounds that if self-denial were to become universal, and therefore the entire human race were to come to an end, then because of 'the connexion of all phenomenon of the will, I think I can assume that, with the highest phenomenon of the will, the weaker reflection of it, namely the animal world, would also be abolished', and therefore finally that with 'the complete abolition of knowledge', the whole world would vanish too (*WWR* I 380). Putting aside the very strange assumption that the animals would be abolished along with humankind, Schopenhauer's argument still implies that nature is not redeemed by one human being alone, but by the universalised potential within humankind. Later he even seems to retract this argument altogether, perhaps wisely, stating that 'if [...] from a very lofty standpoint, we see a justification for the sufferings of mankind, this nevertheless does not extend to the animals whose sufferings are considerable' (*PP* II 322). Schopenhauer too, then, eventually sees that the saint saves only the saint.

If resignation is the secret aim of life, then does this change the significance of the acts performed in the course of an individual's life? Are they any less in vain if salvation is reached through the suffering incurred by them? Not according to Schopenhauer. '[A]fter the entrance of true knowledge', he says, 'with complete resignation in its train, and so after the arrival of the new birth, the morality and immorality of all previous conduct becomes a

matter of indifference' (*WWR* II 607). Here and elsewhere Schopenhauer quotes a suitable Vedic saying: 'He who beholds the highest and profoundest, has his heart's knot cut, all his doubts are resolved, and his works come to nought' (see also *WWR* II 639). Suffering therefore 'purifies' and 'sanctifies' only to the extent that it ultimately washes away the significance of one's acts—or, rather, it finally exposes one's acts as devoid of all significance in the first place. It in no way lends them retroactive significance, but quite the opposite.

We might, therefore, be mistaken to detect much optimism in the soteriological purpose of life as Schopenhauer presents it. The salvation in which it consists does not extend to anyone beyond the individual who attains it, it does not redeem her deeds but, on the contrary, confirms for her their vanity, and this is not even to mention that the mode of this salvation is (or tends towards) complete spiritual dissolution of that individual. The purpose of life seems not to do what we would like such a purpose to do. But perhaps, by now, we should expect this from Schopenhauer. Recall how in his discussion of eternal justice, Schopenhauer essentially replies to the person who is committed to seeing the world through the lens of justice that the most credible conclusion, based upon the abundant evidence, is that our behaviour and constitution must warrant suffering in return—any other conclusion would be sophistical and disingenuous. Likewise, if one is determined to see purpose in life or the world itself, then the most plausible conclusion is that this purpose is to suffer to some devastating end (or to no end at all): 'If suffering is not the first and immediate object of our life, then our existence is the most inexpedient and inappropriate thing in the world. For it is absurd to assume that the infinite pain, which everywhere abound in the world and springs from the want an misery essential to life, could be purposeless and purely accidental' (*PP* II 291). It is roundly agreed, after all, outside of Schopenhauer's philosophy and even amongst its opposition, that the world is a fine instrument for suffering. We should not be dissatisfied with this very obvious fact just because it is threatening; an investigation is prejudiced if from the outset it will not settle for a displeasing result, and so the purpose of life should not be expected to do anything to begin with, except for fit the evidence.

It is, however, worth taking one final, closer look at suffering and salvation as the purpose of life before its potential optimism is relinquished. Although Schopenhauer often speaks, as I have, as if the aim or purpose of life is resignation itself—the conative aspect of salvation, let us say—there is evidence to suggest that its aim is also the cognitive aspect of salvation. For, he does say that 'nothing else can be stated as the aim of our existence

except the *knowledge* that it would be better for us not to exist' (my emphasis). Furthermore, his essay 'The Road to Salvation' opens with the claim, 'There is only one inborn error, and that is the *notion* that we exist in order to be happy' (*WWR* II 634, my emphasis), and then on the opposite page, after discussing the danger into which this inborn error leads us, he says:

[E]verything in life is certainly calculated to bring us back from that original error, and to convince us that the purpose of our existence is not to be happy. Indeed, if life is considered more closely and impartially, it presents itself rather as specially intended to show us that we are *not* to feel happy in it [...]

WWR II 635

There is a mixture of purposes here, suggesting they occur together and in parallel: there is the purpose of not being happy—a negative reference, seemingly, to the purifying process of suffering—which is itself part of the fundamental circumstances of life, but there is also the appearance that life gives of being 'calculated' or 'intended' to induce *consciousness* of those circumstances. 'Now whoever has returned by one path or the other', Schopenhauer says, 'from that error which is *a priori* inherent in us, from that *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* ['first false step'] of our existence, will soon see everything in a different light, and will find that the world is in harmony with his insight, though not with his wishes' (*WWR* II 635). The upshot seems to be, therefore, not to finally have the world that conforms to one's desires, but at least to see the world for what it is, which perhaps includes the knowledge that the constant distance at which the world stands from one's desires is necessitated by the world's very nature. Hence, resignation follows.

Consequently, suffering is doubly purifying. It purifies conatively, that is, morally, in that it gradually or rapidly forces will-lessness upon its subject, but it also purifies cognitively, in that, at the same time, it reveals to consciousness the true nature of life and the world—suffering is, in fact, their true nature, constantly flickering beneath the illusory goal of happiness. As noted further above, cognitive purification is a condition of conative purification, either because the content of what is revealed induces radical resignation, or because the form in which it is revealed is incompatible with motivated action. In Schopenhauer's philosophy, one has to see right in order to be right; [...] to be just, noble,

and benevolent is nothing but to translate my metaphysics into action' (*WWR* II 600), he says, but at its final stage, Schopenhauer's metaphysics dictates supreme *inaction*.⁸⁸

One notices, however, that whereas suffering purifies the will out of existence, it purifies the intellect into cognisance of the highest truth. It would be unwise to deny Schopenhauer's alethic optimism; he certainly believes that access to the truth is possible, and, as we have seen, that the truth is 'profoundly liberating' (Berman: 1999: 181).⁸⁹ At one point he praises the 'hero of truth', such as Socrates and Giordano Bruno, who 'takes suffering and death upon himself [...] for universal and important truths, and for the eradication of great errors' (*WWR* I 375). Indeed, his abuse of other philosophers is often the violence that their (in his view) sophistries do to truth.⁹⁰ It follows that the purpose of life, salvation, when it is seen in its cognitive aspect, is confluent with a closely held value of Schopenhauer's; the world, bad as it is, at least forcibly drives us towards the truth. The optimistic aspect of his ethics of salvation is therefore undeniable in this respect—though, of course, Schopenhauer himself never calls it optimism.

We are, therefore, warranted to say that Schopenhauer's pessimism is diluted not just on the grounds that it is optimistic about the nature and attainability of the truth—which would not be all that remarkable to find to some degree or other in a philosopher⁹¹—but that, according to his ethical philosophy, life is so constituted as to transport us to the truth, which we foolishly resist.⁹² Knowledge of the truth is, of course, valuable only in virtue of its form, since the content of this intuition assigns positive worthlessness to the world overall, and the value of the effect that it induces is, upon closer inspection, questionable at the very least. But formal value is value nonetheless.

⁸⁸ See Cartwright (1998: 127; 2009: 148).

⁸⁹ David Berman classifies Schopenhauer as an 'epistemological optimist' ('although the world is bad [metaphysical pessimism], knowledge about it is good, indeed profoundly liberating'), and Nietzsche as a reactive 'epistemological pessimist'. I agree. Terminologically, however, I follow Aaron Ridley's (2010: 437) classification of Nietzsche's position, at least as far as his aesthetic philosophy is concerned, as 'alethic pessimism' ('a sense that there is, as [Nietzsche] once put it, "no pre-established harmony between the furtherance of truth and the well-being of man-kind"'). Alethic pessimism and alethic optimism track roughly the same distinction as Berman's, but they emphasises the value (or disvalue) of truth directly, as opposed to knowledge itself. We therefore avoid attributing value where Schopenhauer might not, such as to mere abstract knowledge rather than the intuitive form of knowledge in which truth is delivered.

⁹⁰ See Chapter III.

⁹¹ 'Of course, in one sense, there is nothing very distinctive in such optimism. Schopenhauer probably shares this with nearly all philosophers, from Plato at least to the Age of Reason' (Berman 1999: 181).

⁹² '[...] that which struggles against this flowing away into nothing, namely our nature, is indeed just the will-to-live which we ourselves are [...] That we abhor nothingness so much is simply another way of saying that we will life so much' (*WWR* I 411).

On the other hand, not a great deal more need be said, it seems, in response to the argument that Schopenhauer's pessimism is diluted just because of the fact that it contains salvation at all. For, as I have already mentioned, the mode of salvation always matters, and in this case it is the complete self-negation of one individual—admittedly, on behalf of the metaphysical will itself, but, importantly, not on behalf of its other manifestations—which occurs as a result of a shift in conscious awareness to an intuition of the thoroughly insufferable reality of life. The formal value of veracious cognition aside, this should hardly pass as an optimistic flourish at the end of Schopenhauer's philosophy. One might reply, nevertheless, that, in the end, a world in which salvation is possible is surely better than a world in which it is not; but this abstract assumption obscures the facts. To say that a world is made comparatively better by the mere fact of possible salvation implies that, all things being equal, the version of it in which salvation is not possible is necessarily worse. But, according to Schopenhauer, ours is a world which contains salvation for the reason that the world's torturous constitution effectively grinds the will to affirm it down to nothing, with a mechanism so apparently suited to this purpose that no other state of affairs could confidently be stated as its goal. A version of *this* world which does not contain salvation is therefore not itself possible: in the world just described, if all the other facts remain, then salvation is *necessary*, in the efficient-causal sense. Salvation of this peculiar kind is *entailed* by such a world.

In other words, for any possible world in which salvation of this particular kind is not possible, we might in fact take this very impossibility as an indication that the overall constitution of such a world is comparatively milder. For, it is implied that such a world is not so severe as to possibly effect self-negation even upon its more enlightened inhabitants. Therefore, on the condition that Schopenhauer's sense of salvation is admitted, a possible world in which salvation is not possible is not *ipso facto* a worse possible world than a possible world in which salvation is possible; and, correspondingly, a possible world in which salvation is possible is not *ipso facto* a better possible world than a possible world in which salvation is not possible.

5. Salvation as neither optimistic nor pessimistic

Consider again Julian Young's claim that 'Schopenhauer is not an *absolute* pessimist, a pessimist about all possible worlds, but (like the Augustinian tradition with which he

identifies) a pessimist only about this one'. This, Young argues, is because 'at the terminus of [Schopenhauer's] philosophy lies a message of *Erlösung*, salvation, deliverance from this veil of tears to a realm of bliss' (Young 1987: 53). In a later work, while examining the extent to which Schopenhauer's doctrine of salvation is the successful 'provision of a "consolation" for death' (Young 2009: 163), Young raises, and then quells, concerns about whether or not the possible world to which one is delivered could be considered blissful at all. He firstly concludes that, according to Schopenhauer, consolation for death can be taken from the fact that the 'true self [...] is untouched by death' (Young 2009: 163), for the true 'self' is identifiable with the all-encompassing will-to-life.⁹³ However, in light of comments Schopenhauer makes such as (quoting Aristotle), 'Nature is not divine, but demon-like' (*WWR* I 349), taking this to mean that reality (the will-to-life) is 'fundamentally evil', Young wonders whether 'one's choice is between hell and hell', that is, the hell of appearance and the hell of reality. He therefore puts a question mark over whether salvation, in the strong sense of a passage to some kind of heaven, is possible within the terms of Schopenhauer's philosophy. The solution Young proposes draws attention to Schopenhauer's later reaffirmation of Kant's position on the thing-in-itself. Schopenhauer accepts that although the will does offer a much deeper account of the world beyond representation, it cannot bring us to the very bottom of things, as it were (Young 2009: 164). Schopenhauer does make the intriguing comment, for example, that the 'essence of things before or beyond the world, and consequently *beyond the will*, is not open to any investigation' (*WWR* II 642, my emphasis). From this, Young deduces that fundamental reality is in fact neither positively 'demonic' nor positively 'divine' for Schopenhauer. At a certain point, ordinary and philosophical knowledge fails, and the matter therefore cannot be decided.

As a consequence of this, however, Schopenhauer is enticed by the wisdom of mystics. For, the doctrine of salvation is not much more comforting even if we cannot be sure whether reality as it is in itself is either demonic or divine, as opposed to being sure that it is just plain demonic; but according to Schopenhauer, as Young points out, mysticism is able to 'proceed positively' where philosophy necessarily falls silent (*WWR* II 612). Mysticism therefore has a potential positive contribution to make to what can be known of the character of the world of the saved. Young further argues that the 'doctrine of aesthetic veracity' is described by Schopenhauer in Book III of *The World and Will as*

⁹³ See Schopenhauer's essay 'On Death and Its Relation to the Indestructibility of Our Inner Nature' (*WWR* II 463-509).

Representation partly ‘in order to validate mystical beatitude’ (Young 2009: 165). This last point is not elaborated much further by Young, for his final aim is in fact to demonstrate the influence that Schopenhauer’s view has upon Nietzsche, but it—or something like it—is crucial. For, if the viewpoint of the mystic cannot be validated somehow, and therefore while we are still in the position in which reality can only appear to us as neither fundamentally demonic nor fundamentally divine, the sense in which Schopenhauer is not an ‘absolute pessimist’ is massively weakened. It would, of course, still be true that Schopenhauer is only a pessimist about this possible world; however, this is not because he is optimistic about any other possible world, but rather because he is neither optimistic nor pessimistic about any other, nor can he be. Therefore, firstly, Schopenhauer would not be an absolute pessimist for the reason originally stated by Young, that is, for the reason that there really is ‘deliverance [...] to a blissful realm’, because the blissfulness of this realm is still uncertain. And secondly, from this perspective, an absolute pessimist in the strong sense, someone who really is pessimistic about all possible worlds, is an absurdity. Only the mystic, it would seem, could be optimistic or pessimistic about the possible world into which she is now delivered—or rather, as the case may be, for any possible world, only one of its occupants is in a position to be either optimistic or pessimistic about it. In this final section, I will argue that Schopenhauer’s philosophy in fact settles for precisely this uncertainty in the face of salvation, and therefore only in the weak sense of the term is Schopenhauer not an absolute pessimist. That is, he is positively pessimistic about this possible world alone, but only because he can be neither optimistic nor pessimistic about the possible world into which salvation appears to be able to transfer us.⁹⁴

First, an outline of Schopenhauer’s views on mysticism. Schopenhauer helpfully delineates his conception of mysticism from some closely related notions:

Quietism, i.e., the giving up of all willing, asceticism, i.e., intentional mortification of one’s own will, and mysticism, i.e., consciousness of the identity of one’s own inner being with that of all things, or with the kernel of

⁹⁴ I am therefore not directly concerned with the matter, raised by Young (2009), of the way in which salvation can function as a consolation for death (although my argument will presumably have consequences for Young’s view). My direct focus is Young’s earlier (1987) claim that Schopenhauer is not an absolute pessimist, which I take Young to mean in a strong sense; I have mentioned Young’s later views only in virtue of their relevance to this focus, and so I will not pass comment on them.

the world, stand in the closest relation, so that whoever professes one of them is gradually led to the acceptance of the other, even against his intention.

WWR II 613

As Schopenhauer indicates, these three are close to being different aspects of the one state in which salvation consists. The first two, we have noticed already (section 3) and have even touched upon their relationship to one another. The last, mysticism, represents a specific cognitive aspect of salvation. Schopenhauer emphasises here how it designates an awareness of one's identity with the metaphysical will-to-life, although there is also the additional consideration that the experience in which this awareness consists cannot be directed communicated, which (presumably) plays a larger role in how mysticism gets its name. '[W]e see all religions at their highest point end in mysticism and mysteries,' Schopenhauer says '[...] These really indicate merely a blank spot for knowledge, the point where all knowledge necessarily ceases' (WWR II 610).

Why is the mystical experience necessarily incommunicable? Schopenhauer suggests that there will always be a fundamental mutual impasse in understanding between the willing form of life and the will-less form of life, hence the profound final lines of the first volume *The World as Will and Representation*: 'we freely acknowledge that what remains after the complete abolition of the will is, *for all who are still full of will*, assuredly nothing. But also conversely, *to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself*, this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is—nothing' (WWR I 411-12, my emphasis). Schopenhauer goes to great lengths to make it completely clear that the nothingness that he mentions is meant in its relative sense, not its absolute sense. The claim is not that the saved person becomes devoid of all qualities—just as we, who are as yet unsaved, are evidently not devoid of all qualities either—but that a particular quality is (for all we know) completely lacking, which in this case is the will-to-life itself. Schopenhauer posits, as we have seen, a deep connection between the type of being one is, on the one hand, and the way in which one cognises the world, on the other. Putting the emphasis on this connection, he therefore says of the same impasse:

In the hour of death, the decision is made whether man falls back into the womb of nature, or else no longer to her, but —: we lack image, concept, and word for this opposite, just because all these things are taken from objectification of the will, and therefore belong to that objectification;

consequently, they cannot in any way express its absolute opposite; accordingly, this remains for us a mere negation.

WWR II 609

The positive experience of will-lessness is, therefore, is necessarily a mystery to us. It is premised upon the negation of the fundamental principle of our being, and so it is as alien to us as we can possibly imagine.

As a result, Schopenhauer reminds us time and again that our understanding of the person who has negated the will-to-life—even our philosophical understanding, if not especially so—is essentially negative in character. ‘The mystic is opposed to the philosopher by the fact that he begins from within, whereas the philosopher begins from without’, Schopenhauer says:

[N]ow it is in keeping with this that, when my teaching reaches its highest point, it assumes a *negative* character, and so ends with a negation [...] Yet it still does not follow from this that it is absolutely nothing, namely that it must be nothing from every possible point of view and in every possible sense, but only that we are restricted to a wholly negative knowledge of it [...] Now it is precisely here that the mystic proceeds positively, and therefore, from this point, nothing is left but mysticism.

WWR II 611-12

We should therefore remind ourselves of the manner in which Schopenhauer describes, ‘with feeble tongue, and only in general terms’ (WWR I 383), his doctrine of salvation. Salvation is, emphatically, achieved via *negation* of the will-to-life, the corresponding and characteristic cognitive state of which is also described in terms of the absence of the principle of sufficient reason, the *principium individuationis*, which is the motivating form of knowing the world. Furthermore, Schopenhauer suggests, what remains of the mystic’s cognitive experience, when described *via negativa*, ‘cannot really be called knowledge, since it no longer has the form of subject and object; moreover, it is accessible only to one’s own experience that cannot be further communicated’ (WWR I 410). The optimism or pessimism which I attempted above to discern in Schopenhauer’s doctrine of salvation therefore also falls within the negative limiting terms of this external perspective. What

looks good or bad does so only from the outside, but whether it is so from the inside is an open question—or, better perhaps, a non-question.

Schopenhauer's treatment of mysticism is entirely consistent with his expressed method of philosophical interpretation, and in fact, from the very end of his philosophy, it shines a light backwards upon this method. Schopenhauer states of the 'double knowledge' of the body, as will and as representation, that:

we shall use it [...] 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 the double way, but only as representations, according to the analogy of this body

WWR I 105

When the object of philosophical discussion is specified precisely as being will-less, however, what more is there to say? All that remains is the outward representation, in which case the relative nothingness at the centre of the mystic (when viewed from the outside) is akin to the emptiness of the outer objects that 'would be [...] strange and incomprehensible [...] if their meaning were not unravelled [...] in an entirely different way' (WWR I 99). Their descriptions are similarly mysterious. What is more puzzling, perhaps, is how one knows that one has encountered a will-less being to begin with. For, the implication of Schopenhauer's interpretation of the mystic is that he is not attempting to read every object in outer experience as if it were necessarily a manifestation of will, otherwise the mystic would be understood in just the same way, which she is pointedly not. Instead, it must be that every object is read in terms of the will, in which case it is permissible to say that something is negatively understood as will-less. This is still to understand the alien by reference to the familiar, the paradigm of explanation for Schopenhauer, without assuming that the alien object actually shares the familiar quality, and therefore without forcibly ascribing this quality to it. However, what could possibly entitle Schopenhauer, or anyone, to claim that one unique object of experience really is will-less in its inner nature? Metaphysically interpreting all alien objects by analogy to oneself is one thing, but interpreting a particular alien object by its disanalogy seems to be quite another. One must be able to legitimise such differential treatment and, naturally, one cannot directly reach beyond the outward representation in order to verify where the will

lies and where it does not—if this were possible, then Schopenhauer's entire method would be superfluous.

The solution seems to be that the mystic, considered outwardly as an object of experience, is not just a particular alien object, but a *particularly* alien object. The subject who remains full of will simply cannot see his reflection in her, as it were. In Schopenhauer's words:

[...] instead of the never-satisfied and never-dying hope that constitutes the life-dream of the man who wills, we see that peace that is higher than all reason, that ocean-like calmness of spirit, that deep tranquillity, that unshakeable confidence and serenity, whose mere reflection in the countenance, as depicted by Raphael and Corregio, is a complete and certain gospel.

WWR I 411

The mystic is encountered as something so anomalous in her calm acceptance of any and all suffering, so ethereal and contrary to the grain of the will-to-life, that the only plausible way in which to understand her type of being is as the negation of our own. Perhaps extra emphasis should be put on the 'plausible' here. For, if we reflect upon Schopenhauer's philosophical methodology one final time, he admits that one does not have a direct window on to the inner being of the objects of interpretation, but he adds that the immanent standard of a successful interpretation consists in the making the best possible sense out of these objects:

[P]hilosophy is nothing but the correct and universal understanding of experience itself, the true interpretation of its meaning and content [...] Such a deciphering of the world with reference to what appears in it must receive its confirmation from itself through the agreement with which it places the many different phenomena of the world with one another, and which we do not perceive without it.

WWR II 183-4

Schopenhauer, it will be remembered, compares this philosophical-interpretative task to that of the cryptographer,⁹⁵ where, in the absence of someone with the ability to translate a coded language directly, the next best thing is to make the most cogent sense of its instances, assisted only by the necessary foundational clues that one happens to have to hand. In Schopenhauer's view, and perhaps not unwisely, it makes greater sense to interpret the mystic as a will-less being than it does to interpret her as another being full of will.

Strictly speaking, however, Schopenhauer's understanding of the inner state of the mystic is not derived purely from the outside perspective. He does, admittedly, state that a saint's 'conduct alone is evidence that he is a saint' (*WWR* I 383). But Schopenhauer also mentions two other ways in which an indication is given of the inner life of the mystic: through the personal accounts given by mystics and through partial forms of mystical consciousness. As for the first, Schopenhauer says that anyone 'who desires this [i.e. positive and mystical] supplement to the negative knowledge to which alone philosophy can guide him' should be referred to the Upanishads, to Plotinus, Scotus Erigena, Jacob Böhme, Madame de Guyon, Angelus Silesius, Meister Eckhart, the Gnostics, the Sufis, and so on (*WWR* II 612). Naturally, these accounts are not direct communications of the mystical experience, which is impossible, but they are illustrative insights, myths, stories, and other indirect means of illumination. Schopenhauer himself peppers his many discussions of salvation with references to particularly enlightening passages from these figures' mystical writings, and to events in their lives.

The other additional manner in which the inner life of mystics is indicated is the one to which Young alludes when he says (quoted above) that 'aesthetic veracity' is able to 'validate mystical beatitude'. This can be meant in two ways, which are brought together in the following passage at the closing of Book III. For the artist, an aesthetic attitude towards the world

[...] is not the way out of life, but only an occasional consolation in it, until his power, enhanced by this contemplation, finally becomes tired of the spectacle, and seizes the serious side of things. The St. Cecilia of Raphael can be regarded as a symbol of this transition.

WWR I 267

⁹⁵ See Chapter III.

Schopenhauer refers both to the veracity of great artistic depictions of the conversion from aesthetic rapture to saintliness ('the serious side of things'), which he is also referring to in the quotation above in which Raphael is again mentioned as well as Corregio (*WWR* I 411), and to the veracity of the vision itself with which the artist is equipped. Through art and aesthetic consciousness, therefore, one obtains, in Young's words, 'intimations of the transcendent' (Young 2009: 165). One gains for oneself, from the inside, something of an idea of what the mystic's inner experience is. Moreover, Young's analysis of the aesthetic consciousness in Schopenhauer chimes with Schopenhauer's characterisation of the nature of mystical consciousness. The aesthetic mind 'is pure receptivity, reality impresses itself just as, in itself, it is' which, Young adds with the assistance of Nietzsche's reading, is therefore 'free of the possibility of assessment, and so of contradiction, by reason' (Young 2009: 165). Schopenhauer brings out the same character of mystical consciousness by means of its contrast to philosophy: the philosopher 'should [...] beware of falling into the way of the mystics, and, for instance, by assertion of intellectual intuitions [...] Philosophy has its value and virtue in its rejection of all assumptions that cannot be substantiated, and in its acceptance as its data only that which can be proved with certainty in the external world given by perception' (*WWR* II 611). In short, the inner state of aesthetic contemplation, like the proposed inner state of the mystic, is a piercing intuition into the true nature of life, hardly able to be phrased into a 'claim', and therefore not truth-evaluable in the normal sense.⁹⁶

Altogether, then, there are three potential ways in which one might verify that the possible world to which one is supposedly delivered in salvation is not merely neither demonic nor divine, as it appears from the earthly perspective, but is truly heavenly, that is, peaceful and serene. These are through the conduct and outward countenance of saints, their personal recorded accounts, and intimations of the state of salvation through other forms of heightened consciousness. Moreover, as has been seen, Schopenhauer uncontroversibly subscribes to all three. The question is, however, whether this is a proper foundation upon which to claim, as Young does, that Schopenhauer is not an absolute pessimist in the strong sense of the term; that is, that he is pessimistic about only one possible world, ours, and is optimistic about at least one other, the world of salvation, in

⁹⁶ Young (2009: 165) quotes Nietzsche: '“Who”, he asks rhetorically [...], “would seek to refute a work of Beethoven or to find an error in Raphael's Madonna?”'.

which some form of bliss is possible. Schopenhauer is of course optimistic in some sense about the possible world inhabited by the saved, but seemingly not in the correct sense. Necessarily lacking the positive wisdom of the mystic, and having instead only these three kinds of signs, which point hopefully towards such positive wisdom, Schopenhauer's optimism about this matter is comparable to the sense in which one might be optimistic about the future, or the weather, or indeed any other event about which one necessarily speculates or estimates. The outlook certainly seems good, but nothing can be known for sure. On the other hand, the sense in which he is pessimistic about the actual world is very different; here, as we have become accustomed to, Schopenhauer makes substantive, positive claims about the world, which happen to conflict with a number of our deeply held convictions about where value is potentially to be found. Merely an intimation of the positive nature of the transcendent world is not, in this case, an appropriate match for this informed positive account of the actual world.

On pain of a misleading equivocation between the senses of optimism and pessimism, then, one cannot say that Schopenhauer is a pessimist about this world but an optimist about some other. If Schopenhauer is anything more than ambivalent about other possible worlds, then he is so in a different, necessarily more speculative sense than the way in which he is pessimistic about the actual world. Hence, he is indeed not an absolute pessimist, but only in the weak, perhaps trivial, sense that he is positively pessimistic only about the actual world but neither positively optimistic nor positively pessimistic about other possible worlds. The worth of those worlds, as with ours, can possibly be decided only by the judgement of its own inhabitants.

There is the conceivable response that we can, and often do, successfully evaluate the positive states of other, somewhat alien beings. No human being knows precisely what it is to be an eagle, for example, and yet with a degree of confidence we are able to make judgements about what is good for an eagle and what is bad. However, in this case, it must not be forgotten *just how* alien the being in question is. The person who has achieved salvation is unique in such a way that normal evaluative judgements about what is good and bad for her are no longer possible. When evaluating the state of any other being, we are permitted at least to draw upon the familiar experience of the will-to-life. Presumably this is what underlies the rough understanding we might have of what is good for an eagle and what is bad: those things which are in accordance with the will-to-life as it manifests itself in the eagle are good for the eagle, and those which are not, are bad. But this manner of making evaluative judgements is closed off to us in the case of a being that has escaped the

will-to-life, by the very definition of such a being. Hence, Schopenhauer is reticent to call the state of salvation the highest good:

[T]he *good* is essentially relative; for it has its essential nature only in its relation to a desiring will [...] there is no highest good, no absolute good, for [the will], but always a temporary good only. However, if we wish to give an honorary, or so to speak an emeritus, position to an old expression that from custom we do not like entirely to discard, we may metaphorically and figuratively, call the complete self-effacement and denial of the will, true will-lessness [...] the absolute good, the *summum bonum*; and we may regard it as the only radical cure for the disease against which all other good things, such as all fulfilled wishes and all attained happiness are only palliatives, anodynes.

WWR I 362

Normally, 'good' means that something satisfies a particular desire, according to Schopenhauer. The good of salvation is therefore the highest good only in a figurative sense because, strictly speaking, a true highest good would release us from willing once and for all by means of satisfaction of the will—an impossibility—whereas salvation releases us from willing once and for all, but only by means of uprooting the will itself. One may, of course, desire salvation, that is, desire to not desire; moreover, it would presumably be exceedingly good, in the normal sense, for a person who is tormented by the will to obtain 'the only radical cure' for it. However this is still to judge salvation from the outside perspective, and only negatively, not positively: it is judged to be a good relative to the will of a certain person, who in this case wants only to be not what she is. How to even begin to judge whether negation of the will-to-life is positively good for a person once she has actually reached it—given that she transcends the kind of life upon which all our evaluative judgements are based—is therefore necessarily a mystery. Perhaps no meaningful sense can be made of such a task.

As a final remark, being an absolute pessimist in this weak sense, as I have argued, intensifies Schopenhauer's pessimism overall, at least by comparison to Young's stronger reading of it. For—notwithstanding the promising intimations—what lies on the other side of the unbridgeable gulf separating us from salvation can never be fully certified as a heaven, but is always mysterious to us. A mystery may seem better than a certifiable hell,

hence its purely negative appeal to us as a mode of salvation, but we are still constitutionally incapable of positively assessing it either way.

6. Conclusion

Schopenhauer rejects eudaemonic solutions to the problem of suffering on the grounds that even those philosophies that best approximate a true articulation of the miserable nature of life, Cynicism and Stoicism, are misguided with regards to the extent to which practical reason can regulate those desires that are the source of the misery. Ultimately both, if they do not carry themselves toward transcendent solutions, result in a disdainful, self-satisfied, inwardly-tormented outlook. The proper solution is salvation through negation of the will-to-life, which, according to Schopenhauer, is thrust upon the saved person, either upon the occasion of a final all-encompassing vision of the world, after a gradual cognitive ascent, or through overwhelming suffering, as a result of which one's willingness to affirm life is challenged and the same insight into life vanity is produced.

I have argued that, from this side the state of salvation, *ergo* negatively, salvation can be regarded as pessimistic in some respects and optimistic in others. Both the pessimistic and the optimistic respects are, perhaps, unexpected. For, the highly specific nature of the form of salvation extended by Schopenhauer, as opposed to the mere abstract fact of it, is the necessary spiritual erosion of the individual by life itself through suffering. Against those who would take the mere fact of salvation at face value, I argue that this form of salvation is not an unambiguously optimistic feature of the world. On the other hand, just as the life of the human being is poised towards conative self-destruction (though few are fortunate enough to make it this far), it is, according to Schopenhauer, correspondingly poised towards enlightened consciousness of this fact. Given that Schopenhauer consistently values any insight into the truth, this inherent direction of life towards truth can only be an optimistic feature of his philosophy.

Finally, however, I have argued that the position to which Schopenhauer's ethical philosophy leads us ultimately puts the matter beyond positive optimism and pessimism. This is because Schopenhauer is consciously, and probably correctly, committed to the idea that one can have no positive knowledge of the experience of a life-form that is acknowledged as being directly opposed to one's own. Hints and clues about this experience are possible, but it is not possible to be either optimistic or pessimistic in a

sense that could match any of the ways in which Schopenhauer is resolutely pessimistic about the actual world.

Conclusion: The Meaning of Schopenhauer's Pessimism

I have aimed to show that Schopenhauer's pessimism is composed of numerous distinct pessimistic positions, each of which has its own individual import. To this end, I have interpreted his argument that to will is to suffer, and that happiness can never be outweighed by suffering; that this is the worst of all possible worlds, in which the threat of non-existence is encountered at every corner, and that all rationalistic optimistic philosophies cannot cope with the irrational remainder left behind; that human beings are not created morally innocent, but instead are guilty of emerging into a world that ought not to be; that the suffering of apparent innocents is in reality a reflection of their ultimate guilt; and that the only salvation from such a world is total self-abnegation, which forces itself upon those who realise, in intuitive rather than abstract form, these various truths for themselves. Hence, Schopenhauer's pessimism itself appears, just like his general philosophy, as a 'soteriological grand narrative', to use Gerard Mannion's helpful phrase (Mannion 2003: 84). It is more like a series of interlinked events than it is one episode.

By way of a conclusion, rather than provide another summary of my arguments, as was completed in the introduction, I would like to answer a question about the general significance of Schopenhauer's pessimism in light of my interpretation. Can the import of Schopenhauer's overall pessimism, as it is presented here, be condensed down into one, single, certain contribution? It would be fundamentally against the design of this thesis to suggest that his pessimism could be summarised in a single argument; however, what I mean is that we might ask for the *meaning* of Schopenhauer's overall pessimism, or, to stray into slightly grandiose terms, the central implication of post-Schopenhauerianism. According to Nietzsche's famous assessment, Schopenhauer's legacy consists in his having raised the question, '*Does existence have any meaning at all?*' (Nietzsche 2000: 219), although Nietzsche is dissatisfied with Schopenhauer's own answer. I will be a little more specific than Nietzsche in examining the manner in which Schopenhauer's pessimism has influenced the way in which philosophers pose, or should pose, the questions surrounding suffering and the value of life. However, like Nietzsche, I am unsure that it is Schopenhauer's own answers themselves that are ultimately influential.

Without suggesting that Schopenhauer ever consciously adopted this as an aim,

Schopenhauer's pessimism can be seen as the death of a particular standard used in answering the question of the value of life. This is what I would call the cosmological standard, in which philosophers look to the arrangement of the world, its workings and its laws, in order, hopefully, to find something 'out there' that makes sense of the life of the individual and her sufferings. Leibniz's theodicy is perhaps archetypical of this method: his solution looks to the world as a whole, as selected by God, and advises us to try to view our sufferings in light of our place within it. Rousseau does the same only in a subtler way; he looks to the natural state of humankind itself, the anthropological laws of its history and social development, and derives optimistic implications for the lives of all human beings from his conclusions. Kant lauded Rousseau as the 'Newton of the mind' (quoted in Neiman 1997: 141). The same standard is applied even in the arguments that do not belong to any particular philosopher, such as whether there is a greater likelihood of finding pain or pleasure in the world. By repeatedly adopting an oppositional stance in the way that I have described, in which he tests out whether these value-laden systems and accounts actually describe the world we live in, Schopenhauer is not abandoning this standard. He is simply demonstrating, seemingly on a case by case basis, that the hopes pinned on the world when it is viewed in such a way, where value is supposed to come from 'out there' somehow, are bound to be dashed. For—if Schopenhauer has made his case correctly—the world, when viewed from such a cosmological standpoint, is relentlessly and pointlessly hostile. Nothing will be found 'out there' to console us, apart from the very message of this nothingness, which overwhelms the lucky few into complete spiritual submission, but for the rest of us is simply a constant nagging reminder.

Thus Schopenhauer's ethical response to the failure of the cosmological standard is anti-cosmological. It is a wholesale rejection of this world that is incapable of meeting such a standard. He himself even describes negation of the will-to-life as an '*anticosmic tendency*' (*WWR* II 614), and this is perhaps the closest that Schopenhauer comes to an explicit awareness of the meaning of his pessimism as I see it. The cosmological standard is inherently impersonal, and in spite of the fact that the individual's true role in all of this is as the mediator in the cosmos's own eventual tendency against itself—that is, the self-denial of the will-to-life—this ethical response is contrastingly personal in appearance. Salvation is only visited upon individuals; it is they who resign from life, it is their lives that are affected. Nietzsche is notable in taking up, and taking further, the significance of a personal ethical response to the world. However, if not by consciously detecting the effect that Schopenhauer's pessimism has upon the question of the value of life according to a

cosmological standard, then by presupposing it out of his own fluctuating Schopenhauerianism, Nietzsche cuts straight to the chase and introduces the possibility that the question of the value of life can itself be asked according to a personal standard in the first place. The question of whether and how existence has meaning should inquire not about the world itself, but about the agents in that world. We must now strive, Nietzsche suggests, to be the active creators of value in the world, as opposed to its passive recipients: ‘*Actual philosophers [...] are commanders and law-givers: they say, “thus it shall be!”*, it is they who determine the Wherefore and Whither of man kind’ (Nietzsche 1990: 142). Hence, Nietzsche is relatedly wary about the function of truth as it is traditionally conceived, which harbours ambitions of grasping some objectively-ordered, impersonal reality. In the words of the novelist Robert Musil, whose main characters are often devotees of Nietzsche, ‘Truth is the successful effort to think impersonally and inhumanly’.⁹⁷ Instead then, with regards to his ‘coming philosophers’, Nietzsche states that ‘[i]t must offend their pride, and also their taste, if their truth is supposed to be a truth for everyman, which has hitherto been the secret desire and hidden sense of all endeavours. “My judgement is *my* judgement: another cannot easily acquire a right to it” – such a philosopher of the future may perhaps say’ (Nietzsche 1990: 71); ‘Their “knowing” is *creating*, their creating is a law-giving, their will to truth is – *will to power*’ (Nietzsche 1990: 143). Given Schopenhauer’s alethic optimism, by attacking truth in the traditional sense, Nietzsche appears to be hitting Schopenhauer where it hurts; nevertheless, truth as it is meant by Nietzsche’s future philosophers also contains within it the possibility of redemption.

This, then, is the meaning and legacy of Schopenhauer’s pessimism, and Nietzsche is the model of the struggle with the post-Schopenhauerian fallout. I say this whether or not an accomplishment of this kind was a conscious aim on Schopenhauer’s part. The waves of Schopenhauer’s various pessimistic arguments, including his pointedly anti-optimistic ones, test the cosmological standard of the question of value beyond breaking point.

⁹⁷ From *The Man Without Qualities* (Musil 1995: 606).

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