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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Department of Philosophy

Schopenhauer's Soteriology:

Beyond Pessimism and Optimism

by

Timothy Paul Birtles

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

February 2024

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

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OPTIMISM

Timothy Paul Birtles

This thesis is primarily an attempt at solving some issues in Schopenhauer's theory of salvation. My aim is to provide ways in which Schopenhauer's soteriology could work. It is a partially reconstructive project in that I will be bringing to the forefront some of Schopenhauer's assertions at the expense of others. My aim is to show that we are able to provide a much more cohesive and satisfying reading of Schopenhauer's philosophical project if we let go of some of the more orthodox assumptions in the Schopenhauer scholarship – chief among these being that Schopenhauer is committed to the view that the will constitutes ultimate reality. While this reading is a departure from the vast majority of the traditional readings of Schopenhauer's philosophy, I believe it has the twin advantages of both aligning Schopenhauer's thought much closer with the eastern traditions he believes his work is in sympathy with, and ultimately, providing a new platform from which to assess the 'traditional' reading of Schopenhauer's thought as 'hopelessly pessimistic'. It is my contention that while it remains true that Schopenhauer is very much a pessimist about the world as manifested will, it is the perceived difficulties of his philosophy of salvation that have provided the most significant road block preventing critics from seeing that there are dimensions to Schopenhauer's thought that cannot so easily be labelled as either pessimistic or optimistic. This thesis is an attempt to shed light on possible new readings of Schopenhauer's project in light of attempts to resolve issues in his soteriology.

I begin with the question – why do we need saving? I attempt to answer this through an analysis of the terms 'will', 'will-to-life' and 'affirmation and negation of the will-to-life'. Next, I attempt to argue that the will should not be seen as ultimate reality in Schopenhauer's system and that this is both closer to the account which Schopenhauer himself was inclining towards later in his writings as well as a necessary sacrifice in order to save Schopenhauer from more problematic inconsistencies.

I next attempt to solve inconsistencies in Schopenhauer's account of personal identity. I argue that there can only be a denial of the will-to-life if there is more to our identity than willing. I will also examine the possibility of a denial of the will-to-life at all. I will be engaging with recent scholarship from Christopher

Janaway on the possibility of negating the will-to-life and the implications of this for Schopenhauer's account of willing.

I will then attempt to resolve the on-going debate in the secondary literature concerning Schopenhauer's ethical pronouncements and his theory of the negation of the will-to-life. I will argue, contrary to Sandra Shapshay and Tristan Ferrell, that it is possible to be one in whom the will has denied itself while remaining one who wills ethically and that this can be the case if we focus our attention on what Schopenhauer may truly mean by a compassionate will to help others.

Next, I will be asking why exactly it is good to be one in whom the will has denied itself and what this means for our understanding of value for the will-less subject.

Finally, I will be focusing on Schopenhauer's pessimism and how a new reading of Schopenhauer's soteriology means that we can introduce new ways of assessing both the world as well as the place of Schopenhauer's philosophical system within it.

Ultimately, I will conclude that any interpretation of Schopenhauer's philosophy presents the scholar with a choice and that we are subsequently only able to make new evaluative assessments on Schopenhauer's philosophy, as well push back against the charge that it is wholly pessimistic, if we choose to accept major revisions to his metaphysics of the will. However, because Schopenhauer himself seemed to be moving towards such revisions, we should not be afraid of doing so either.

Table of Contents

Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship.....	6
Acknowledgements	7
Abbreviations of Schopenhauer’s works	8
Introduction: ‘The will to a system’ & A methodological note on ‘Eastern thought’.....	10
Chapter I: Why Do We Need Saving?.....	19
1. Introduction.....	19
2. The ‘will-to-life’.....	19
3. ‘Affirmation and negation of the will-to-life’.....	29
4. Conclusion.....	39
Chapter II: What do we need saving from?.....	40
1. Introduction.....	40
2. The will as Kantian ‘thing-in-itself’	40
3. The will as not ultimate reality.....	50
4. Conclusion.....	56
Chapter III: Who is Saved? The Problem of Personal Identity.....	57
1. Introduction.....	57
2. Salvation as denial of the subject of the will-to-life.....	58
3. What is it ‘like’ to have denied the will-to-life?.....	66
4. The self as indestructible ‘true essence’ and the problem of suicide.....	76
5. Conclusion.....	81
Chapter IV: Desiring Salvation – A Will to Will-lessness?.....	83
1. Introduction.....	83
2. A desire to be without desire.....	85
3. Different kinds of willing.....	89
4. Conclusion.....	101
Chapter V: Salvation & Ethical Conduct.....	104
1. Introduction.....	104

2. Renunciation <i>and</i> compassion.....	104
3. A role for suffering?.....	114
4. Conclusion.....	132
Chapter VI: Is Salvation Good?.....	134
1. Introduction.....	134
2. 'Good' as cessation of the pain of willing life.....	136
3. 'Good' as cessation of the suffering of willing life.....	140
4. Salvation as neither good nor bad.....	152
5. Conclusion.....	154
Chapter VII: Salvation & Pessimism.....	156
1. Introduction.....	156
2. Schopenhauer's pessimism.....	157
3. Redemption from suffering.....	163
4. Beyond pessimism and optimism.....	176
5. Conclusion.....	182
Conclusion: Can Schopenhauer's soteriology be saved?.....	184
Bibliography.....	190

Declaration of Authorship

Timothy Paul Birtles

Schopenhauer's Soteriology: Beyond Pessimism and Optimism

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. 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;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. 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;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. 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;
7. None of this work has been published before submission;

Signature: T. Birtles

Date 23/2/24

Acknowledgements

During the first COVID-19 national lockdown in the spring of 2020 I picked up an unread copy of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* which had been languishing unread on my bookshelf for over ten years. I became an instant 'disciple', feeling both challenged and consoled by Schopenhauer's vision. I knew instantly that I wished to bring more attention to the salvatory aspects of Schopenhauer's thought. I have spent the last four years reading and re-reading Schopenhauer's works – this thesis represents the fruits of these studies and I hope that the reader is able to share something of the ebullience I felt four years ago.

I would like to thank my supervisor Christopher Janaway for his insights, advice and guidance as well as his deep knowledge of all things Schopenhauer. I would not have been able to even begin this project without his constant support and faith in me. I would also like to thank Giulia Felappi for her superb support as secondary supervisor. Thanks are also due to the members of the Schopenhauer 'WorkSchop' run by Professor Colin Marshall at the University of Washington who invited me to their group and gave valuable input into the arguments of chapter VII. Thanks are also owed to Mathjis Peters who allowed me to read his piece – 'Ways to Salvation: On Schopenhauer's Theory of Self-Negation and Salvation', in advance of its publication.

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Finally, I wish to thank my son Indiana who was born as I began writing and has been a constant source of distraction ever since. Above all I wish to thank my wife Ellie, for showing me the meaning of strength and love. It is to her and our second son Jude who we had to say goodbye to during the writing of this project, that I dedicate this thesis.

Abbreviations of Schopenhauer's Works

- FOW: 'Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will' in *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*. trans. and ed. C. Janaway. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- GB: *Gesammelte Briefe*, trans. and ed. A. Hübscher. Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1978.
- MR I: *Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, Volume I Early Manuscripts (1804-1818). trans. E.F.J. Payne. Ed. A Hübscher. New York: Berg, 1988.
- MR III: *Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, Volume III Berlin Manuscripts (1818-1830). trans. E.F.J. Payne. Ed. A Hübscher. New York: Berg, 1989.
- OBM: 'On the Basis of Morals' in *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*. trans. and ed. C. Janaway. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- PP I: *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Volume I. trans. and ed. S. Roehr, C. Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- PP II: *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Volume II. trans. and ed. A. D. Caro, C. Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- 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.
- WWR I: *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume I. trans. and ed. J. Norman, A. Welchman, C. Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- WWR II: *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume II. trans. and ed. J. Norman, A. Welchman, C. Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- WWR II (P): *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume II. trans. E.F.J. Payne New York: Dover Publications, 1966.

In that unitive state there is neither father nor mother, neither worlds nor gods nor even scriptures. In that state there is neither thief nor slayer, neither low caste nor high, neither monk nor ascetic. The self is beyond good and evil, beyond all the suffering of the human heart.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

Introduction: 'The will to a system' & A methodological note on 'Eastern thought'

'The will to a system'

Thomas Mann famously referred to *The World as Will and Representation* as 'a symphony in four movements' (Mann, 1947, p394). This thesis presents an attempt to reconcile difficulties 'baked' into Schopenhauer's fourth movement, his philosophy of salvation. The hope is that an attempt to address the issues in one movement may give us new ways of valuing the entire symphony. In his preface to the first edition of Volume I of his *magnus opus*, Schopenhauer states that his work has the aim of conveying 'a single thought' and that all the parts that express this thought should be 'organically coherent' (WWR I:5). Perhaps one of the reasons why Schopenhauer remains so fascinating for philosophers to this day is that he (at least ostensibly) did not falter in his conviction that his entire philosophical output consisted of the elucidation of this one thought – that the world is both phenomenal representation and manifestation of a blind purposeless and pernicious will that may, in human beings, come to negate itself. Since the turn of the twentieth century it has become increasingly popular to dismiss all-encompassing, life embracing system building as malignant symptoms of a naïve enlightenment rationalism (and indeed optimism). Schopenhauer's best-known former apostle admonishes system builders for the belligerence required to hold them together, stating in *Twilight of the Idols* – 'I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity' (Nietzsche, 1990, p35). And yet, there is something that continues to draw us to systems. Is it the scope of their ambition, or perhaps it is the promise of, once and for all, a resolution to the 'riddle' (*Räthsel*) of life (WWR I:124)?

The conviction that any truth must necessarily be global and sit holistically and harmoniously alongside other truths appears to be a near ubiquitous human conviction. It is the drive behind disciplines as apparently disparate as religion and science. Schopenhauer was certainly taken by this drive, take for example where he states – 'only truth can agree through and through with itself and with nature: by contrast, all false fundamental views conflict internally with themselves and externally with experience, which submits its silent protest at every step' (OBM:243). Yet, while the

great rewards of a coherent, global, life-encompassing system remain tempting for philosophers, their pitfalls are equally perilous and notorious. Chief among these being the charge of inconsistency. To use an analogy Schopenhauer himself would have approved of, if a system of thought represents a currency, then the trust or confidence in this currency is its consistency. And yet, despite his ambitious protestations, from the very first reviews of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer faced the charge that his system was anything but 'organically consistent' (WWR I:5).¹ The spectre of inconsistency would continue to loom in Schopenhauer's own lifetime despite his attempts to redress them and hold his system together. These redresses came in the form of new works as well as revisions, amendments and countless references, both scholarly and anecdotal. Taken collectively, we may reasonably ask whether the thoughts of a young man in his twenties writing at the beginning of the 19th century can realistically be expected to be entirely congruent with those of a sixty-year-old towards the middle of a century, particularly a century of such intellectual upheaval? One issue is the sheer audacity of the implicit supposition that a single mind can successfully make sense of, and then create a system that accurately accounts for, the myriad disparate and perplexing phenomena of existence.

There is an inevitable jarring sense of awkwardness to Schopenhauer's philosophy taken as a whole; a feeling of an irresolvable dissonance and lack of overall harmony. This feeling is only strengthened when attempts to resolve issues in one area of his system unwittingly force new issues into prominence in another. The inevitable difficulty with systems is that, like jigsaw puzzles, an exact and complete picture is so attractive and yet the pieces must fit. If one piece does not, then attempts to force it to will, at best, force another piece out or, at worst, threaten the integrity of the entire picture.² Christopher Ryan puts the problem well when he states that attempts at resolutions to difficulties in Schopenhauer's thought, along with the resulting dissonance, are redolent of Schopenhauer's own critical comments on the history of Christian theodicies that spin "in an endless

¹ Christopher Ryan identifies Johann Friedrich Herbart as foremost among these voices, with Herbart holding Schopenhauer to account for an inconsistent reading of Kantianism as early as 1820 (Ryan, 2020, p374).

² Mathijs Peters also draws attention to the problem that Schopenhauer's attempt at the elucidation of a 'Single Thought' leads to many contradictions. Peters, however, concludes that these contradictions in fact better help us to make sense of the limits of thought and thus the very riddle of existence itself (Peters, 2023, p323).

circle by trying to bring these things into harmony, i.e. to solve the arithmetical problem that never works out but whose remainder appears sometimes here, sometimes there, after it has been hidden elsewhere" (WWR I:434 in Ryan 2020, p377). Was it arrogance or just sheer stubbornness that sustained Schopenhauer in his insistence to the point of death that, despite the palpable conceptual paradoxes, his collected works still represented the consistent 'working out' of one single thought: that the world is the phenomenal representation of a blind purposeless and pernicious will that may come to negate itself? Such difficulties include but are not limited to: If the world is nothing other than a manifestation of will – what is left after one has denied the will? If we are nothing but manifestations of will – how can one deny the will? If renunciation means one no longer wills, how can any form of compassionate behaviour be willed? Why should we aim to be will-less, in what sense is it a state that should be described as good? If the world is nothing more than the will, is will-lessness simply a denial of the world – a kind of 'death-drive'? Such difficulties have led to some critics campaigning for the jettison of whole areas of Schopenhauer's philosophy. Foremost among these voices being Bryan Magee who argues that the above issues are so severe that 'Schopenhauer has to give up this notion of renunciation of the will altogether' (Magee, 1997, p242).

My aim in this project is not to attempt to resolve all difficulties in Schopenhauer's system. As well as being practically unfeasible, I have come to the conclusion that this is simply not possible. My aim is a more modest one: it is the offering of one particular reading of Schopenhauer's philosophy. From the investigation of the issues in one area, his soteriology, I wish to offer up a solution which, while it (I believe necessarily) does not absolve his system of all its difficulties, does provide the most attractive and, above all, most satisfying approach to Schopenhauer's philosophy. What is more, I will argue that my approach has the added advantage of opening up new avenues for evaluating Schopenhauer's thought. In particular, my reading challenges and complicates the assertion that Schopenhauer's system is 'hopelessly pessimistic'. Through a detailed examination of some of the problems contained in Schopenhauer's soteriology, and how these play out in his metaphysics, theory of self, philosophy of desire, ethics, meta-ethics and philosophy of value, I will argue that the position which would make most consistent sense of Schopenhauer's various assertions as well as give us the most hermeneutic and exegetical satisfaction is one that maintains

that:

1. We should not view the will as synonymous with ultimate reality, the Kantian 'thing-in-itself'.
2. The experience of ascetic renunciation of the will-to-life represents a deliverance from the world of willing such that the suffering and pain of existence may be perceived as non-inevitable.
3. The state of ascetic transcendence is not one of negation of the world alone but also promises a positive state, an ineffable 'something' which, being beyond the will, is non-abysmal.
4. It is possible to reconcile will-lessness with ethical conduct and compassion.
5. Close correlates with eastern traditions, in particular Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism can help us make sense of, and come to terms with, some of Schopenhauer's more difficult claims and apparent invoked paradoxes.
6. Fundamentally, it is not inevitable that we see Schopenhauer's thought as irredeemably pessimistic and that, like the Buddhist tradition, Schopenhauerian pessimism is only a way-station on the road to a higher system of valuation, a vehicle through which we can achieve a state which is beyond such valuations as pessimism and optimism.

I will begin in chapter I by asking – why do we need saving? I will attempt to answer this with a detailed survey of the Schopenhauerian terms 'will-to-life' and 'affirmation and negation of the will-to-life'. These terms provide the foundation for Schopenhauer's philosophy and their exact meaning has often been subject to disagreement as well as misunderstanding. It is essential, therefore, to have a firm and univocal grip on them. In chapter II, I will argue that the first step in resolving difficulties in Schopenhauer's soteriology, as well as challenging the charge of a 'hopeless pessimism', is to no longer equate the will with ultimate reality. In chapter III, I will be examining issues of personal identity in Schopenhauer's account of 'negation of the will-to-life' and I will come to the conclusion that in order for his account to make sense there must be room in Schopenhauer's ontology for more than just the will. In chapter IV, I will be exploring the potential problems contained in an account of will-lessness. I will be engaging with problems within Christopher

Janaway's novel term 'the will-to-will-lessness' (Janaway, 2023). In chapter V, I will attempt to resolve recent disagreements in the published literature concerning ethical altruism and the negation of the will-to-life. I will attempt to demonstrate that ascetic renunciation is the highest soteriological path because it is the path of least suffering. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how compassion and renunciation can operate at the same time. I will also be attempting to show that compassionate behaviour towards some may, in fact, involve allowing some suffering to take place in order to facilitate an individual's transcendence beyond both suffering and ordinary valuation alike. In chapter VI, I will be asking, what is 'good' for Schopenhauer? I will be exploring how a negation of the will-to-life can be seen as good and in what sense it is preferable to willing life. In chapter VII, I will attempt to argue that a resolution to issues in Schopenhauer's soteriology provides us with a unique opportunity to launch new valuations of Schopenhauer's philosophy in general, and in particular a new route to challenge the traditional 'Philosopher of Pessimism' moniker.

A Methodological note on 'Eastern thought'

My methodology will be to, as far as possible, rely on Schopenhauer's own published texts as well as the extensive secondary literature. However, I also wish to take seriously Schopenhauer's injunction that 'if the reader has also already received and been receptive to the consecration of the ancient Indian wisdom, then he will be in the very best position to hear what I have to say to him' (WWR I:9). If Schopenhauer's system faces conceptual difficulties and he believes that at the very least his system is in sympathy with, and at most is an extension of, eastern philosophical traditions, then it would seem prudential to examine how the great systems of the east deal with similar if not identical issues. I will, therefore, at times attempt a form of cross-cultural philosophical engagement with eastern traditions in order to search for new ways of resolving Schopenhauerian problems. Permission for this approach, I believe, flows explicitly from Schopenhauer himself.

Our next question is what 'Ancient Indian wisdom' does Schopenhauer wish us to engage with? Schopenhauer read extensively and refers to a great many specific 'threads' within eastern traditions. At other times he rather unhelpfully refers in passing to the 'beliefs' of 'Hindus' and 'Buddhists' without further specifics (see for example WWR II:484). It is, however, my considered view that ultimately what Schopenhauer wishes us to 'take' from these eastern traditions is one

fundamental idea, one that he believes his philosophy is also espousing – that our ordinary ways of engaging with the world need to be transcended so that we can uncover both a more authentic relationship with ultimate reality as well as a profound inner peace. To this end I will focus on just two traditions: Advaita Vedanta and the Buddhist tradition more generally. This is because of the similarities between their general aims and Schopenhauer's – that ordinary modes of existence are in error and need reassessing in order for us to become liberated. Furthermore, these two traditions are explicitly and repeatedly referred to by Schopenhauer as those his philosophy is in closest sympathy with. Advaita Vedanta represents the tradition within Hinduism that attempts to make sense of the non-dual aspect of Brahman (ultimate reality) of the Upanishads. This appears to be what Schopenhauer most admires about the Upanishads – he often cites the Sanskrit adage from the Chandogya Upanishad – *Tat Tvam Asi* (That you are) (see for instance WWR I:382, 401; WWR II:616; OBM:254). The parallels Schopenhauer identifies between his thought and Buddhism he argues are all the more profound because he was not familiar (or so he believed) with Buddhism when originally formulating his system in 1818. Of Buddhism, Schopenhauer states in 1844:

If I wished to take the results of my philosophy as the standard of truth, I would have to privilege Buddhism above all other religions. I am pleased in any case to see that my doctrines are in such profound agreement with a religion followed by the majority of people on earth...This agreement is all the more satisfying because I was certainly not influenced by it in my philosophizing.

WWR II:178

While there is much to potentially be gained from an examination of 'Eastern' readings of Schopenhauer's soteriology, it is critical that we proceed with caution. I wish to proceed with a single extremely modest question: Can an examination of *some* similarities between Schopenhauer's thought and eastern traditions engender greater insights into how we approach Schopenhauer's soteriology? The use of analogues from the east is simply hermeneutic – in short: can we gain new perspectives and new insights into Schopenhauer's soteriology and evaluative system through the 'lens' of eastern traditions?

The potential problems with this approach are explored in depth by Urs App in his monograph *Schopenhauer's Compass: An Introduction to Schopenhauer's Philosophy and its Origins* (App, 2014). Put simply: Schopenhauer's acquaintance with ancient Indian texts was heavily bastardized. App illustrates how Schopenhauer's encounter with the Upanishads informs the core of his understanding of Indian Philosophy. Schopenhauer's love for the Upanishads is well known, he heavily leaned upon them both intellectually – 'I would like to claim (if it does not sound arrogant) that each of the individual and disconnected remarks that form the Upanishads could be derived as a corollary of the thoughts I will be imparting' (WWR I:9) and personally – 'it [the Oupnek'hat] has been the consolation of my life and it will be that of my dying' (PP II:357). However, as App illustrates, there is a problem: Schopenhauer's favourite book was not a direct translation from the Sanskrit original as modern editions are. Rather it was a translation of a translation known as *The Oupnek'hat* (translation: book of the secret) which was, in part, a Latin translation of a Persian translation from the Sanskrit by the French Indologist Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731-1805). Though a translation, over half of the 1800-page text is comprised of Anquetil's own commentary and essays. The original Persian translation was commissioned by Crown Prince Dara Shukoh (1615-1659), son of the fifth Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (the builder of the Taj Mahal), himself inspired by Islamic Sufism as well as Occidental neo-platonic influences (App, 2014, p128). Thus, as App states:

Schopenhauer's favorite book thus appears to be an extraordinary melting pot of Oriental and Occidental philosophies and religions. It contains fifty texts of Indian origin that were redacted, collected, and transmitted in the course of many centuries as 'Upanishads'. But it also contains interpretations based on Shankara and other Indian philosophers, some of which belong to the Vedanta school and also reflect influences by the idealism of the Mahayana Buddhist Yogacara school.

App, 2014, p145

This threatens to leave us with a profound problem: why go to Advaita Vedanta or Buddhism as we understand them today if Schopenhauer himself was not directly influenced by these modern sources? Why not after all go to, as App suggests, the source that he was actually familiar with?

I will not be drawing on the exact sources that Schopenhauer was privy to because the purpose of this project is not to trace the evolution or even the foundations of Schopenhauer's thought, but instead to understand new methods of exegesis. If the former were the project, then a study of the sources Schopenhauer was actually familiar with would suffice. However, the purpose of this project is to provide new ways of interpreting Schopenhauer's soteriology. To this end it is not necessary to go to the exact sources Schopenhauer was familiar with. Doing so may, in fact, be counterproductive in so far as such sources are themselves such a melting pot of different ideas and philosophies. For a consistent hermeneutical platform upon which to develop an exegesis of Schopenhauer's soteriology, it is best to borrow from extant systems and traditions as Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism as we understand them in modern scholarship despite these not being altogether familiar to Schopenhauer himself. This relies on a commitment being made to distinguish between philosopher and philosophy. While the philosopher may have been inspired by a bastardized version of the Upanishadic tradition (as well as others), and biographical accounts of the evolution of his thought should rely on this, we do not need to rely on only these sources in our attempts to re-assess the philosophy he has left us with. It is, therefore, a somewhat anachronistic enterprise we are embarking on and this is because we are not aiming at a purely historical or biographical project but a somewhat reconstructive one – how can we make better sense of Schopenhauer's soteriology through cross-cultural engagement with other traditions that have similar aims?

Finally, I feel obliged to clearly inform the reader that what this project is decidedly not is a work of comparative philosophy. While this is an important and fecund discipline, it is not one that I will be embarking on. I will not be comparing Schopenhauer's thought with eastern equivalents as a self-declared end.³ There will, in fact, be large tracts of this project which will not draw on eastern

³ Recent works of scholarship that have this aim include Stephen Cross's somewhat misleadingly titled - *Schopenhauer's Encounter with Indian Thought: Representation and Will and their Indian Parallels* (Cross, 2013). Unlike Cross, I will be arguing that it is not helpful for our purposes to simply point out the similarities between Schopenhauer's philosophy and eastern traditions and that instead we must actively

thought at all because the discussion does not demand it to. In so far as solutions to Schopenhauerian issues can be found within his own thought, it is to Schopenhauer's thought that I will seek to find them. The reader is, therefore, not to expect a project with a heavy focus on eastern traditions. Rather what I propose is to do what Schopenhauer himself did: draw upon eastern equivalents as and when it becomes necessary for elucidation of difficulties and problems. If Schopenhauer is correct in his contention that his system is totally in tune with eastern thought, then it is, to some extent, of no consequence whether the solutions to the issues in his soteriology are found within the eastern tradition or his own.

and hermeneutically use insights from eastern traditions to help us solve problems in Schopenhauer's thought.

Chapter I: Why do we need Saving?

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will illustrate why it is that Schopenhauer believes we need saving. In short, the will-to-life, which is constitutive of our very nature, manifests creatures such as we are who are incapable of true fulfilment. It is for this reason that we require a deliverance from the will-to-life, it is because, in so far as we will-life, we are structurally exempt from achieving a life with any measure of positive satisfaction.

1.2. The ‘will-to-life’

Schopenhauer argues that our inner nature, as well as the inner nature of all things, is the will. It is with this insight that he believes, with the first publication of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation* in 1818, that he has identified the Kantian thing-in-itself, the inner essence of the world lying behind all phenomenal representation beyond all spatial and temporal categories.⁴ In man, this inner principle of the world (the will) has developed understanding in order to aid his continuation and propagation. Therefore, we experience this principle as cognitive motivation to movement – willing.

However, not every movement of my body is knowable as willing in the strictest sense in which I encounter it in self-reflection as cognitively motivated striving and desiring – and yet it is still a manifestation of will. For instance, my heart beats independently of my consciously desiring (or not desiring) it to. It is, therefore, to some extent misleading to claim that the reason my heart beats, is because of my will. While my heart-beating is not something I consciously will, the term ‘will’ is still used by Schopenhauer to denote the fundamental ‘x’ underpinning the representational phenomenon of my beating heart because ‘will’ is the name that I give to the inner nature underpinning the representational phenomenon that I am privy to, namely my own voluntary

⁴ Whether or not the will is constitutive of ultimate reality or not will be discussed in depth in section 2.2.

movements and, because of the impossibility of plurality and individuation outside of cognition, this is the same 'x' behind all phenomena.

What is it about my own willing (as the closest available access I have to the will) that is pre-motivational and yet not a 'force' or 'energy'? I would argue that the only contender for this very narrow designation is a kind of non-motivational blind and yet (in some sense) purposeful striving. Therefore, for Schopenhauer, the will in essence, in so far as we can understand it as an object of cognition, is not brute Newtonian mechanical 'force' because it is (in some sense) purposeful and yet it is also not (other than in humans and higher animals) goal oriented and teleological in a consciously motivated sense either, being, in essence, devoid of cognition.⁵ Schopenhauer describes the will variously as 'blind activity' (*Thätigkeit*) (WWR I:139), 'striving' (*Streben*) (WWR I:143), in animals devoid of cognition as 'creative drives' (*Kunsttrieben*) (WWR I:176), and 'formative drives' (*Bildungstrieb*) (WWR I:140) and in inanimate nature as 'blind impulse' (*Drang*), a 'dark, dull driving' (*ein finsteres, dumpfes Treiben*) and 'a dark driving force' (WWR I:174). Therefore, the will is a blind, (apparently and somehow) goal-oriented, teleological drive or striving. What is it that the will is striving or driving for? Schopenhauer's answer is that it cannot be striving for anything consciously because (other than in humans and some animals) it is without cognition.

Nonetheless, in some sense, the will is striving towards a goal. Leaving aside for the moment the difficulties raised by the suggestion of a blind and yet teleologically purposeful striving, Schopenhauer argues that the will can strive only after the perpetuation of itself because, being devoid of plurality as a feature of the understanding, there is nothing else existent apart from it. Again, it is not striving intelligently or consciously, however, as Schopenhauer points out in many

⁵ The fine path Schopenhauer is treading may be further confused when he states - 'I must use the law of motivation to understand the inner meaning of the law of causality' (WWR I:151). How exactly is one to use 'the law of motivation' to understand the inner meaning of the law of causality' without incorrectly anthropomorphizing un-intelligent, non-cognitive processes? Are we thus not guilty of projecting teleological striving onto un-intelligent processes, such that when a stone falls it does not truly have a 'drive' to reach the ground, we simply and erroneously anthropomorphize it with our cognitive apparatus? This seems to be the cornerstone of Magee's argument, that Schopenhauer has misled his audience through poor choice of wording leading to the invocation of a neo-Aristotelian conception of the universe as goal-oriented objects with 'drives' (Magee, 1997, pp143-4).

highly illustrative examples, apparently ‘intelligent’ goals can exist without intelligent awareness.⁶ Therefore, it is very important to note that willing is not strictly synonymous with desiring, though it may to some extent be so in the case of our conscious awareness of the will as motivated volition. The will as ‘inner essence’ of the world underlying both my motivated willing and the non-motivational movement of a stone falling to the earth, is fundamentally blind and non-consciously teleological.

Importantly, this explains why I can never (in ordinary circumstances) stop willing nor start willing nor be motivated to will as such. I may have different motives concerning what does or does not become an ‘act of will’ (*Akt seines Willens*) (WWR I:124-5) at any given time, for instance I am motivated to make a cup of instant coffee when I am tired rather than brew fresh coffee because I am motivated by laziness and this is easier. However, each act of will is only ever a decision as to the manner in which the will expresses itself from moment to moment. That I will is something that is beyond my control and entirely non-cognitively teleologically motivated: there is cognitive purpose to my acts of will in so far as they are the result of motives (in combination with my intelligible character), however there is no motivated purpose to my willing as such (non-philosophically available to me at least).⁷

This is what Schopenhauer means when he states that properly speaking the will can will nothing other than itself because multiplicity is a feature of the world as representation only (WWR

⁶ For example, the larva of the male stag beetle who creates a hole big enough for it to develop its horns despite not knowing about its future metamorphosis (WWR I:139). We could of course question whether or not such a process is truly teleological and purposeful even non-consciously and therefore maintain that Schopenhauer is wrong to view the will as teleological and purposeful in any sense. For example, evolutionary theory appears to show that processes have no inherent purpose but are only retrospectively perceived as having them in virtue of the ‘accidental’ manner in which they are adaptively advantageous.

⁷ I say ‘non-philosophically available to me’ because, presumably as a manifestation of the will, my willing has the purpose that all manifestations of the will ultimately have which is willing itself. This motivation is not personal to me as an individual and thus I am not consciously aware of it in normal circumstances; although, interestingly, through rational cognition I become aware of it through philosophy. Indeed, I believe that this is what Schopenhauer wishes to say about the denial of the will-to-life in book IV of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation*: I am able to deny it as soon as, through knowledge, I am able to recognize it. Though of course there are other, more common ways to be motivated to deny the will-to-life other than simply knowledge, for example the experience of suffering.

I:153); the direction of my will may be determined by motives but not my essence as a willing subject because I am, like all things, through and through, embodied will.⁸ Hence Schopenhauer states:

These acts of will (*Akte des Willens*) continue to have a ground outside themselves, in motives. But these motives do not determine anything more than what I will at *this* time, in *this* place, under *these* circumstances; not *that* or *what* I will in general, i.e. the maxims that characterize the whole of my willing (*mein gesamntes Wollen*). This is why motives cannot explain the complete essence of my will; rather, they only determine its expression at a given point in time, they are only the occasion for my will to present itself; the will itself lies outside the jurisdiction (*außerhalb des Gebietes*) of the law of motivation, which necessarily determines only its appearance at each moment in time.

WWR I:131

This is why it is partially misleading to view willing as synonymous with desiring. While my will at any given moment is (usually at least) synonymous with what I desire, this accounts for only how my will is manifested in any given moment and is not an account of my fundamental existence as a willing subject. Desire can, according to the fourth principle of sufficient reason (the cognitive process of projecting aetiological explanation onto raw experience), the law of motivation, explain *what* I will but not *that* I will which remains groundless and foundational in so far as willing at all is beyond the principle of sufficient reason. It is for this reason that the will becomes near impossible to escape from – it is groundless and ontologically fundamental to our being.

The will, perceived as representation in our empirical understanding, is in a state of always ‘striving’ to manifest repeatable ‘Ideas’. For example, ‘tree’, ‘man’, ‘gravity’. These grades of the will’s manifestation are in constant conflict with one another for the matter upon which they attempt to

⁸ This raises issues when it comes to the negation of the will which will be fully addressed in chapter III. Ivan Soll states the issue well arguing that – ‘[if we are]...creatures whose entire being is will and nothing but will...it becomes incomprehensible how we could ever possibly suspend our will or have an experience in which our wills were not engaged. One can take a break from what one does, but not from what one is’ (Soll, 2012, p312).

manifest. In fact, Schopenhauer argues, the very nature or essence of the will's manifestation consists in strife and tension with itself. All manifestations of the will as repeatable Ideas are in conflict with one another for their expression and it is in such a way that each Idea is manifested. He states that the Ideas 'come into conflict with one another since each, guided by its causality, wants to take control of the matter at hand. The appearance of a higher Idea will emerge from this conflict' (WWR I:169).

In such a manner the will 'aims' for its highest possible objectification. This constant conflict contributes to the necessary suffering of all cognizant organisms as our very existence and preservation relies on a continual 'battle' with other manifestations of the will. This conflict is not just with other organisms but also with forces within ourselves, with our own 'chemical forces which, as lower Ideas, have a prior right to that matter...thus the burden of physical life in general, the necessity of sleep and ultimately death in which...those subjugated forces of nature overpower the organism that is wearied even by constant victory, winning back the matter that was torn from them' (WWR I:171). However, in an important sense, this striving is illusory. Because time and space apply only to representation, change, strife and flux are a feature only of the world as representation, that is, to animal perceptual consciousness. Nonetheless, the world of representation as the aspect of the world as will available to our senses and understanding, shows a world of 'internal rupture' (*Entzweiung mit sich selbst*) (WWR I:171).

In §27 Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer first introduces the term 'will-to-life' (*Wille zum Leben*) stating – 'So the will to life constantly lives and feeds off itself in its different forms up to the human race, which overpowers all others and regards nature as constructed (*ein Fabrikat*) for its own use' (WWR I:172). Why introduce the term 'will-to-life'? What does it designate that the term 'will' does not? I believe that Schopenhauer (at least at this stage in 1818) views the will and the will-to-life as synonymous. The reason behind his introduction of a new term is not to denote something new but rather to help us better understand the nature of the will. The will-to-life exists at all levels of the will's manifestation and is simply the objectification of

the will's urge to continue to express itself. Therefore, we can, for now, use them interchangeably.⁹ Importantly, while individuals express the will-to-life, properly speaking, it is the will-to-life that is expressing individuals. This is because the will-to-life is ontologically and metaphysically primary and only manifests individuals because doing so furthers its own ends. It is for this reason, Schopenhauer states, that nature casts aside individuals when it is done with them, its real concern being with the species-will – the continuation of the Idea through propagation. Schopenhauer states – ‘the individual...is of only indirect value for nature, namely only to the extent that it is the means of preserving the species’ (WWR II:366). Despite this, each individual manifestation is filled with life-will (*Lebenswillen*) that continues despite the death of the individual, and therefore, in so far as our essence as will is non-spatially and temporally individuated in this particular body, we are immortal. What this amounts to is the suggestion that the suffering we experience in life will not end even in death. We will discuss the difficulties this raises for a consistent account of personal identity in chapter III.

The use nature has for its illusory manifestations is most visible with organic biological objectifications of the will that are manifested in such a way as to ‘desire’, whether cognitively or not, self-preservation and then reproduction. However, conative striving is existent in all grades of the will's objectification. It is even evident in inorganic nature – ‘when...sprouting crystals come into contact, clash, and interfere with each other...or also when a magnet forces magnetism onto a piece of iron’ (WWR I:173). Thus, Schopenhauer has a special meaning for the term ‘life’ which is not simply reducible to biology but covers all representational manifestations of the will. Schopenhauer states ‘since what the will wills is always life, precisely because life is nothing but the presentation of that willing for representation, it is a mere pleonasm and amounts to the same thing if, instead of simply saying “the will”, we say “the will-to-life”’ (WWR I:301).¹⁰ Importantly, the strife and

⁹ This is the usual reading of Schopenhauer. Another reading that we will later explore is that in order to make better sense of Schopenhauer's soteriology, we ought to view the will-to-life as non-identical to the will. In chapter IV, I will be exploring Christopher Janaway's article ‘Different kinds of willing in Schopenhauer’ in order to question whether or not the will-to-life is only one form of willing (Janaway, 2023).

¹⁰ This claim will be complicated and challenged in chapter III and IV when we come to entertain the view that the will does not always will life but can will will-lessness too.

conflict of the manifestations of the will-to-life in representation will, by necessity, never be at an end. This is for the following reasons.

Firstly, there is a limited amount of matter upon which the Ideas can make themselves manifest and each Idea ‘urges’ to subsume all matter to the propagation of itself. Secondly, the very expression of the Ideas relies on resistance as an integral feature. For example, to continue as a human (or to be a human at all) requires that there is a constant struggle and overcoming of other forces, for example, gravity, or bacterial decay. While my body resists the willed manifestation of Ideas which would destroy it, I also cannot exist apart from my conflict with them because they are utilized in a fine balance for the very expression of my Idea. Thus, he states:

Sometimes several of the appearances of the will at the lower levels of its objectivation – the inorganic levels – come into conflict with one another since each, guided by causality, wants to take control of the matter at hand. The appearance of a higher Idea will emerge from this conflict and overpower all the less perfect Ideas that were there before, in such a way that it lets their essence continue to exist in a subordinate manner by taking an analogue of them into itself.

WWR I:169

Is there a final goal or telos behind all this striving? Because Schopenhauer continually uses the terms ‘drive’, ‘striving’, ‘desiring’ and even ‘teleology’ it may at first appear that he wishes to identify a purpose given by the will-to-life. However, this is misleading for the following reasons. Firstly, the will is one and complete in itself and, therefore, there is no-thing for it to strive to, or for, outside of itself. Secondly, the will cannot strive to realize itself because it cannot be divided temporally or spatially and therefore there is no state of movement or change from potentiality to actuality.¹¹ Any ‘movement’ or striving exists in the will’s manifestation in the world as

¹¹ This is similar to Aristotle’s conception of the Prime Mover and the later ‘Wholly simple God’ of Thomist Scholasticism (Aquinas, 1920). The will is, outside of representation, pure ‘actuality’ with no ‘potentiality’, its movement in the world as representation is only an apparent movement like the movement of images in a kaleidoscope. Thus, it is perhaps helpful to see the relation between the causal motion in the

representation, therefore we might argue that the will has the goal to ‘express its whole essence’ in representation. However, such a Hegelian striving for perfection is not the case either because the world as will and the world as representation are not ontologically distinct but are only epistemically distinct for cognizing creatures. Therefore, there is no separate world as representation that the world as will can have the appropriate causal, spatial or temporal relationship with necessary for such a drive.

Thirdly, the law of motivation as the fourth principle of sufficient reason is not appropriately applicable to the will other than in its manifestation in representation. Schopenhauer is insistent that the will is one, whole and complete and does not strive after greater manifestations in such a way.¹² In what sense, then, is the will purposefully striving? When Schopenhauer speaks of teleology, what I believe he is doing is describing the manner in which the will appears to us in representation. The will appears to us to aim to manifest itself at higher and higher levels, though of course, because time is a representative illusion, the will expresses all its forms at once and in totality – an eternal present.¹³ Therefore, the will is not teleologically willing anything as such. However, in the world as representation, that is, the world as it appears to perceptual consciousness, the will ‘appears’ to be teleologically willing itself. This, in fact, explains the will-to-life well. If the will can will only itself then the will-to-life represents the manner in which individual manifestations of the will (in normal circumstances) only will their own continuation with no greater teleology beyond this – they will only to continue to will. Schopenhauer seems insistent that there is no greater teleology whatsoever to the will and that teleology is a feature only of our subjective understanding of the world.¹⁴

world as representation and the world as will as similar to Aristotle’s Prime Mover in book 8 of the *Physics* and book 12 of the *Metaphysics* (Aristotle, 1995) – the ‘Unmoved Mover’ moves the world not as an efficient cause but as final cause as milk moves a cat. This comparison is interesting because, for Aristotle, the world ‘moves’ through desire (eros) to realise the prime mover. Does this provide a helpful way of viewing the world as representation, that it moves through desire to emulate or to realise higher levels of reality? This is certainly closer to the Brahmanic view of the Upanishads where it is love of Brahman that draws the world to him.

¹² This is remarkably similar to Plotinus’ account of ‘The One’ in the sixth book of the *Enneads* (Plotinus, 2018) as well as Parmenidean monism (Barnes, 1987).

¹³ Again, think of the kaleidoscope metaphor or the ‘beatific vision’ of Thomist Scholasticism.

¹⁴ How close to Darwinism Schopenhauer’s philosophy inadvertently approached and whether or not knowledge of Darwinism would have substantially changed any of Schopenhauer’s claims remains an

Whether the will in essence is teleological or not, the truly salient point I believe Schopenhauer is making is that the will appears to us, both in ourselves and in its appearance in other objects, as being goal oriented and teleological and, therefore, the term ‘will’ provides a fruitful metonymy for Schopenhauer as a way of interpreting the world. This is, in fact, what makes the will-to-life so perniciously insidious and gives rise to the desire for ‘negation of the will-to-life’ (*Verneinung des Willens zum Leben*); that it gives the illusion of being goal oriented towards satisfying objects outside of itself but, in fact, its goal is illusory and, ultimately, it aims only for the continuation of itself.¹⁵ The will is therefore self-referential – in one sense it is goal oriented and teleological because it wills itself but in another sense it is not goal oriented or teleological because it has no goal outside of itself.

Why is it that the will-to-life has created an awareness of itself through representation; namely humans and animals? Schopenhauer argues that the will-to-life, in both animals and humans has manifested cognition in order to aid survival and continued propagation of the ‘Species’ Idea (WWR II:495). Animals and humans thus will life in a specific manner: like the will-to-life without cognition, for example plants, we will the continuation of our own body, we will the continuation of our own species through reproduction (species-will), however, uniquely we also will our own individuated and self-aware aims and goals (these being secondary and subservient to the first two goals). The level of conscious awareness of these aims will differ depending on the cognition the will has managed to manifest in each organism, as well as the need for the organism to be consciously motivated, with these going hand-in-hand. In humans, as the highest manifestation of the will-to-life, conscious awareness of the will-to-life is most developed. Despite its complexity in conscious motivation, the overall aim of all willing is the same as the ‘dark, dull driving’ (WWR I:174) of inanimate nature, the only difference being that in ‘higher’ animals this driving exists alongside cognition. Thus, for humans, the will-to-life is felt as...

interesting subject of debate. Schopenhauer died ten months after the publication of *On the Origin of Species* and almost certainly did not read it. Sandra Shapshay explores these questions well (Shapshay, 2019).

¹⁵ This idea is expressed very well in the Buddhist imagery of the ‘three poisons’ that keep the dharmic wheel of samsara turning: greed, ignorance and hatred which are represented as a rooster a pig and a snake respectively – locked in eternal motion each are pulling the other’s tails with no beginning nor end, nor efficient cause outside of itself.

...desiring, striving, wishing, longing, yearning, hoping, loving, enjoying, rejoicing and the like, no less than not-willing or resisting, and detesting, fleeing, fearing, being angry, hating, grieving, suffering pain, in short all affects and passions, among the manifestations of willing as well; for these affects and passions are simply movements, more or less weak or strong, now violent and stormy, now gentle and calm, of one's own will that is either restrained or released, satisfied or unsatisfied, and they all relate in multiple variations to the attainment or non-attainment of what is willed, and to enduring or overcoming what is detested; thus they are decided affections of the same will that is in operation in decisions and actions.

FOW:38

Despite the above, it is essential to remember that this is only how the will-to-life appears as it is self-reflectively manifested to animal cognition. The will-to-life as such is usually not accompanied by cognition or motivation. Thus, my heart beating is a manifestation of the will-to-life despite my not motivationally willing it. Motivated willing is only one manifestation of the will-to-life and is, in fact, subservient to it because it owes its existence to the will-to-life wishing to express itself in a higher gradation – that is, in a complex organism requiring self-consciousness in order to carry out the will of the will-to-life. Thus, the will-to-life is not cognitive desiring though cognitive desiring is a manifestation of the will-to-life. Because the aim of the will-to-life is only itself, there being nothing apart from will, the will of an individual organism ultimately wills as its final end only its own continuation (including its continuation in reproduction through propagation – species-will).

Since the manifestations of the will-to-life draw their very essence from the conflict with other manifestations, conflict and strife are the necessary 'centre' of the will-to-life and there can be no relief while it is continually expressed. This strife must continue if the manifestation of the will-to-life is to continue. Thus, the will-to-life is always conative and directed towards new objects and new realisations of itself. There is, therefore, a constant lack gnawing at the heart of all manifestations of the will. This is a lack that we are aware of all the more for being creatures for whom the will has developed cognition. Ultimately, desire will never stop in so far as we continue to manifest the will-

to-life. We may despair at this relentless Sisyphean apparatus all the more because it is not at all arbitrary. This way of being is totally necessary in virtue of the beings that we are. Our very being is inconceivable in any form other than as a manifestation of the will-to-life because it is the will-to-life that is ontologically primary – the demands of the will-to-life have brought about creatures such as we are, and the demands of the will-to-life are never satiated. Schopenhauer states:

In fact the absence of all goals, of all boundaries, belongs to the essence of the will in itself, which is an endless striving...it is...revealed most simply on the very lowest level of the objecthood of the will, namely in gravity, whose constant striving is clear to see, despite the evident impossibility of its goal. Even if all the matter that exists were compressed together into a clump, as gravity wills it to be, gravity would still strive towards the middle point in this clump, always struggling against impenetrability, as rigidity or elasticity. Thus, the striving of matter can always be merely impeded but never fulfilled or satisfied. But this is just how it is with all the strivings of all the appearances of the will. Every goal that is achieved is once again the beginning of a new course of action, and so on to infinity.

WWR I:188

Thus, the will-to-life is structurally incapable of delivering us any permanent satisfaction.¹⁶

1.3 'Affirmation and negation of the will-to-life'

In extremely poignant and memorable ways, Schopenhauer describes the subjective experience of being a manifestation of the will-to-life as something we should despair at. Schopenhauer asks, as creatures who are born to relentless toil and striving, what do we get in return? (WWR II:368). The answer is that we get very little if anything at all. This is for two interconnected reasons. Firstly, our

¹⁶ Schopenhauer uses the term 'will' instead of 'will-to-life' in the above passage here for no special reason other than that they appear interchangeable for him at this point in his thought (1818) as was demonstrated when he describes all forces as manifestations of the will-to-life (WWR I:134-5).

will is never satisfied for long; if we (on occasion) achieve the desired object of our will, willing is only temporarily quietened before either the process of willing begins again or we feel the painful listlessness of boredom. In such a way, the will-to-life is felt as a gnawing lack, an itch never to be adequately scratched, and this defines our very being. Hence Schopenhauer states:

All satisfaction is only illusory and that acquisition does not achieve what desire had expected, namely the ultimate quenching of the fierce impulse of the will. Instead, the fulfilment of a wish only alters its shape, so now it spreads its misery in a new form; and in fact when all wishes are finally exhausted, the will retains its impulses even in the absence of any known motives, and these impulses announce themselves with incurable misery through a feeling of the most horrible desolation and emptiness.

WWR I:391

The will-to-life, in the sense that it manifests in animal cognition, is essentially conative and future oriented, consequently happiness and lasting satisfaction promised to us by the future fulfilment of our current desires will, by strict logical necessity, always escape us. This is because once the object of our will is gained, the future then becomes the present and our satisfaction turns into dissatisfaction and renewed longing. In this way, the will-to-life has manifested the distorting conditions of outer intuition, time and space, for us to labour under the illusion of. Properly speaking, there simply is nothing 'outside' of the eternal present and, therefore, nothing in the future that can deliver to us the satisfaction for which we long. Perhaps the most painful insult of our condition is that the majority of us are doomed to an inevitable ignorance of it. It seems not to matter how many times we painfully learn of the inability for any object of our will to quench our thirst, we do not learn what is ostensibly staring us in the face: that there can be no permanent or adequately meaningful satisfaction of the will.

The second reason that life fails to be worth the invested effort is rooted in Schopenhauer's negative understanding of pleasure as a *privatio malorum*. Because willing, and the necessary pain that comes with it, has primacy, any 'pleasure' that can be gained from an instance of fulfilled willing, whether we call it comfort, satiation or happiness, is necessarily only ever ontologically negative and

has no positive value – it is a temporary reprise from the pain of endless willing only. Consequently, as creatures who will life, we are always, by necessity, at a hedonic deficit from birth – pleasure or happiness having no positive value to begin with. Thus the ‘nullity and futility of the striving of the whole appearance’ necessitates that there is no ‘proportion between the exertions and the vexations of life and its revenues or profits’ (WWR II:369).

Essential to understanding the rationale for a negation of the will-to-life is that our condition as willing subjects is not accidental, rather it is strictly necessary in so far as we are manifestations of the will-to-life born for the sole purpose of its maintenance and perpetuation. Therefore, a solution to our predicament, if it is at all forthcoming, cannot come from altering the external circumstances that we find ourselves in, we will not be ‘happier’ if only we were to get the ‘right’ lover, or hold on to the ‘right’ job with the ‘right’ salary. All objects of the will are chimeras – they are illusory in the sense that, once gained, they lose their lustre and fresh willing again takes over.

It is in this context that Schopenhauer introduces his ‘most serious’ book (book IV of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation*) which he sub-heads ‘With the achievement of self-knowledge, affirmation and negation of the will-to-life’. The question at hand is ‘the worth or worthlessness of an existence, where salvation or damnation is in question’ (WWR I:297). Schopenhauer presents two diametrically opposed ways of being in the world. The first is to affirm the will-to-life (*Bejahung des Willens zum Leben*) and the second is to negate it (*Verneinung des Willens zum Leben*). ‘Affirmation of the will-to-life’ is to, both in one’s cognition and one’s actions, fully manifest our innate nature as creatures who are nothing except embodied will-to-life. Hence the ethical appearance of such an outlook is practical egoism and the cognitive appearance is metaphysical ignorance. In egoism, the will-to-life drives to satiate itself in its own individuated appearance alone. Hence the egoist is concerned with his needs above and even to the detriment of all others. Thus, the egoist uses others to fulfil his own individual manifestation of the will-to-life and will cause great suffering to others if it benefits him – another’s pain is, after all, nothing more than a representation for him. To this extent the egoist suffers for the following reasons:

Firstly, and most importantly, he is living in cognitive ignorance. Veiled behind ‘māyā’ (Sanskrit for illusion) (WWR II:617) and the *principium individuationis* he is kept from the ‘profound calm and inner serenity’ (WWR I:417) afforded by a ‘closer’ or more authentic

relationship with the world beyond individuated willing.

Secondly, the inherent nature of the will-to-life just is suffering and, consequently, to will strongly is to suffer more. The egoist manifests the will-to-life more fervently and hence suffers more. Schopenhauer states that if there were ‘an incomparably more violent will to life...[it]...would exhibit that much more suffering: it would be a *hell*’ (WWR I:423). Why is it a hell to will violently? It is because material resources are finite and, therefore, egoistic willing is to will to rob resources to the detriment of other manifestations of the will-to-life and thus cause suffering. Thus, egoism is hell for others. It is, however, also hell for the egoist. This is because the will as inner essence is one and, therefore, suffering inflicted from one appearance on to another is a suffering inflicted only upon oneself. Hence – ‘the tormentor and the tormented are one’ and the egoist is causing his ‘true’ self harm when he allows the will-to-life manifested through him to sink its ‘teeth into its own flesh’ (WWR I:381).

Thirdly, the egoist ‘feels he is surrounded by alien and hostile appearances’ – by cognitively approaching the world of appearance in a metaphysically incorrect way, the world appears to him as either ‘me’ or ‘not me’ and hence he sees outside of himself only the threat and competition of ‘hostile appearances’ (WWR I:401). The only possible meaningful respite from the horrors of the will-to-life, expressed most palpably in the egoist but nonetheless extent in all manifestations of willing, comes with a negation of the will-to-life.

It is important to recognise that there are various ways in which a negation of the will-to-life may come about for Schopenhauer. In its ethical bearing a negation of the will-to-life is to metaphysically abandon one’s association with the individuated appearance of the will-to-life as it manifests in my own appearance. This is achieved through an advanced and focused form of altruism, and more precisely in compassion (*Mitleid*). In compassion, the individual comes to acknowledge that his appearance only matters to the same extent that all appearances matter, and that it is the same will suffering in my appearance suffering behind all appearances. In the Schopenhauer literature, compassionate altruism alone has been viewed as not a true negation of the will-to-life because the individual still affirms the fulfilment of the will-to-life, it is just that the scope of the application of the will-to-life is no longer individuated in myself but has extended to all appearances. This is argued for in particular by Sandra Shapshay in *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s*

Ethics: Hope, Compassion and Animal Welfare (Shapshay, 2019). In chapter V, I will argue that a form of compassion can be compatible with the negation of the will-to-life and that this is the case because compassion tracks suffering rather than willing. However, I will not pre-empt the arguments of this chapter as the purpose of the current chapter is simply to make the most sense of Schopenhauer's terms and a discussion of the possibility of compassion and renunciation together deserves its own chapter.

The standard Schopenhauerian reading is that the altruist aims to fulfil the will-to-life of another because he makes no moral distinction between himself and another; and this is because he identifies with the will and the pain of another as his own. This comes through deep metaphysical insight that, beyond appearances, because the will is one, the other is me and I am the other. This is the metaphysical insight that Schopenhauer believes is expressed in the Chandogya Upanishad – *Tat Tvam Asi* (That you are) (see for instance WWR I:382, 401; WWR II:616). Because of this, the altruist's goal is the reduction of suffering for all sentient creatures by aiding them in the fulfilment of their will-to-life as an extension of his own willing. Thus, the altruist affirms the will-to-life. It is for this reason that much has been made of how ethical altruism is not a path to the denial of the will-to-life, for instance Sandra Shapshay and Tristan Ferrell who argue for the incompatibility of altruism and ascetic denial (Shapshay and Ferrell, 2015). Again, the reader will need to wait for my own criticism of this position in chapter V to see why this need not be the case.

Schopenhauer states that there is a way that ethical altruism may lead to a denial of the will-to-life, however, most have understood this as being only possible if the altruist first relinquishes his altruism. If the altruist, confronted by the sheer scale of suffering, cognitively recognizes that it is the will-to-life that is the foundation behind all suffering, then an 'abhorrence' of the will-to-life may set in and he no longer wishes to fulfil it in any of its manifestations. This is the rarer route to a negation of the will-to-life because it involves higher cognition and the philosophical awareness that all suffering in the world belongs to him (WWR I:419). It is from this 'abhorrence' of the will-to-life that Shapshay and Ferrell argue that the will-less subject must relinquish compassion and altruism – he can no longer empathize with the will-to-life as it is manifested in another nor can he be motivated to fulfil it in any of its appearances.

The second and (according to Schopenhauer) more common way in which an individual may

come to negate the will-to-life is through one's own personal suffering. The sheer weight of suffering that the individual is privy to may lead to correct cognizance that the will-to-life is, in reality, utterly pernicious and, as the very cause of suffering, should be abandoned. If this is the case, personal experiential suffering becomes the 'tranquilizer' of the will-to-life (WWR I:427). This is in contrast to the philosophical insight arrived at with altruism – being confronted with the sheer scale and shared inheritance of suffering. That such 'turnings away from the will' are at all possible is because in humans the will-to-life has manifested in one of its appearances an organism that, through cognition, is able to reflect upon itself. Hence, just as in aesthetic contemplation, humans have the unique ability to be a pure will-less mirror of the world, a 'pure cognitive subject' who beholds the world in an objective and disinterested manner (WWR I:209). What exactly Schopenhauer can mean by this will be explored in more depth in chapter III.

Suffering (one's own or the cognized suffering of others) can lift the individual outside of his individuated self as only one manifestation of the will-to-life among many because he 'sees through' the illusory appearance of the will-to-life as well as its ethical outlook – egoism. While the faculty of cognition may have originally been manifested by the will-to-life to further its own ends as a complex organism, it now becomes capable of self-sabotage. The individual who has become the 'clear mirror' of the world (WWR I:201) is able to 'see beyond' the *principium individuationis* and see the world objectively in a 'truer' light rather than as it must appear blindly to his own individuated being, instinctively enslaved to the will-to-life in his own appearance; his own egoistic wants and needs. Thus, the individual gains higher cognition and perhaps even liberation in this way.

Now that we have explored the antecedent conditions from which a desire for the negation of the will-to-life may emerge, let us now focus on what exactly the negation of the will-to-life means and entails. It remains a term that has confounded interpreters and has led to the charge of inconsistency or even outright contradiction from some; for how can something meaningfully negate itself? Ivan Soll presents this objection well when he states 'one can take a break from what one does, but not from what one is' (Soll, 2012, p12). How then can one deny one-self?¹⁷ Schopenhauer states that if cognition has awoken in the subject of willing in either of the two

¹⁷ My own solutions to these problems will be fleshed out more fully in chapters III and IV.

aforementioned ways; that is, he either comes to know cognitively the irredeemable and eternal suffering of all manifestations of the will-to-life or comes, experientially through his own suffering, to realise the futility at the heart of the will-to-life, then such knowledge will begin to act as a ‘tranquilizer’ of his will (WWR I:427). In short, he is motivated to no longer will life. He sees ‘through’ the mirage of willing and now wishes nothing more than to be free of will.

The first issue is whether or not suffering (both personal and experiential or non-personal and belonging to others and understood cognitively) can ever be motivation for a negation of the will. I will argue that it cannot and that this is for very good Schopenhauerian reasons. Suffering can act as motivation for an increased *desire* to negate the will-to-life, not least because this desire appears to be one that is dormant in all individuals whether they come to negate the will-to-life or not.¹⁸ Suffering may, therefore, be a necessary precursor for a negation of the will, but it cannot by itself, be sufficient. This is because a free voluntary act of negation of the will is not possible. To see why this is we need to look to Schopenhauer’s account of freedom and necessity.

In his *Prize Essay On the Freedom of the Will*, Schopenhauer states that the human subject is both free and unfree. He does this by employing the Kantian distinction between ‘intelligible character’ and ‘empirical character’. The ‘intelligible character’, for Schopenhauer, is our nature as willing subjects before manifestation in appearance and is entirely free. It is free because causation is a feature of cognition and not the ‘thing-in-itself’. There is, therefore, no necessity tethering and restricting my ‘intelligible character’ (FOW:107-8). However, because my ‘intelligible character’ is free from causation, it cannot be altered or changed. This is why Schopenhauer is fond of the expression from Seneca’s Epistles: ‘*Velle non discitur*’ – ‘willing cannot be taught’ (WWR I:321, 322, 331, 395, 396). It is of no use attempting to change or alter my character – it is not possible. This is why Schopenhauer laments most ethics as empty sermonising (see for instance WWR I:395). Furthermore, the manner in which my ‘intelligible character’ manifests in the world as representation (that is, in my physical actions made known to cognition through appearance) follows strict laws of causal necessity. According to the principle of sufficient reason, there can be

¹⁸ Schopenhauer states that in ‘ordinary’ willed existence, the will-to-life, – ‘we cannot help feeling the greatest longing, since we acknowledge that this alone [will-lessness] is...infinitely superior to everything else’ (WWR I:417).

no action that is not proceeded by strict casual antecedents (FOW:96). Therefore, my behaviour is causally determined and I am not free. This is known as my ‘empirical character’, it is the ‘intelligible character’ as I come to discover it through my actions subject as they are to space, time and causation. My will as both ‘intelligible character’ and ‘empirical character’, therefore, cannot be affected by causal motivations. The only variable is the particular way in which my ‘intelligible character’ manifests empirically – which motives move it – which cannot differ significantly enough to change who I fundamentally am. For example, I will an ice-cream rather than a chocolate bar because I happen to have walked past an ice-cream shop and not a chocolate shop. Thus, external factors presenting as individual motivations can change what I will but not truly how I will – regardless of the shop I pass, I still remain greedy. At the most, I can become more or less cognitively aware of the various motivations that determine the particular manifestation of my character from one moment to the next. The extent to which Schopenhauer’s distinction between ‘intelligible’ and ‘empirical’ character remains consistent, while an interesting question, is not one that strictly concerns us here. It simply suffices to state that Schopenhauer argues that my character is not able to change.

What does this mean for the ‘negation of the will-to-life’? What it means is that I cannot choose to negate the will-to-life any more than I can choose to negate my ‘intelligible character’. My inbuilt nature is ultimately impervious to any motives – it cannot be changed. The manner in which my character manifests is certainly open to motivations, hence I may steal from someone rather than both steal and kill them because, along with my greed, I am motivated by knowledge of the prison system of the country I happen to have been born into, however my nature as a callous individual prone to criminality is unalterable. How then can one come to make such a radical alteration of one’s character so as to negate the will-to-life?

One response may be to argue that in the negation of the will-to-life my character is not changed so much as it is abolished – the distinction being that my character does not become amended but eradicated altogether.¹⁹ However, it is still difficult to see how an abolition of the character could be chosen and, therefore, I believe that the only possible answer to this apparent paradox is to concede that one cannot freely negate the will-to-life. One can only, through cognition,

¹⁹ Christopher Janaway also suggests this (Janaway, 2023, p17).

desire to. The actual process of negation is not freely chosen because it is a total transformation of the character from willing life to no longer willing life and the character is impervious to causation and therefore motivation. Schopenhauer states that, to a great extent, the ‘process’ through which a negation of the will-to-life emerges is highly mysterious. To the extent that I may want it, it certainly can be an object of my will, it is something that I desire, however to the extent that it is actually ‘achieved’ it cannot be willed. This leads Schopenhauer to describe the negation of the will-to-life in passive religious language as the ‘*effect of divine grace*’ (WWR I:432). Schopenhauer uses this insight to defend what he sees as the fundamental truth of the Christian creed, in particular the Augustinian and Lutheran dogmas of salvation through grace alone rather than the Pelagian account of salvation through good works (WWR I:433). The transformation of the individual from willing to will-less is not a transformation that we can achieve through our own efforts – ‘that entrance into freedom cannot be forced by any intention or resolution, but emerges from the innermost relation of cognition to willing in human beings, and thus arrives suddenly, as if flying in from the outside’ (WWR I:432).²⁰ Schopenhauer further states:

In this faith it is clear from the start that our condition is originally and essentially incurable and that we need to be *redeemed* from it; also, that we ourselves are essentially evil and are bound to evil so tightly that the works we perform according to laws and precepts (*Vorschrift*), i.e. according to motives, could never remotely satisfy justice, nor could they redeem us; rather, redemption is to be won only through faith i.e. through an altered mode of cognition, and this faith itself can only come from the outside. This means that salvation is something entirely alien to our person and it points to the fact that salvation requires us to negate and abolish precisely this person.

WWR I:435

Nonetheless salvation remains desperately desired because it represents ‘a peace that is higher

²⁰ It from insights such as these that Schopenhauer believes his philosophy is in spiritual harmony with what he sees as the core of Christianity.

than all reason...where...we are shown the completely calm sea of the mind, that profound tranquillity, imperturbable confidence and cheerfulness' (WWR I:438-9).

Therefore, if the will-to-life is to negate itself, then the process by which this comes about necessarily must remain a mystery. This is because, being a complete and free expression of the 'intelligible character', it is not subject to the principle of sufficient reason. This is because reason, as a faculty of the mind, is an instrument bound to causal, temporal and spatial categories none of which apply to the 'intelligible character'. Therefore, though there may remain profound questions as to the nature of this negation, we cannot always expect to find answers to them in Schopenhauer's philosophy because, in this discussion at least, we have passed from the 'the kingdom of nature' to the 'kingdom of grace' (WWR I:435-6). Despite this, we may still 'wonder' at the negation of the will-to-life. It is simply that we should not accuse Schopenhauer of inconsistency if he does not provide fully satisfying philosophical answers to them.²¹ Some of these questions include – what is the nature of personal identity such that the same 'I' that desires a negation of the will-to-life can persist once it has achieved said negation? If ordinary personal identity results from my identification with my own manifestation of the will-to-life then in what sense can I be the same 'I' after I have negated the will? What is it 'like' to be a negated will, what is the nature of this 'relative' nothingness (WWR I:436)? Is negation of the will an event, something that takes place in time once and for all, or is it a continual process that must be consistently 'renewed'? If the will is our essence, how can the will negate itself, in what sense can we come to deny our essence? It is to these questions that we will turn in chapters III and IV.

²¹ Though of course many would argue that the view that Schopenhauer is able to 'hide behind' his claim that the full nature of the 'will' is not fully available to us is both a weak position and one that he himself does not bear out in his philosophy. Firstly, to leave claims undefended because they are 'outside of reason' would not be considered philosophy for many. Secondly, the assumption that Schopenhauer has identified a limit to philosophy is questionable not least because it assumes the limit that philosophy in fact has which would violate Wittgenstein's warning that – 'in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit' (Wittgenstein, 2021, p54). A Kantian may wish to argue that Schopenhauer is overstepping the remit of conceptual thought by even proposing such ideas. Though of course, Kant trod a similar path with his postulates of practical reason which he states do not rely on reason (Kant, 2015, 5:133, p107). Finally, it may appear strange that Schopenhauer wishes to delineate a limit to what is thinkable at this side of 'the negation of the will to life' because, after all, he is prone to philosophize much about the 'thing-in-itself' and the nature of 'will' as ultimate reality – this, in fact, represents most of the second book of *The World as Will and Representation*.

1.4 Conclusion

For Schopenhauer, so long as we will life, we are logically and necessarily exempt from any significant measure of fulfilment or satiation such as would compensate us for our efforts, he states – ‘Thus, as long as our consciousness is filled by our will, as long as we are given over to the pressure (*Drange*) of desires with their constant hopes and fears, as long as we are the subject of willing, we will never have lasting happiness or peace’ (WWR I:220). The will-to-life which appears to be constitutive of our very nature manifests creatures such as we are who are incapable of true fulfilment. It is for this reason that we require a deliverance from the will-to-life, it is because, in so far as we will-life, we are structurally barred from achieving a life with any measure of positive satisfaction. Schopenhauer provides two ways in which we can be in the world with each corresponding to either more or less pain and suffering. The first is to be one who has affirmed the will-to-life and the second is to be one in whom the will has negated itself. In the next chapter, I will examine the metaphysical foundation that is necessary in order for us to even begin to suggest that we could operate independently of the will-to-life.

Chapter II: What do we need saving from?

2.1 Introduction

My aim in this chapter is to provide an argument for why we should no longer view the will as ultimate reality in Schopenhauer's philosophy. This will be the first step in our attempt at making better sense of his soteriology as well as reassessing the 'pessimist' label. In the end, I will argue that it is only possible to satisfactorily make sense of Schopenhauer's soteriology if we partially reconstruct his metaphysics. I will then argue that what we need saving from is not the world per se, but one way of being within the world only.

2.2. The will as Kantian 'thing-in-itself'

In book II of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer begins laying the foundations for an attempt at a resolution to the 'riddle' (*Räthsel*) (WWR I:124) of life by asking – to what extent can the 'inner essence' (*das innere Wesen*) behind all phenomenological appearances be known? (WWR I:121). This 'inner essence' of the world defies all ordinary epistemic explanation because, in a transcendently ideal manner, all sciences, regardless of how foundational, necessarily do not provide us access to cognitively unconditioned reality beyond the necessary ways in which we must come to know it. Consequently, empirical and rational investigation alone will not suffice, both eventually coming up against a '*qualitas occulta*' (WWR I:147), a hidden unknown brute fact of experience beyond which no further level of explanation is forthcoming. For example, despite the principle of sufficient reason telling us a great deal about the qualities and relationships inherent in the phenomena, the inner necessity of gravity for instance, the 'x' out of which it emerges, cannot be explained further. While this remains the case, the world will remain an 'unknown quantity' (WWR I:136). Schopenhauer asks if there is any way in which we can cognitively break through the world of appearances and access the Kantian 'thing-in-itself' (*Ding an sich*), the unconditioned, non-representational reality behind the empirical world of representation. This would not be possible were it not for one object which is knowable both through representation and yet also immediately from 'within'. This is our own bodies.

To be human is to be not only a subject of cognition, ‘a winged cherub’s head without a body’ (*geflügelter Engelskopf ohne Leib*), but what is more, embodied (WWR I:124). For Schopenhauer, our embodied experience is the key to solving the ‘riddle’. This is because, in so far as we have a corporeal form, we are privy to a two-fold perspective on one object in our world. This object is knowable both mediately through our pure forms of cognition as representation subject to spatial, temporal and causal cognitive categories as well as immediately and in-itself. While the ‘outside’ of the object remains the limit of what is knowable of other bodies and consequently the ‘in-itself’ of the phenomena ‘behind’ all other objects in the world as representation remain unknowable to me, this is not the case with my own body. My body is not only an object of perception for me, it is also something that I am aware of immediately from within.

Therefore, the inner mechanism beneath representation is visible to us in this one unique object among objects. What is it that we come to know directly through self-reflection upon our own bodies? Schopenhauer answers emphatically – we experience the inner principle of our own bodies as intentional volition. Schopenhauer calls this ‘will’. He states:

The subject of cognition, appearing as an individual, is given the solution to the riddle: and this solution is *will*. This and this alone gives him the key to his own appearance, reveals to him the meaning and shows him the inner workings of his essence, his deeds, his movements. The body is given in two entirely different ways to the subject of cognition.

WWR I:124

Therefore, in the voluntary movement of my leg for instance, unlike any other body in representation, I come to understand not only the ‘what’ of external representation filtered through intuition in space and time (how the movement of my leg appears to me and others ‘externally’ through my senses and cognitive faculties), but also the ‘why’. This is a result of my privileged access to the what lies beneath the representation. Why is it the case that my leg moves in such a way? It is because I *will* it. No other level of explanation is more foundational and, therefore, I directly know the ‘in-itself’ of my own body.

My will is a unique object of knowledge for me because, not being representation, it is experienced in such a way as not to be subject to spatial or causal categories.²² I can, as it were, will at will, while *what* I will appears to need motive or prior cause in the world as representation, *that* I will does not and is foundational. Willing as such, which is my very essence, has no prior cause or sufficient reason. Furthermore, my will is not something that causes the physical movements of my body. Rather my will is ontologically identical with the movement and manifestation of my body. My will to move my leg and my perception of its movement in the world as representation are just two epistemic ways I come to know the same ontological event – the body is nothing but the objectified will. Thus, Schopenhauer states:

Every true act of his will (*Akt seines Willens*) is immediately and inevitably a movement of his body as well: he cannot truly will an act without simultaneously perceiving it as a motion of the body. An act of the will and an act of the body are not two different states cognized objectively, linked together in a causal chain, they do not stand in a relation of cause and effect; they are one and the same thing, only given in two entirely different ways: in one case immediately and in the other case to the understanding in intuition.

WWR I:124-5

Therefore, there is no willing that is not immediately and at the same time a physical ‘doing’ (WWR I:125). Furthermore, the identity between willing and the body is such that not only is every act of will simultaneously an act of my body, but every effect on the body is also an effect on my will such that certain forms of physical stimulation are knowable directly as manifestations of will. Physical stimuli which are contrary to my will are knowable as ‘pain’ and stimulation in accordance with my will is knowable as ‘pleasure’.²³ Only very few impressions on the body do not excite my

²² Though my will does appear to me in time. This proves to be a great sticking point for Schopenhauer and an area where he has to give up the claim that there is direct knowledge of the ‘thing-in-itself’ (see WWR II:208).

²³ Though of course, as we saw in the previous chapter, pain is ontologically primary and pleasure is merely the felt absence of pain – an absence that is in accord with our will.

will and are thus representations only, for instance sight, hearing, and touch when they are neither pleasant nor unpleasant to a sufficient degree so as to stimulate my will, and are, consequently, knowable only representationally as intuition. The identity between willing and the body is further maintained when Schopenhauer argues that my will is not knowable to the subject in its entirety through any singular act but is revealed chronologically through time as one act of will succeeding another, collectively manifesting my essence. This is true of the body too which is not revealed in its entirety in any one moment in time but instead through successive activity. Thus, my will and my body are knowable through the form of time and I am aware of both my body and my will via individuated acts that collectively reveal my essence (WWR I:126).

With this foundational insight Schopenhauer believed (at least in 1818 with the first publication of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation*) that he had taken the Kantian project in the *Critique of Pure Reason* one step further than Kant himself was able to: he had identified a ‘single, narrow gateway’ by which we can directly come to know the non-representational, ‘*Ding an sich*’ (thing in itself) behind representation (WWR II:207). Furthermore, Schopenhauer argued that what he had discovered as the ‘thing-in-itself’ of his own body was self-identical to the ‘thing-in-itself’ behind all phenomena. Thus, my will, as the ‘in-itself’ of my body is a manifestation of the ‘in-itself’ behind all phenomena. This he names the ‘will’. For many commentators, this is a step too far.²⁴ However, Schopenhauer believes he has good reason to make such a claim.

The first is hermeneutic. Understanding the inner-nature of representational phenomena as manifestations of the same will we experience in ourselves helps us to make more sense of the world. Thus, if we make ourselves susceptible to his foundational insight – ‘we will recognize that same will as the inner essence, but not only of people and animals...[but]...rather, the continuation of this reflection will lead us to recognize this will as the driving and vegetating force in plants, the force growing in crystals, turning magnets north...it appears as repulsion and attraction, separation and unification’ (WWR I:134-5).²⁵

²⁴ See for instance Magee, 1997, p144.

²⁵ Sandra Shapshay argues that this is an example of a ‘metonymic’ metaphysics from Schopenhauer: an interpretative rather than a foundational exercise projecting onto ultimate reality our

The second reason builds upon Kant's 'Transcendental Aesthetic' in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. If we are willing to accept, as Schopenhauer was, that Kant was able to demonstrate that space and time, as features of our intuition, are 'nothing but the representation of appearance' (Kant, 1998, A42, p168), then individuation, being a feature of spatiality and temporality, necessarily cannot be a feature of the 'thing-in-itself'. The a priori necessity that governs space and time is a feature of the understanding alone. Consequently, for the 'thing-in-itself' as it manifests in my body to be different to the 'thing-in-itself' manifesting in all bodies would be an impossibility because the 'thing-in-itself' is non-divisible. I cannot, therefore, have identified 'part of', or 'one aspect of' the 'thing-in-itself' that manifests in me and separate it from the 'thing-in-itself' as it manifests in say, my sofa, because this would be to inappropriately apply plurality. Plurality is dependent on spatial and temporal categories the application of which should never go beyond the scope of transcendently possible experience. Therefore, I can extrapolate from the 'thing-in-itself' as it exists within me to the 'thing-in-itself' as it exists 'behind' all representations – if I have discovered it within myself, I have discovered it in its entirety (WWR I:153). Therefore, Schopenhauer reasons that, because the will is knowable directly in the inner awareness I have of my own body as motivation to movement, this must be applied equally to all phenomena of the will (WWR I:136). Thus, the foundation behind the whole world is willing.

Much ink has been spilt on this controversial step in Schopenhauer's argument, for instance one of Schopenhauer's very first reviewers, Johann Friedrich Herbart, took him to account in 1820 claiming that Schopenhauer was guilty of an inconsistent reading of Kantianism (Ryan, 2020, p374). Bryan Magee argues that Schopenhauer makes himself vulnerable to misunderstandings because the word 'will' anthropomorphically projects teleological striving onto un-intelligent processes (Magee, 1997, pp143-4). The issue comes down to two inter-connected problems. The first being – has Schopenhauer invoked an outright contradiction in even suggesting the possibility of 'contact' with the 'thing-in-itself'? Kant clearly maintained that such contact is an impossibility (Kant, 1998,

most immediate encounter with it, which, while hermeneutically helpful, in no means should be read as an exhaustive descriptive account of reality beyond the transcendently necessary way in which it becomes known to us (Shapshay, 2019, p51). I will make use of this interpretation when I come to discuss the possibility of the negation of the will-to-life.

A255/B311, p350). Indeed, cognitive contact with anything would seem to necessitate that the object is a representation for a knowing subject and therefore, by necessity, antithetical to the ‘thing-in-itself’. Should we not expect the same injunction from Schopenhauer who similarly argues ‘no object without a subject’ (WWR I:461)?²⁶ Schopenhauer does attempt to proceed with a degree of caution stating – ‘this *thing in itself* (we will retain the Kantian expression as a standing formula) can never be an object, because an object is only its appearance and not what it really is’ (WWR I:135). However, he goes on to say that we can ‘think objectively’ about the thing-in-itself. This seems a clear violation of Kant’s insistence that the content of the ‘thing-in-itself’ is not even thinkable given that – ‘we have no intuition, indeed not even the concept of a possible intuition, through which objects outside of the field of sensibility could be given’ (Kant, 1998, A255, p350).

Perhaps we should see an evolution to Schopenhauer’s thought with, Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation* presenting a philosopher who is fully confident that he has provided direct cognitive contact with the ‘thing in itself’, whereas by Volume II there emerges one who is far more trepidatious, admitting that even an act of will must be within time and therefore cannot be the ‘thing-in-itself’ stripped of all forms of outer intuition. He later claims that ‘although the thing in itself has largely thrown off its veils...it does not emerge fully naked’ (WWR II:208). Indeed, Schopenhauer does appear to shift his focus from a confident assertion of direct knowledge of the ‘thing-in-itself’ in Volume I to feeling the need to draw his readers attention to the paradox of knowing the ‘thing-in-itself’ by Volume II –

Accordingly, even this last and most extreme step still leaves the following question: what in the end is this will, which presents itself in the world and as the world, ultimately in itself?...This question is *never* to be answered because, as was already mentioned, being-cognized inherently contradicts being-in-itself and everything we cognize is as such mere appearance...the thing in itself (which we cognize most directly

²⁶ Christopher Ryan illustrates how the secondary literature is divided on this issue with Julian Young and John Atwell taking the view that Schopenhauer did not really hold the will to be the Kantian ‘thing-in-itself’ (Young, 1987, pp31-2, Atwell, 1995, p126), whereas David Hamlyn and Robert Wicks take the opposite view, that Schopenhauer did (Hamlyn, 1980, pp92-100; 149-55, Wicks, 2011, p80, pp142-46) (Ryan, 2020, p364).

in willing) may have – entirely outside of any appearance – determinations, properties and ways of being (*Daseynsweisen*) that entirely elude our grasp or cognition.

WWR II:209

This difficulty continued to haunt Schopenhauer in his own lifetime. When questioned on the same issue in 1852 by his earnest ‘disciple’ Julius Frauenstadt, he replied (somewhat weakly in my view) that his philosophy:

...teaches what appearance is, and what the thing in itself is. But this is thing in itself only in a relative sense, i.e., in its relation to appearances...But I have never said what the thing in itself is apart from that relation, since I do not know it; but in it, it is the will to life.

GB:291

There is a serious issue here. How can Schopenhauer lay claim to knowledge that the philosophical ‘discovery’ of the will has removed a veil from the ‘thing-in-itself’, if we cannot, by necessity, ever cognize what the ‘thing-in-itself’ is independently of its veils?²⁷²⁸ If this is so, then

²⁷ Schopenhauer himself appears to state that this is not possible – ‘To want to construct the essence in itself of things according to the laws of mere appearance, is an undertaking that can be compared to wanting to construct a stereometric body from mere surfaces and their laws. Every transcendent dogmatic philosophy is an attempt to construct the thing in itself according to the laws of appearance, which ends up being like the attempt to cover two absolutely dissimilar figures with each other, which always fails because no matter how one turns them, now this and now that corner sticks out’ (PP II:85).

²⁸ For Frederick Copleston in particular, this issue is so serious a violation of Kantian principles as to render Schopenhauer’s entire philosophy absurd. He states that, if the conclusion to Schopenhauer’s arguments can only be that ‘all my ideas, all my thoughts, are phenomenal: they are objects for “me”, i.e. the pure knower, just as much as the objects of the external world are objects for me...[then]...not merely is the subject-object distinction phenomenal, but my assertion of my knowledge, my thought of the subject-object distinction is also phenomenal, it is my idea. More than that, the distinction I make between phenomenon and noumenon, between the subject-object distinction on the one hand and the Metaphysical unity of Will, the “inside” of the world, on the other hand is also phenomenal. (In fact, the whole philosophy of Schopenhauer’s is phenomenal!). But if phenomenal means illusionary, as it clearly does in Schopenhauer’s doctrine concerning the external world as contained in the last book of the World, then any

upon what foundation can he claim to tell apart a veil from the ‘thing-in-itself’?²⁹ Similarly, on the assumption that we have removed a veil, who is to say that this has given us deeper/greater access to the ‘thing-in-itself’? Perhaps there are an infinite number of veils and, consequently, removing one gets us no closer – there are ‘turtles all the way down’ (anon). Indeed, it could be conjectured that, because the ‘thing-in-itself’ is unknowable, on the assumption that we have succeeded in removing one or more veils, we have presumably only ‘uncovered’ something that would, by necessity, always remain invisible anyway. If I place a veil over something that is, independently of me, invisible and then remove it, in what sense have I meaningfully ‘uncovered’ it?³⁰

The view I will be arguing for will be that we should reconstructively suggest that ultimate reality (by which I mean the nature of the world totally independent of any representation for a knowing or willing subject) should not be considered as synonymous with willing, that willing is simply a ‘layer’ of reality between ultimate reality and the phenomenal world of empirical representation, the uncovering of which allows us to get deeper behind appearances while never, by necessity, striking at the bed-rock of the thing-in-itself.^{31 32} This view does appear to be offered by

distinctions I draw, any thoughts I think, any philosophy I formulate, are also illusionary...In this way, the philosophy of Schopenhauer, in the opinion of the present writer, negates itself’ (Copleston, 1946, p69).

²⁹ In *The View from Nowhere*, Thomas Nagel suggests something similar when he states that the world beyond our experience of it may be different in ways that we simply ‘cannot imagine’ and ‘that our thoughts and impressions are produced in ways that we cannot conceive’ (Nagel, 1986, p71).

³⁰ Christopher Janaway puts the point well when he states – ‘If the thing in itself is unknowable, we must always be ignorant about the closeness of resemblance between it and any phenomenon. Even if a clear account can be given of that inner experience of the will which is supposedly mediated only by time, there can in principle be no guarantee that a smaller number of subjective forms of the understanding takes us “nearer” the thing in itself than a larger number does. Our experience of willing may be “immediate” in some other sense—incurably known, non-inferential, without observation (for example)—but to say that it gives us our “most immediate” access to the thing in itself is to make nonsense of the concept *thing in itself*’ (Janaway, 1989, p197).

³¹ I say ‘reconstructively’, however there is room to argue that this was, in fact, Schopenhauer’s mature position (see for instance WWR II:659).

³² Julian Young makes a similar argument, stating – ‘Is the will of Book II really intended as an account of the ultimate ‘whatness’ of things, of ultimate reality? Is it really intended as an answer to the question of the nature of Kant’s ‘thing in itself’? As a young man Schopenhauer intends it as such an account. He thinks, moreover, that he can offer will as an account of the thing in itself and remain a good Kantian. He thinks this because he believes that in encountering ourselves ‘as will’ we encounter something that is non-‘representation’ and must therefore be the thing in itself. This is a bad mistake since inner experience, though non-spatial, is subject to the form of time and hence, for Kant, cannot be the atemporal

Schopenhauer, for instance in the final chapter of Volume II of *The World as Will and Representation* entitled 'Epiphilosophy' where he states – 'The essence of things before or beyond the world, and consequently beyond the will, is closed to all investigation because cognition in general is itself only phenomenon and therefore takes place only in the world, just as the world takes place only in it...the inner essence in itself of things is not cognizant' (WWR II:659). At other points Schopenhauer even appears to openly state that the will is, in the end, not the 'thing-in-itself'. In his manuscript remains from 1829 he states:

I have, of course, declared this will to be the thing-in-itself, yet not absolutely, but only in so far as the thing-in-itself is to be named after its most immediate phenomenal appearance and accordingly the extreme boundary-stone of our knowledge is to be found in the will. When subsequently I represent this will as abolishing itself, then here I have expressly stated that the nothing that is left for us is only a relative and not an absolute nothing. From this it is obvious enough that that which abolishes itself as will must yet have another existence wholly inaccessible to our knowledge, and this would then be simply the existence of the thing-in-itself.

MR III:595

The second problem is perhaps even more damaging: if willing is not identical to the pure unveiled Kantian 'thing-in-itself', then under what pre-text are we entitled to extrapolate from, and then label, the 'inner essence' behind, all representation – willing? If willing is the 'thing-in-itself' of our bodies still dressed in some 'veils', not least temporality, and we, necessarily, cannot tell apart what is veiled from what is 'thing-in-itself' because we are denied verifying access to the 'thing-in-itself' independent of all of its veils, then, when we extrapolate our inner essence onto the inner essence of the world at large, how can we be confident that we have correctly identified willing as the

thing in itself. The mature Schopenhauer realises this and modifies his position so that the will, while still being offered as a deeper account of reality than that provided by objectual consciousness, is acknowledged to be, in the final analysis, an account of the world as appearance rather than an account of Kant's thing in itself (Young, 2005, p101).

world's inner essence and have not instead erroneously and anthropomorphically projected the specific veil under which we come to know the 'thing-in-itself' in us onto the 'thing-in-itself' of the world.³³ This is a serious problem and has led to both the charge that Schopenhauer inappropriately animates nature as well as the charge of unverifiability.³⁴

Schopenhauer admits that naming the 'thing-in-itself' will is, to an extent, misleading. This is an issue of language and necessarily so because ordinary language necessitates that we refer to the 'in-itself' of our own bodies according to the way in which we come to know them, namely with one of its veils, temporality, still intact. However, Schopenhauer believes there is no sufficiently appropriate term available other than 'will'. This is because, as a term denoting the inner-most essence of the only being we actually have direct access to – ourselves, it is understood best and most clearly with this term. Thus, he states:

If we are to think objectively about this 'thing-in-itself', it must borrow its name and concept from an object, from something that is somehow objectively given, and thus from one of its appearances: but if this is to further our understanding, it can be nothing other than the most complete of all appearances...i.e. the clearest, most highly developed appearance, the one that is illuminated immediately by knowledge: but this is just the human *will*. It is nonetheless fair to say that we are only using a denomination from the superior term (*denomination a potiori*) that gives the concept of will a broader scope than it had before...Accordingly, I will name the genus after its most important species; the more intimate and immediate cognition we have of species leads to the mediated cognition we have of all others.

WWR I:135-6

³³ Sandra Shapshay similarly argues that we should not view willing as an exhaustive account of the nature of ultimate reality for Schopenhauer but instead see it 'metonymically' as a way of deciphering and making sense of phenomena (Shapshay, 2021, p64).

³⁴ Bryan Magee is the leading example of the former criticism. He believes that Schopenhauer should never have named the inner essence of the world 'will' to begin with and that his insistence on it – 'has ensured that all but close students of his work are bound to take him to be saying...something semi-occult, perhaps even a bit crackpot' (Magee, 1997, p144).

2.3. The will as not ultimate reality

Vasfi Özen argues that Schopenhauer leaves us with three distinct and irreconcilable accounts of the ‘thing-in-itself’ which he nonetheless holds simultaneously (Özen, 2020, p254). First is the view dating from the first publication of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation*, that the ‘thing-in-itself’ is directly knowable as the will. The second is the view dating from the time period of 1820-21, that, because the will is in time and the ‘thing-in-itself’ is beyond temporality, the ‘thing-in-itself’ is not directly accessible or knowable. This is the view that the will is the ‘thing-in-itself’ minus one of its ‘veils’ (WWR II:208). Finally, Özen argues, Schopenhauer offers a third account – the will is no longer identified as the ‘thing-in-itself’ at all but is instead the barrier separating us from a greater awareness of the true ‘thing-in-itself’. In so far as it is at all possible to make ‘contact’ with the ‘thing-in-itself’, this is done only via a negation of the will-to-life such that the ‘thing-in-itself’ is that which does not will life (Özen, 2020, p271). Özen believes evidence for this new position can be found, among other places, in the following passage:

In tragedy...we see before our eyes the state of the world diametrically opposed to our will. At the sight of this we feel called upon to turn our will away from life, to stop wanting and loving it. Precisely this, however, makes us aware that something else remains in us that cannot be recognized positively but only negatively as that which does *not* will life.

WWR II:450

Schopenhauer refers to this ‘something else’ elsewhere – he states that ‘what the church calls the *natural man*...is that very will to life that must be negated if redemption from an existence such as ours is to be achieved. Behind our existence lies something else and it only becomes accessible to

us when we shake off the world' (WWR I:432).³⁵ Özen argues that asceticism and denial of the will takes the place the will occupied in Volume I as the key to the inner essence of the world – that which can lead to an 'overcoming of the self and the phenomenal world, and thus of recognizing a reality that is beyond plurality, transience and decay, change and extinction, in other words a reality beyond willing' (Özen, 2020, pp273-4). Thus, the will falls from its position as the 'the-thing-in-itself' and instead becomes an inhibitor in our attempt to know 'the thing-in-itself' – 'Put simply and somewhat paradoxically, for Schopenhauer, it is as if the will negates itself in order to disclose to itself what it truly is and hence voluntarily passes "over into empty nothingness" (WWR II (P):198)' (Özen, 2020, p274). If such a position can be sustainably argued then it presents a profound new path for valuating Schopenhauer's philosophy because it suggests that ultimate reality is not synonymous with the will such that:

The very possibility of abandonment—denial of one's will, renouncing the temporary—instigated by tragic suffering, enables one to know that there exists something beyond the self, which resides outside the phenomenal realm of experience. The world presents itself as the blindly striving will, "the luckiest development of which is that it comes to itself in order to abolish itself." (WWR II (P):570). In this self-abolishing, Schopenhauer suggests, it reveals a consciousness that is devoid of thought, differentiation, conceptualization, and hence not reducible to the reflective apprehension of one's own being. The underlying goal of Schopenhauer's later treatment of ascetic themes is to elucidate the nature of the unique way such consciousness relates us to something that persists behind and above all time, something that is not itself in time.

Özen, 2020, p274

³⁵ Christopher Janaway notes how Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion, particularly in *On the Basis of Morality*, appears to lack an account of the will as ultimate reality. While his ethics requires a monism such that I can empathize with another as an extension of the same substance as myself (tat tvam asi), this ultimate reality which constitutes individuals in the empirical world is never really equated with the will (Janaway, 2022, p184). Though one could of course argue that this is because of the anonymity Schopenhauer assumes in *On The Basis of Morals* which prevents him from introducing his metaphysics of will.

Özen illustrates that there are still issues with the above conception, not least because any ‘knowledge’ or ‘awareness’ of ‘something else’ we gain through a denial of the will-to-life is anathema to the Kantian ‘thing-in-itself’ in so far as the ‘thing-in-itself’ is supposed to be unrepresentable and unknowable in any sense. In what sense then can even the will-less subject lay claim to any experience of the ‘thing-in-itself’ (Özen, 2020, p278)?

I believe that the only reasonable way to proceed, while still employing the Kantian term ‘thing-in-itself’ univocally, that is, in the sense Kant intended, is to admit that there is, necessarily, no possible knowledge of it. Consequently, I believe it is more useful to simply abandon any attempts to label any items of our ‘knowledge’, will or otherwise, the ‘thing-in-itself’. Furthermore, as a consequence of its over use and, therefore, loaded nature, I suggest that we do not refer to that which by necessity cannot be known as the Kantian ‘thing-in-itself’, at all. Instead, what I propose is that we refer to this ‘something else’ with the term ‘ultimate reality’. The very term ‘ultimate reality’ should be understood as a *via negativa* description, the remainder left over after the world is stripped of the distorting effects of the forms of our cognition. It is the ‘something else’ that ‘only becomes accessible to us when we shake off the world’ (WWR I:432). The term ‘ultimate reality’ should, therefore, not be considered properly as denoting anything in a positive sense but is rather a ‘place holder’ for whatever may be ‘left over’ were we to ‘strip away’ our forms of cognition.³⁶

What I then propose is that, like the layers of an onion, while we can never access the centre and know what it is, we can at least have greater knowledge of what ultimate reality is not. Schopenhauer was able to strip away some layers of the onion, namely empirical representation and spatiality: he understood that ultimate reality is not spatial or empirically known and that what is left when these layers are stripped back is a further layer – the will – which he at first (in 1818) believes is the centre of the onion. This further layer of reality, because it represents a deeper understanding of the onion provides great insights into the nature of phenomenal existence, however, it is not ultimate reality exposed ‘naked’ because it is still a representation for a knowing

³⁶ What is more, If the will is not ultimate reality then, as Christopher Janaway illustrates this will bring Schopenhauer closer to the Vedanta tradition where Brahman as ultimate reality is spoken of only ever negatively – about which ‘one can only say “not --, not --”’ (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.5.15 in Janaway, 2022, p188).

subject as well as revealed in time. However, because the will is itself another layer, in denial of the will a further layer disguising ultimate reality is peeled back. Because a denial of the will removes the further layer of temporality as well as the subject/object distinction inherent in all cognition, the state of will-lessness represents a state where ultimate reality, while never directly knowable as an object of cognition devoid of all its layers, nonetheless appears somewhat ‘more naked’.³⁷

With the above understanding we can maintain the following simultaneously:

1. The will is an *inner* principle behind phenomenal reality that really does explain the ‘everyday’ world we experience despite not being the *innermost* principle.³⁸
2. Schopenhauer can remain a good Kantian because the will can be seen as an ‘inner principle’ of the world without being the ultimate principle, the Kantian ‘thing-in-itself’.
3. A denial of the will is a metaphysically preferable state because it removes a further layer enveloping and keeping us removed from ultimate reality.

The reason I believe that we should make the above distinctions rather than attempt to hold on to the view that the will does represent ultimate reality for Schopenhauer is because it solves two further problems.

The first is that it resolves inconsistencies in Schopenhauer’s thought. If we admit that he was wrong to label the will as the Kantian ‘thing-in-itself’ to begin with, and that the will is only ultimate reality stripped of the veil of spatiality, then we are able to escape some of the more pernicious

³⁷ Gerard Mannion makes a similar point, that “‘behind’ the will, there must be “something” in accord with conceptions of the “good” and therefore something which conditions our suffering analogous to theistic interpretations of ultimate reality and the ground of existence’ (Mannion, 2003, p237).

³⁸ I say ‘an inner principle’ rather than ‘the inner principle’ because we cannot say how many ways ultimate reality might make itself known – there may be many inner principles. In response to the criticism that the inner principle of the world is supposed to be beyond plurality, we may choose to argue that ultimate reality is still one, it is only that the manner in which this reality manifests may be multiple (For a salient image of how something that appears as many can nonetheless be one see Schopenhauer’s metaphor of a rainbow appearing through a waterfall to describe the life of the species vs the life of the individual (WWR II:495-5))

paradoxes that Schopenhauer invokes – for instance, how the will could possibly be the ‘thing-in-itself’ despite appearing to us in time. Secondly, this position provides new and exciting valuative possibilities as we are able to suggest that Schopenhauer need not see all of existence as a manifestation of the will but instead see the will as only one manifestation of existence. If this is the case, then there is room to argue that Schopenhauer should not be perceived as a *total pessimist* (a pessimist about all possible worlds) but only as a *qualified one* (pessimistic only about the world as objectified will-to-life): it is the world as manifested will that devalues life not the world *per se* and, therefore, there remains hope for a more positive existence beyond the will for those who come to deny it.³⁹ Finally, as will be later argued in chapter VII, this reading allows Schopenhauer’s thought to more easily fit with some areas of eastern thought.⁴⁰

Pre-emptive criticisms of this position may take the form:

1. Even supposing a ‘veil’ has been removed from ultimate reality in what sense does this make ultimate reality more knowable if, by its very nature, it is not knowable in any sense?⁴¹
2. If we cannot know anything about ultimate reality, then in what sense can we even say what it is not? This is a form of the Trendelenburg ‘Neglected Alternative’ criticism of Kant’s

³⁹ We might then speculate that a better title for his *magnus opus* would have been ‘*The World as Will and Representation...and Something else...*’.

⁴⁰ Moira Nicholls suggests a similar position (Nicholls, 2006). She argues that the shift in Schopenhauer’s thought away from the will as ultimate reality tracks his deeper understanding of eastern thought. Nicholls argues that Schopenhauer’s discovery that ultimate reality – Brahman – in the Advaita Vedanta system as espoused by the eight century Indian philosopher Sankara gives him the impetus to see the will as not an exhaustive account of ultimate reality because Brahman is supposed to be the source of all goodness and the saint attempts to dissolve his being into Brahman (which in fact is his own being – Atman). However, the original account of the will debars Schopenhauer from such a contention because the will is identified as very much not the source of ultimate goodness or the goal of the ascetics’ greater union in Schopenhauer’s thought. There is, therefore, greater incentive for Schopenhauer to no longer identify ultimate reality with the will. Nicholls states ‘The will, on this view, becomes the esoteric but non noumenal essence of the world’ (Nicholls, 2006, p186). It is worth noting however that R. Raj Singh strongly disagrees with Nicholls’s suggestion that there are shifts in Schopenhauer’s position on the nature of the will as thing-in-itself (Singh, 2020, pp386-7).

⁴¹ This is Janaway’s point (Janaway, 1989, p197).

transcendental idealism – how do we know that, just because space and time are features of our cognition, they are not also features of the world ‘in-itself’ (Bird, 2007, p487)? Therefore, how can we guarantee that the layers we strip away from ultimate reality’ (spatiality, temporality, willing etc.) are actually obscuring layers at all and not instead the nature of ultimate reality itself?

I do not believe that there is a straightforward rebuttal to these criticisms. Instead, I would argue that my interpretation simply contains the following advantages. Firstly, I would suggest that my assumptions (that ultimate reality is not in space or time) do at least make Schopenhauer more Kantian in the sense that Kant argued that space and time are ‘nothing but the representation of appearance’ (Kant, 1998, A42, p168). Secondly, I believe that the inability to give a straightforward rebuttal is itself Schopenhauerian. Schopenhauer believed that there was a limit to where conceptual thought and the discipline of philosophy could go (WWR II:606-7). As already suggested, even the state of will-lessness, where at least one layer covering ultimate reality has been stripped back (spatiality), ultimate reality still remains ineffable and unconceptualizable. If we still insist on seeking knowledge of ultimate reality then...

...all we could do is to point out the state experienced by everyone who has achieved perfect negation of the will, that has been called, ecstasy, rapture, enlightenment (*Erleuchtung*), unity with God, etc. But this state cannot really be called cognition, because it no longer has the form of subject and object, and also because it is accessible only to one’s own experience and not to experience that can be communicated beyond that. But we who are firmly entrenched in the standpoint of philosophy must content ourselves here with negative cognition, satisfied in having reached the final boundary stone of the positive.

WWR I:438

The above conclusions concerning the nature of ultimate reality for Schopenhauer will be discussed in much more detail in later chapters. However, what can be agreed upon at least at this

stage is that regardless of whether or not the will represents ultimate reality or not, Schopenhauer does believe that it is an underlying substratum explaining phenomenal existence such that identifying the world as will enables us to make better sense of existence – it is the nature of the world or essence of the world as it (ordinarily) appears to us. In short: while, in my view, it may not be the key that unlocks all doors to ultimate reality, it does open at least one door and is, therefore, a more profound way of understanding the inner mechanism of the world as representation. This is because the will is devoid of spatiality and, therefore, is one and the same essence that is behind all phenomena.⁴² Furthermore, an understanding of the will allows us to strip back a further layer – the will itself. It is this ‘layer’ of reality that we need saving from. In the next two sections I will explain how.

2.4 Conclusion

Schopenhauer has left us with many unresolved difficulties not least, perhaps the most important one – what does he really mean by the terms ‘will’, ‘will-to-life’ and ‘negation of the will-to-life’? I have no doubt that scholarship will continue to dispute and imaginatively re-interpret these terms. Fundamentally however, it is beholden upon any one interpreter at any one time to decide how he/she is to understand these terms. By ‘will’ I understand the phenomenal world stripped of at least one layer revealing a substratum behind representation that is characterized by an un-intelligent and non-purposive driving and striving. While the world as will helps us make much better sense of the world as representation, it is not constitutive of ultimate reality which is, fundamentally, incognizable. By ‘will-to-life’ I understand the term ‘will’ as it manifests primarily biologically, that is according to striving for the preservation and propagation of its own life and its own species-life to the detriment of all other manifestations. By ‘negation of the will-to-life’, I understand the turn within the human individual away from willing life and towards a more authentic relationship with ultimate reality stripped of the ‘veils’ of space, time and willing. In short: we don’t need saving from the world, we need saving from one way of being in the world.

⁴² This is, of course, still a contentious assertion.

Chapter III: Who is Saved? The Problem of Personal Identity

3.1. Introduction

What for Schopenhauer constitutes my identity? In this chapter, I wish to demonstrate how this essential question sits at the very heart of many of the difficulties in Schopenhauer's soteriology. In the previous chapter we saw how Schopenhauer wishes to define a human being as nothing more than a manifestation of the will-to-life, stating – 'as thing in itself, the will constitutes the true, inner and indestructible essence of the human being' (WWR II:212).⁴³ If, as Schopenhauer appears at first to be claiming, I am nothing more than objectified will-to-life, then his soteriology runs into serious difficulties. Issues arise as soon as we simultaneously entertain the following premises:

1. I am nothing except objectified will-to-life.
2. I can continue to exist after the will-to-life has come to deny itself through me.

The ostensible problem is such: 1 alone should necessitate that 2 is impossible.⁴⁴ This is because in order to achieve 2, the same 'I' must persist throughout and beyond the negation. If 'I' do not, then in what sense have 'I' been delivered after I have stopped willing life? However, if 1 is the case then I cannot be the same 'I' after a denial of the will-to-life. Therefore, as it stands there remains an unresolved tension between two mutually opposed assertions, both of which Schopenhauer appears to wish to retain.⁴⁵ It remains unclear whether he will be able to successfully retain both commitments.

Ultimately, I will argue that it is necessary to retain 2 because there must be a subject upon whom the 'bliss' of a state of will-lessness can be predicated. Therefore, either 1 must be omitted altogether or the 'I' of 2 is a radically different conception from any understanding of 'I' that we

⁴³ I understand 'will' here as interchangeable with 'will-to-life'.

⁴⁴ Others who have set out the problem well are Robert Wicks (Wicks, 2008, pp128-129), Christopher Janaway (Janaway, 2023, p11) and Gerard Mannion (Mannion, 2003, p272).

⁴⁵ Those who have raised similar objections include Julius Frauenstädt (GB: 288, 568-69) and Swami Vivekananda (Janaway, 2022, p187).

would ordinarily countenance, a ‘subject’ but not an ‘individual’. It is not at all certain whether there will be a satisfactory resolution to these problems. Much of the difficulty lies with the fact that ‘I’ is not at all a simple concept for Schopenhauer. He states – ‘the word “I” contains a huge equivocation, one that will be immediately obvious to anyone bearing in mind the content of our Second Book, with its explanation of the separation of the willing part of our being from the cognitive part’ (WWR II:507). It will therefore be necessary to explore the different conceptions of self that Schopenhauer appears to employ at various points. I argue that there are four uses of the term ‘self’ being employed across his works: the subject of willing, the subject of knowing, the self as embodied will-to-life and the self as indestructible thing-in-itself. Ultimately, I hope to use this chapter to provide another defence for the position that ultimate reality should not be seen as synonymous with the will.

3.2 Salvation as denial of the subject of the will-to-life

Let us start with a definition of the terms, beginning, as Schopenhauer does, with the ‘knowing subject’. The subject of knowing is the subject of representation. By ‘subject’ Schopenhauer means something akin to Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception (though he in the end rejects this as a comprehensive account of identity (WWR I:480)): a single unitary locus of experience; a central point around which my representations coalesce into a holistic sequence, for whom they are ‘felt’ to ‘belong’. Because of his insistence that subject and object are co-relative, that is that each necessitates the other such that no one entity can be both subject and object, he reasons that the subject cannot be an object of knowledge for itself (WWR I:25). Wittgenstein asserts something similar in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* when he states that – ‘nothing *in the field of sight* allows inferring that it is seen by an eye’ (Wittgenstein, 2021, p206). Rather, the subject of knowing represents the ‘invisible’ vanishing point necessitated by the fact of my experience, not the object of my knowledge but nonetheless present as a necessary condition of it. It is the ‘empty’ foundational centre of my experience in virtue of which I am able to recognise myriad representations as belonging to one unified entity which I call my ‘self’. What preserves my continuity over time is that it is the same ‘I’ posited as the focal point of representation across different instances of experience. Thus the ‘I’ both unifies and is the condition upon which each separate representation is made possible.

By the ‘subject of willing’ Schopenhauer means that I find myself in the world not simply as a

knower but as an embodied will-er. Importantly, this is not a ‘vanishing point’ of apperception, rather it is a physical material existence. My will and my physical movements are ontologically identical meaning that my body is nothing other than spatially and temporally represented will and my will is nothing other than the inner mechanism of my physical body (WWR I:124-5). Being an object represented by the intellect in both space and time, my self as subject of willing is able to be an object of knowledge for me as knowing subject. What preserves my continuity over time is that it is the same ‘I’ posited as the focal point of willing across experience because it belongs to the same body in space and time. Schopenhauer states that it is the will that ‘lends consciousness its unity and holds all its representations and thoughts together, accompanying them as a sort of continuous ground bass (*Grundbaß*). Without the will the intellect would have no more unity of consciousness than...a convex mirror whose beams converge in an imaginary point behind its surface’ (WWR II:149). Furthermore, Schopenhauer states that it is the will that is spoken of ‘whenever “I” occurs in a judgement’ and, therefore, the will is ‘the true and ultimate point of unity for consciousness’ (WWR II:149). Thus the ‘I’ of my embodied willing both unifies and is the condition upon which each act of willing is made possible; when ‘I’ will, I will for myself, that is (at least in egoism) my own body as manifestation of the will in this particular instance of space and time.⁴⁶

What do I mean then by the self as ‘embodied will-to-life’? This is the self as object of representation in the material universe – my body. It is my conscious as well as unconscious manifestation of the will-to-life. For example, my stomach as objectified hunger or my genitals as objectified sexual desire or my brain as objectified will-to-know. Importantly the self as embodied will-to-life is not entirely the same as the self as subject of willing, although the later is certainly a manifestation of the former. This is because most of my bodily processes I am not subject to, nor do

⁴⁶ In the next chapter, and in response to Christopher Janaway’s assertions (Janaway, 2023), I will go on to explore ways in which willing may continue after a negation of the will-to-life and, therefore, properly speaking, it is the subject of the will-to-life who has been negated and not the subject of all willing. What this amounts to is that the subject who wills egoistically for the life and maintenance of his own body has been vanquished in a negation of the will-to-life, while there is the possibility of a remainder of willing in another sense. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I will continue to use the subject of willing as short hand for the subject of the will-to-life. This is partially justified by the reconstructive nature of the project in the next chapter as well as the fact that Schopenhauer uses the terms ‘will’ and ‘will-to-life’ interchangeably anyway.

I consciously or volitionally will them. For example, the beating of my heart, which is embodied willing but not volitional or conscious for me as a subject. It will accordingly be maintained that the self as embodied willing can survive the demise of the subject of willing and the transformation of the subject of knowing into the 'pure' subject of knowing. This is because the body must survive the negation of the will-to-life in order to materially sustain a 'pure' subject of knowing. Furthermore, this is not a contradiction because much of the body can and indeed does operate entirely independently of the subject of willing anyway, for example in dreamless sleep.⁴⁷ Thus, in the negation of the willing subject, embodied willing survives but the 'pure' subject of knowing no longer identifies with it as 'his' body as he no longer identifies with the will-to-life in any form.

It is important to again reiterate that the subject of knowing, the subject of willing and the self as embodied will are not ontologically different but are, instead, different ways of coming to know the same self. My sense of self in 'ordinary' existence when I will life comes from the relationship between the subject of knowing and the subject of willing. It tends to not come from the self as embodied will-to-life as much because, while I do say 'you hurt me' if you for instance hurt my body, I also, in common language, separate the body from myself when I speak of parts of myself which are not subject to volitional willing; when for instance I say 'my stomach hurts'. Identity is therefore found with the interplay between the subject of willing and the subject of knowing. The subject of willing needs to manifest the subject of knowing in order to further its own ends. Importantly, however, identity is only assured in so far as I identify as the subject of willing. This is because it is only as the subject of an embodied willing that I am an entity at all because the subject of knowing, being a 'vanishing point' is, by itself, not a thing. Thus 'a winged cherub's head without a body' (*geflügelter Engelskopf ohne Leib*) would not have a sense of self (WWR I:124).

We may like to pause at this point and consider the charge that Schopenhauer has invoked serious conceptual problems by positing both an idealism inherent in his account of the knowing subject, that 'the world' exists as representation to a knower, and a materialism inherent in the account of the willing subject who is embodied. The complexity emerges because Schopenhauer

⁴⁷ I say 'dream-less' sleep because presumably we continue to will in dreams, though of course, because there is (usually) no corresponding movement of the body, this does provide an interesting exception to Schopenhauer's assertion that all willing is simultaneously a physical act.

wishes to keep both the assertion that the material world exists as nothing more than representation for a knowing subject and, at the same time, that the knowing subject is fundamentally reducible to the material brain. Which, therefore, is fundamental as an account of the self – a biological process developed in the material brain in order to better manifest the will-to-life, or a knowing subject upon whom the entire material world, the brain included, depends? Schopenhauer appears to give us a clear answer, stating ‘Thus I first posit *will as thing in itself*, something completely original; second the body as its mere visibility, objectivation (*Objektiviation*); and third, cognition as merely a function of a part of this body’ (WN:340).

Thus, while Schopenhauer asserts that ‘the world is my representation’ (WWR I:23) he also asserts that will is primary and representation secondary in all accounts of the world. The self as knowing subject, like all things, is a manifestation of the will-to-life. The brain is nothing more than the physical manifestation of the will to know. It is the will-to-life made manifest in a higher organism so as to aid this particular expression of the will-to-life’s survival and propagation by forming representations and, out of these, concepts. He states:

As thing in itself, the will constitutes the true, inner and indestructible essence of the human being: in itself, however, it is not conscious. This is because consciousness is conditioned by the intellect, and intellect is a mere accident of our essence, being a function of the brain which (along with the nerves and spinal cord attached to it) is merely a fruit, a product, even a parasite of the rest of the organism, not interfering directly in the organisms inner workings, but serving the purpose of self-preservation by regulating the organisms relation to the external world.

WWR II:212

Christopher Janaway has described this mixing of idealism and materialism as ‘breath-taking’ (Janaway, 1989, p180). Ultimately however, I believe it may be that such a combination of idealism and material realism is not an issue because each are addressing different questions. The idealist project is a transcendental enquiry into the possibility of knowledge and is thus not asking ontological questions, but rather epistemic ones. Similarly, the materialist project is not asking

epistemic questions but rather ontological ones. If this is the case then, ontologically, the self is a manifestation of material reality, namely the brain as a ‘real’ material object in a materially objectively existent universe; the transcendental idealist project is simply a question as to what perspective is primary in our understanding of this objective reality – this being the subject.⁴⁸

Let us return to our fundamental problem, what persists through the negation of the will-to-life? Schopenhauer, both in books III and IV of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation*, states that the only candidate for such a subsistence is the knowing subject in its ‘purified’ form – a ‘*pure cognitive subject*’ (WWR I:209)/‘*pure subject of cognition*’ (WWR I:308) who beholds the world in an objective and disinterested manner. This subject of knowing, cleansed of the demands of the will-to-life, appears to be a state available to us in aesthetic appreciation,⁴⁹ where...

...the relative predominance (that emerges with human beings) of *cognition* over *desiring* consciousness, and hence the secondary over the primary aspect of consciousness, can (in the isolated cases of unusually gifted individuals) go so far that when it achieves its greatest intensity the secondary or cognitive aspect of consciousness detaches itself completely from willing and achieves free activity on its own, i.e. activity that is not stimulated by the will and hence no longer serves the will.

WWR II:217

In ‘negation of the will-to-life’ the same knowing subject ‘cut[s] all the thousand threads of willing that keep us bound to the world...[and]...gazes back calmly and smiles’ (WWR I:417). The knowing subject as ‘parasite of the rest of the organism’ is able to survive the negation of the will-to-life as a purely knowing subject (WWR II:212).

⁴⁸ Sebastian Gardner makes this point well in his analysis of Kant’s transcendental idealism. (Gardner, 1999, p90).

⁴⁹ Later I will argue that we cannot argue that the state achieved in denial of the will-to-life is identical with the state of will-lessness in aesthetic contemplation if we are at the same time to maintain that the ascetic state is an ineffable relative ‘nothingness’. This is because, in order for the state of will-lessness to be ineffable and a relative ‘nothing’, it has to be one we cannot achieve nor know of in any other way or form. Nonetheless, there are enough similarities between the two in so far as they are both to greater or lesser extents salvatory as well as that they both involve a depletion in the assertion of the will and thus can only be spoken of negatively.

Our first problem is that closer inspection should reveal to us that such a break from the will-to-life should not be possible if, as Schopenhauer states, the knowing subject is as a manifestation of the will-to-life and depends ontologically on the will-to-life as the ‘sole metaphysical entity or thing in itself’ (WWR I:427). The issue can be summarised as:

1. If the knowing subject depends upon the will-to-life, it being nothing more than the will-to-life expressing itself as the brain – the will-to-know, and the will-to-life has ceased, then in what sense can the knowing subject persist after a negation of the will-to-life?

My solution is to deny that this is a problem for the following reasons. Firstly, the will-to-life has not disappeared in a negation of the will-to-life. This is because the body persists. The body must continue after a negation of the will-to-life in order for the knowing subject to continue. The knowing subject is a manifestation of the brain and the brain is materially embodied will-to-life. If emancipation from the will-to-life was a destruction of the body then there would be no knowing subject who could ‘gaze back with a smile’ because such a consciousness is materially supported by the organism, by the blood delivered by the heart to the brain for instance. Furthermore, that the body is able to survive without conscious willing is evident in everyday examples such as sleep or disinterested aesthetic contemplation. Finally, if emancipation from the will-to-life was a destruction of the body then we would be able to achieve attainment of the negation of the will-to-life simply through suicide and Schopenhauer insists that suicide is a ‘clumsy’ attempt at salvation because the knowing subject is lost (PP II:280). Thus, in salvation from the will-to-life, the individual brain, which ordinarily both knows and wills, but now only knows, continues. This is one way of interpreting Schopenhauer’s assertion that – ‘the negation of the will to life (*Verneinung des Willens zum Leben*) in no way signifies the annihilation of a substance...the mere act (*Aktus*) of not-willing; the same thing that willed hitherto will no more’ (PP II:281). In ‘negation of the will-to-life’, the substance, the physical brain, loses one of its properties (willing) and retains another (knowing).

In summary then, the body does survive the negation of the will because:

- a. The body's maintenance is required in order for the renunciant to continue to practice asceticism and become one in whom the will denies itself; Schopenhauer states that there must be a remainder of will-to-life within even those who have negated it, a 'last glowing spark that sustains the body' (WWR I:417).
- b. The body survives the absence of conscious willing in dreamless sleep and in 'pure' aesthetic contemplation and thus, because they have already been demonstrated to be separable, there is no *prima facie* reason why the body should not survive the absence of conscious willing in a denial of the will-to-life.
- c. Destruction of the body (namely suicide) is not a means of liberation.

Because of the above, I would like to argue that what is meant by a denial of the will-to-life is not to become non-embodied but instead to no longer be a subject of willing and, therefore, it is the subject of willing and not the will-to-life *per se* that has been vanquished and overcome.⁵⁰ Instead, in a renunciation of the will-to-life, 'I' continue to possess an embodied manifestation of the will-to-life it is just that 'I' simply have no intentional attitudes nor volitions concerning it. Thus, perhaps 'I' continue to feel hunger or thirst because these are not straightforwardly volitional, what has changed is instead that 'I' no longer consciously desire to satiate this drive because 'I' no longer identify with it. This is possible because the knowing subject, while it depends for its origination on the will-to-life, nonetheless does not rely upon it for its continued existence and identity. It is not a contradiction to state this because a similar phenomenon has been well documented by evolutionary scientists. A feature of my body may have a certain evolutionary history and thus owe its origination to natural selection and yet eventually be used for an entirely different purpose altogether, one that is no longer reducible to evolutionary advantage. For instance, my hand has evolved to aid my survival by allowing me to manipulate food, and yet I can now use it solely for playing computer games which no longer aids my survival. In a similar way we may choose to argue that the knowing subject has developed in humans in order to further the ends of the will-to-life and yet it is not

⁵⁰ More properly it is the subject of the *will-to-life* who has been vanquished. As we will see in the next chapter, in some sense a subject of willing may persist if we are to propose that there are different kinds of willing.

contradictory to state that it could survive in its ‘pure’ form in a way that is no longer beneficial for survival – as pure disinterested contemplation. Thus, identity can persist after a negation of the will-to-life because the knowing subject is not reducible to ‘nothing more’ than the will-to-life expressing itself as the brain – rather it can break free of its causal origin and assume a new function not reducible to the continued ends of the will-to-life. This is because the knowing subject is outside of space, time and causation. And yet, in some sense identity persists because the knowing subject is anchored to the body which is still persistent through time.

My proposal then is that we should view the emancipation of the knowing subject from the willing subject not as an ontological event but as a phenomenological one. The knowing subject still occupies a body that wills life, this cannot be helped. Moreover, it is still the same ‘substance’ as the subject that previously willed. The transformation arrives not in losing one’s embodied will-to-life but in losing one’s identity and commitment to it. Analogues with Buddhism may be helpful here. Graham Priest argues that while the enlightened individual still desires, he is no longer mentally troubled by the desire remaining unfulfilled (he no longer craves) (Priest, 2017). The distinction is important – the body and its desires still persist, it is only the phenomenological attitude that the knowing subject takes to such desires that is altered – he no longer is attached to them. Indeed, if we are to take Schopenhauer’s advice seriously and leave theoretical philosophy and instead go to the examples of saints (WWR I:438-9) – the Buddha still ate and presumably he still felt hunger.⁵¹ Therefore, in order to ensure the continuity of selfhood we may argue that the knowing subject persists and also that the body as manifested will-to-life must remain alongside it in order to materially support the brain that manifests it. The difference with the non-enlightened individual being that in a state of enlightenment, while the individual’s body does still will life, he is no longer attached to it, defined by it, or identifies with it but instead simply perceives it in pure awareness, in short, he is no longer a *subject* of willing.⁵²

⁵¹ Indeed, maintenance of the body is a key feature of the Buddha’s ‘middle path’ where the goal is to avoid the excesses of extreme indulgence and extreme asceticism alike.

⁵² Jonardon Ganeri argues that the difficulties resultant from Schopenhauer’s two conceptions of self are in part due to his inability to reconcile two disparate accounts of self from which he was influenced – the self as essentially insubstantial ‘no-thing’ of the Madhyamika Buddhist tradition which influences his account of the knowing subject and the substantial self of Upanishadic theory, identical with the ‘world

I find this the most attractive solution. Drawing on Buddhist analogues again, solutions to the issue of personal identity may be forthcoming if we examine how the issue is actually dealt with in the Buddhist tradition. The third mark of existence for the Buddha is ‘Anatta’ – ‘there is no such thing as self’. An essential Mahayana teaching is that all phenomena are essentially empty, depending contingently for their origination on further ‘empty’ dependently contingent phenomena (Westerhoff, 2022). If this is the case, then exactly who is it who becomes enlightened? What makes the Buddha an individual? And what gets re-born between lives carrying the same karma? One traditional answer is to claim that continuity is ensured through karmic continuity – the ‘self’ is simply the term given to the chain of karmic cause and effect but is nothing more beyond this. The analogy of a candle is given to demonstrate this. While the flame of a candle is not ordinarily perceived as being the same when it ignites on a new wick, it is, in an important sense, the continuation of the original flame and thus is appropriately causally connected. Consequently, we may be able to propose that the knowing subject persists through a negation of the will-to-life because he is causally connected to the knowing subject before the negation of the will-to-life. A second traditional answer is that the question of continuity of identity is simply not a relevant question and should instead be relegated to the status of ‘unanswered’ or ‘undeclared’ questions. The *Sabbasava-Sutta* contains a list of questions the Buddha taught as ‘unwise reflection’, being simply irrelevant, unwise, or, at worst, symptomatic themselves of an attitude of craving. This includes ‘What am I?’ and ‘Am I not?’ (Bhikku, 1997).

3.3 What is it ‘like’ to be have denied the will-to-life?

While the above seems to help Schopenhauer to some extent, there is a further problem – what is the nature of an individual who is no longer individuated by his association with his own embodied willing? This is a problematic question because, while there may remain a persistent body as the object of knowledge for the denier of the will-to-life, it is not a body that the denier of the will identifies with anymore. The body, while remaining one that we are more intimately familiar with,

soul’ of ultimate reality which informs his account of the willing subject (Ganeri, 2012, pp217-223). As we will go on to see, much of the difficulties in Schopenhauer’s soteriology may owe their origin to the two distinct eastern traditions that he draws upon and the difficulties of marrying them together.

has become a disinterested object of knowledge like any other – one of many in a universe of representations. However, in order for me to be an individual at all I must have concrete delineations demarking where I begin and end. This is not a problem for self-identity before a denial of the will-to-life because this was ensured by the subject of willing's identification with the body which is identified as beginning and ending in space and time. However, because these concrete circumscriptions were only assured in so far as the subject of willing persisted, in what sense can I be an individual as a pure subject of knowing alone? This is problematic because the subject of knowing by itself is not, and indeed has never been, any *thing* at all, it is a self-reflexive 'vanishing' point that cannot be beheld by itself and thus be subject to the *principium individuationis* through which it could become individuated. Therefore, in what sense is the individual an individual if he is no longer a subject of willing and no longer identifies with this body? From the objective standpoint this is not a problem because what ensures continuity of self is embodied existence. Thus, I can point at the Buddha and say 'this body is him'. However, subjectively and phenomenologically, what is the enlightened individual's own sense of self if it does not lie with his body?

My suggestion is that, in his salvation, the subject of knowing is phenomenologically no longer an individual. Ontologically to a third-party he is still an individual in so far as he occupies this particular body in both space and time, but phenomenologically to himself, in so far as he has relinquished his commitment to the 'I' of egoism, he is no longer an individual. If this is the case then we are only using the terms 'individual', 'I' as well as the pronouns he/him/she/her/them/it to refer to this individual in a conventional sense and in order to refer to his body. This can be supported by the following passage where Schopenhauer is describing the loss of individuation in aesthetic experience – 'This transition occurs suddenly when cognition tears itself free from the service of the will so that the subject ceases to be merely individual and now becomes the pure, will-less subject of cognition' (WWR I:200)

What can we say then in response to the question of how 'I' can continue in negation of the will-to-life as the same subject of knowing if the subject of knowing loses their 'I'? In many ways, as we have said, this is a redundant question because the subject of knowing has never been an individual 'thing' to begin with. Therefore, perhaps in a negation of the will-to-life, in so far as the body persists, one continues as a spatially and temporally located individual in the ontologically

objective sense, however, in the subjectively phenomenological sense, that is in terms of the first-person experience of self and world, one's individuality has dissolved into the groundless vanishing point of consciousness that one has always been. Thus, denial of the will-to-life is to assume one version of 'I' without the other – the 'I' as groundless grounder of representation without the 'I' of volitional willing.

What is it like to no longer associate with the body as an individuated thing but instead be conscious of self as a groundless vanishing point? Attempted answers to this question are what I believe Schopenhauer is referring to when he states that there is an upper limit, a 'boundary-stone' for what philosophy can reasonably answer (WWR I:438).⁵³ Philosophy can only proceed from concepts, which are themselves reliant on the subject-object distinction of ordinary willed existence. They are, therefore, not the ideal way to approach the subject of salvation according to Schopenhauer because salvation arrives on the other side of the subject/object distinction. Therefore, when I speak of the same 'individual' who has, over the course of thirty years, both affirmed the will-to-life and reached a state where they have denied the will-to-life, my use of the term 'individual', while it certainly applies to the same body, is no longer a term that holds any meaning phenomenologically for the individual themselves because they have ceased to identify as an individual. This is right and fitting considering the phenomenological break the pure subject of knowing has made with the body. The only grounding giving the subject of knowing a sense of individuality to begin with was the association with the body, and now that this tie is broken, the untethered subject of knowing becomes what it is and always has been in its state of 'purity' – a non-object, non-spatially or temporally located. Beyond this, philosophy cannot venture. I believe this is what Schopenhauer is attempting to express in his infamous passage at the end of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation* when he states that a denial of the will-to-life is at the same time to embrace a nothingness. He states:

Nonetheless, if someone persisted in demanding positive cognition of what philosophy can express only negatively, as the negation of the will, then all we could do

⁵³ Mathijs Peters also expresses this well, stating – 'it is impossible to grasp what salvation entails because it lies *beyond* the conditions under which we can develop cognition at all' (Peters, 2023, p315).

is to point out the state experienced by everyone who has achieved perfect negation of the will, that has been called, ecstasy, rapture, enlightenment (*Erleuchtung*), unity with God, etc. But this state cannot really be called cognition, because it no longer has the form of subject and object, and also because it is accessible only to one's own experience and not to experience that can be communicated beyond that. But we who are firmly entrenched in the standpoint of philosophy must content ourselves here with negative cognition, satisfied in having reached the final boundary stone of the positive.

WWR I:438

Because all possible cognition takes the form of subject/object and the pure knowing subject exists in a state where subject and object have dissolved into one another such that there is no longer an 'I', nor a world cognized as an object that such an 'I' could behold, it necessarily must be *no-thing* to us as willing conceptualising individuals. Schopenhauer states:

for everyone who is still filled with the will, what remains after it is completely abolished is certainly nothing. But conversely, for those in whom the will has turned and negated itself, this world of ours which is so very real with all its suns and galaxies is – nothing.

WWR I:439

What is the nature of this 'nothing' (*Nichts*) that constitutes the subjective state of the denier of the will-to-life? Schopenhauer draws the distinction between an absolute nothing (*nihil negativum*) and a relative nothing (*nihil privativum*) (WWR I:436). He argues that the 'nothing' constitutive of the state of having negated the will is not an 'absolute nothing' because this is not even conceivable, he believes it is a contradiction in terms. Rather, the *nihil privativum* is a state of nothingness or emptiness not to the enlightened individual who constitutes it, but only relative to us as non-enlightened willing subjects limited as we are to the confines of conceptual knowledge with its insistence on the subject/object distinction.

There is a wealth of secondary literature exploring the nature of this Schopenhauerian ‘nothingness’. Christopher Ryan argues that the manner in which a commentator chooses to interpret Schopenhauer’s ‘nothingness’ speaks to their preferred approach to the issue of whether or not the will should be seen as constitutive of ultimate reality or not (Ryan, 2020, pp364-5). On one side of the debate are commentators who believe that this ‘nothingness’ is existentially negative entirely with no positive element. The state is a result of a subject who has denied the will as the only metaphysical reality that there is, and therefore, *no thing* replaces it once it has been denied. With this view, it is held that there is no greater metaphysical truth accessed with a denial of the will-to-life and that the only reason Schopenhauer makes the distinction between relative and absolute nothing at all is that the latter is a conceptual folly and, therefore, the only kind of nothing possible is the relative kind. The claim goes that what he is not doing is making room for a nothing that is, in some sense, positive yet unknowable to us. The saint, therefore, lives out their days in pure contemplation only, with nothing new replacing the absentee willing. Ryan includes David Hamlyn and Robert Wicks in this camp (Ryan, 2020, p364). In this sense, negation of the will is a negation of every possible world, because the world as manifested will *is* the only possible world. This tends to be the view that is at least implicitly assumed by most who write on Schopenhauer and has, in this writer’s opinion, contributed above all else to the assessment of Schopenhauer as nothing more than a pessimistic ‘world-denier’.

The reason I do not believe that this position (that the state of will-lessness does not have positive dimensions and is an absolute nothing only) is a promising one is because Schopenhauer claims that we cannot positively know the state of negation of the will before an experience of it, and yet the state of being a pure contemplating subject and nothing else is presumably a state that we do know in advance via aesthetic contemplation.⁵⁴ While it is correct to say that a ‘pure’ subject of cognition is no-thing because it is a state that is not able to be an object of knowledge for itself, it is nonetheless a no-thing that we can experience in states other than the denial of the will-to-life. Therefore, in order to maintain that the state of negation of the will-to-life is unknowable and

⁵⁴ Furthermore, if we suggest that ‘witness-consciousness’ (which we will discuss shortly) is an accurate descriptor of consciousness anyway, then it is perhaps a state that we are immediately familiar with at all times.

unconceptualizable, it must be something more than just contemplation without willing or the purely disinterested ‘witnessing’ of mental events.

In the other camp are those who believe that, while this ‘nothingness’ is indeed the result of a subject who has denied the will, the saint has, nonetheless, not denied all possible states because the will is only an intermediary metaphysical reality, one layer of the onion. Schopenhauer’s conscious choice to affix ‘relative’ to the ‘nothing’ of the state of denial of the will, therefore, means only that it is a state that is ‘nothing’ to us as willing creatures. This, in Julian Young’s view, necessitates that the will cannot be an account of ultimate reality. Ryan puts Julian Young and John Atwell in this camp for whom ‘nothingness’ is not an ontological descriptor but an epistemic one (Ryan, 2020, p364). The debate then is between whether the saintly negater of the will-to-life achieves ‘unknowable being or literal nothingness’ (Ryan, 2020, p364-5).⁵⁵ This provides an interesting new way of interpreting Schopenhauer’s assertion that – ‘the negation of the will to life (*Verneinung des Willens zum leben*) in no way signifies the annihilation of a substance...the mere act (*Aktus*) of not-willing; the same thing that *willed* hitherto *wills* no more’ (PP II:281). Earlier I suggested that it is the brain as material substance that continues as a repurposed by-product of the original designs of the will-to-life that now no longer wills and thus continues as the same substance. Another way of interpreting this passage would be that our ultimate substance, as non-cognizable thing-in-itself is in fact not knowable at all and, therefore, what subsists after a negation of the will is an unknown ‘x’ such that our ultimate existence, as well as ultimate reality itself, is not reducible to willing nor anything else possibly cognizable. This suggestion would make more sense of the passage from Schopenhauer’s notebooks where he states – ‘from this it is obvious enough that that which abolishes itself as will must yet have another existence wholly inaccessible to our knowledge, and this would then be simply the existence of the thing-in-itself’ (MR3:595). Furthermore, it would make sense of how Schopenhauer appears at times to maintain that there is a ‘something else’ that survives

⁵⁵ Ryan himself argues that Schopenhauer must understand nothing as ‘unknowable being’ rather than ‘literal nothingness’ because of his annotation to a handwritten footnote in 1860 where he states – ‘this is precisely the pradschna-paramita of the Buddhists, the “beyond of all knowledge”, i.e. the point where subject and object are no more’ (WWR I:439). For Ryan, this suggests that Schopenhauer understood the ‘nothingness’ of a denial of the will as a re-absorption into the primal oneness of the ‘thing-in-itself’ as ultimate truth beyond the will (Ryan, 2020, p366).

the negation of the will, for instance where he states – ‘behind our existence lies something else and it only becomes accessible to us when we shake off the world’ (WWR I:432).⁵⁶

In chapter II of this project, I argued that Schopenhauer simply cannot contend that the will is the thing-in-itself. In chapter VII, I will continue this line of argument and maintain that it provides the most satisfactory presentation of Schopenhauer’s soteriology because of the complications it resolves as well as for the new perspectives it can potentially afford us of his philosophy as a whole.⁵⁷ However, for the purposes of this chapter it is not necessary to explore this question any further because ours is a more refined one, that is – what can be said of the nature of an ‘I’ who no longer identifies as an ‘I’? In answer to this question, a negative expression is all that can be given or understood conceptually, that is – in negation of the will-to-life, the ordinary ‘I’ of the knowing subject, attached to the body, becomes ‘lost’ or ‘liberated’, no longer beholding the body as an object of identity – a pure subject of knowing who no longer manifests the empirical character as the manifestation of this individual emanation of the will-to-life. From the observation of saints and mystics, Schopenhauer believes that this is proven true because all saints and mystics behave identically:

However, since we are not talking about an alteration but rather a complete abolition of the character, then however different the characters concerned might have

⁵⁶ Robert Wicks argues that the two interpretations of ‘nothingness’ can be seen as mirroring the tensions between Schopenhauer’s Buddhist and Vedic influences – stating that the tension is between willlessness as ‘Upanishadically-revelatory’ or ‘Buddhistically-empty’ (Wicks, 2008, p138).

⁵⁷ However, there is room for caution: Ryan argues that resolving an issue in one area of Schopenhauer’s philosophy opens up new issues in other areas. This is because part of Schopenhauer’s soteriology is to admit of the necessity and inevitability of suffering such that suffering can be accepted as a non-contingent fact of existence. However, if there is an ultimate reality/existence beyond the will that is not necessarily pernicious then it becomes harder to account for or see suffering as inevitable. He states – ‘the wickedness, evil and suffering of willing seem to have been relegated to the status of contingent effects of this subjects action or operari, as opposed to proceeding from the esse of the world’ (Ryan, 2020, p376). Nonetheless, I wish to argue that this is the most promising view not least because the phenomenal world becomes no less wicked and evil if it turns out that that which makes it evil (will) is not constitutive of ultimate reality. Furthermore, such a tension, that suffering is both inevitable and avoidable, mirrors the tension expressed in the four noble truths of Buddhism – that suffering is inevitable (*Dukkha*) and that there is an end to suffering (*Nirodha*). This is explored in more depth in chapter VI.

been before this abolition, their actions (*Handlungsweise*) look very similar afterwards, although they *speak* very differently, according to their different concepts and dogmas.

WWR I:431

Therefore the 'I' has vanished.⁵⁸ And yet ascetics and 'enlightened' individuals still speak conventionally of 'themselves'.⁵⁹ How is this to be reconciled? The way in which there can exist two simultaneous levels in which the self can be understood – on the one hand conventionally as this body and on the other hand in terms of ultimate truth (as neither this nor that, and at the same time all of this and all of that) – is a staple of eastern thought. In the Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism, the philosophers Nagarjuna and Santideva speak of a doctrine of 'two truths' The enlightened being perceives the world as conventionally existent in so far as phenomena have relative reality dependent on other phenomena (*Pratityasamutpada*) and yet also simultaneously perceives the world as empty (*Sunyata*) (Ganeri, 2012, pp97-124). Similarly, both Buddhist and Advaita Vedanta traditions speak of *paramārtha-satya* (the absolute metaphysically and ontologically accurate reality) and *Vyaharika* or *saṃvṛti-satya* (empirical or pragmatical reality) (Deutsch and Dalvi, 2006, p157). Therefore, for both traditions, enlightened existence consists in managing to hold both perspectives simultaneously and yet to understand which is truly 'real'. In many respects then, enlightened existence is simply to correctly identify, and thus, temporarily strip back, one epistemic mode of perception so as to 'see' the world as it truly is. This is redolent of the teaching of 'Buddha nature' in the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition which teaches that all beings are born innately

⁵⁸ Christopher Janaway makes this point well, arguing that it is the individual will understood as the character that has been negated (Janaway, 2023, pp17-18)

⁵⁹ For example, the sayings of the Buddha retain the first person, for instance the Buddha states that – 'When I had asked this the Nigantha Nataputta answered *me* as follows...' (Gethin, 2008, p15) (my emphasis). However, as Ganeri argues, the sayings of the Buddha should be seen as protreptic, that is as methods for the instructor to prepare the mind of the initiate for higher truths and this means that, when the Buddha speaks of self, this is conventional and useful for the initiate but should not be held to be the Buddha's own view. Ganeri draws attention to how the Buddhist philosopher Candrakīrti illustrates this with the following words – 'The Buddha, not thinking that the aggregates composed a self, did yet say "I" and spoke of "these my teachings". In such a way, though things are certainly without intrinsic being, He taught non-definitively and said they are' (Ganeri, 2012, p108).

enlightened and only need help to recognise their full Buddha-nature ('Vajrayana', 2016). If it is necessary only to identify and then strip away epistemic layers which are considered 'more' or 'less' helpful, then perhaps the state of being of the saintly ascetic is no different to the fundamental consciousness that we all already experience as the foundational substratum of basic conscious awareness.

This position, that enlightened perception is already within all of us and we could realise this if only we could strip away layers of perception/cognition, is suggested by Schopenhauer when he maintains that the ascetic state involves stripping away the subject of willing while retaining the subject of cognition. Of course, this relies on Hamlyn and Wick's view that denial of the will-to-life does not involve the addition of anything positive but is instead simply a denial of the world as will. A similar idea, that through ascetic and meditative practice we can access a fundamental 'layer' of consciousness that has always been present, can be found in the Advaita teaching of 'Witness-consciousness'. In her paper 'Witness-Consciousness: It's Definition, Appearance and Reality', Miri Albahari argues that, far from proving esoteric, eastern accounts of the fundamental 'whatness' of consciousness are in fact very helpful in our attempts to explain the essential nature of ordinary consciousness in contemporary philosophy (Albahari, 2009). She argues that the ultimate phenomenal nature of consciousness can be best understood as an account of 'witness-consciousness' which she defines as a '*mode-neutral awareness with intrinsic phenomenal character*' (Albahari, 2009, p63). By this she understands that the basic 'hum' of consciousness, before any objects of consciousness are registered as belonging to a subject, is an essential 'awareness' or 'witness' to the events of conscious experience (Albahari, 2009, p64). This is a primal 'whatness' or registering of experience that does not necessitate a 'for-me-ness' pointing in the direction of a continuous subject of experience. Perhaps then the experience of being one who has denied the will-to-life is something akin to the 'primal' awareness of witness-consciousness. Because such a layer of consciousness has, of yet, no ego and is prior to judgements which assume a relation between subject and object, this can provide a promising account of the pure contemplative awareness of the saint.

While I believe that the connections made with 'witness-consciousness' do provide new and interesting ways of viewing and understanding the saintly state, fundamentally I believe they are unsatisfactory. This is because they conflict with the account of both the ineffability of the state of

will-lessness, as well as the existentially positive dimensions Schopenhauer continues to assert about the saintly state. In short, as we have said with the aesthetic state, in what sense can the state of being will-less be experientially unknowable if it is in fact the fundamental state of consciousness? If, as Atwell and Ryan argue, the ‘nothingness’ of the state of having denied the will-to-life is only an epistemic nothing, that it, nonetheless, remains a ‘something’ but only one that we cannot comprehend as willing subjects (which is my preferred approach for reasons already discussed), then the account of witness-consciousness as well as the account of the aesthetic state short circuit this. This is because, in order to account for ineffability and the positive noetic quality of the ascetic state, we cannot maintain that it is a state possible outside of denial of the will-to-life. Thus, we should abandon the likening of the state of saintly denial with the aesthetic state or witness-consciousness, or anything else for that matter.

One attempt to at least somewhat nullify this problem is to argue that Schopenhauer does not equate the saintly state with the aesthetic state. After all, the aesthetic state is one where the subject is not only will-less but also contemplating the Platonic Ideas as manifestations of the will. The purely cognizing subjects’ contemplation and appreciation of the Platonic Ideas would suggest that the subject of knowing is not entirely disconnected from the will. Issues with this interpretation are that Schopenhauer positively asserts that the state of will-lessness is akin to the aesthetic state – that the ‘same cognition [the aesthetic] makes possible an abolition (*Aufhebung*) and self-negation (*Selbstverneinung*) of the will in its most perfect appearance’ (WWR I:314). In what sense then can the saintly state be ineffable and still the ‘same’ state that we can experience without denying the will all together?

Alternatively, we may be able to escape the problem and retain the view that saintly denial of the will-to-life is of the same kind as the aesthetic experience and witness-consciousness by arguing that they represent only a difference in degree rather than kind – the state of saintly denial is a ‘pure’ state of witness-consciousness/aestheticism with no admixture of other psychological states. It could, therefore, be maintained that we do have no experience of this as willing individuals and yet it is, nonetheless, a state similar but not identical to one that we are more readily familiar with. The problem with this, of course, will be that, as we have already demonstrated, if the state of denial of the will-to-life is similar to the aesthetic state and the state of pure ‘witness-consciousness’, then it is

not at all clear how the state of saintly denial is not already knowable to us and, therefore, not a relative 'nothing' but instead a relative 'something'. It is, therefore, my view that the best way of making sense of Schopenhauer's contentions is to maintain that the state of denial of the will-to-life, because it is fundamentally incognizable and is only expressible as a 'relative nothingness', it is fundamentally not of the same kind as either the aesthetic state or as 'witness-consciousness' because the latter two are states that we can be aware of before a denial of the will and, therefore, our familiarity with them would threaten the ascription of 'relative nothing' to the state of ascetic will-lessness.⁶⁰

Other attempts at overcoming this difficulty may come from suggesting that Schopenhauer's positive descriptions of the ascetic state are simply figurative. This would mean that he does not intend for them to be descriptive but rather the 'best attempt' at depicting something essentially unknowable through suggestive imagery. A similar method is adopted by most if not all major religions.

3.4 The self as indestructible 'true essence' and the problem of suicide

So far, we have discussed three conceptions of self for Schopenhauer, the self as 'subject of knowing', the self as 'subject of willing' and the self as 'embodied will-to-life'. There is, however, a fourth sense – the self as 'thing-in-itself'. On this topic, Schopenhauer includes a highly illuminating section of chapter X ('On the doctrine of the indestructibility of our true essence by death') of Volume II of *Parerega and Paralipomena* entitled – 'Small concluding dialogical diversion' (PP II:251-254). He establishes a Platonic dialogue between two imaginary interlocutors – Thrasymachus (who believes the self ends with death) and Philaethes (who argues that the true self can never perish). Philaethes argues that the true self should be identified as our nature as 'thing-in-itself'. Such an understanding of self appears to be independent of the self as knowing subject because it is the self that Schopenhauer identifies as indestructible and the knowing subject, in so far as it is an emanation

⁶⁰ This is unless we could argue that we are not normally familiar with the state of 'witness-consciousness' in ordinary willed experience and in aesthetic contemplation alike because, while it is the background 'hum' of ordinary experience, we are precluded from an awareness of it by both our willing and, in aesthetic contemplation, our awareness of the Platonic Ideas as objects of knowledge – therefore, full 'untarnished' awareness of it in will-lessness does constitute new 'positive' knowledge.

from the physical brain, is certainly not indestructible. This is the self as will as metaphysical reality, 'the essence' of our nature independent of spatial or temporal manifestation made cognizable to consciousness. It is thus not capable of beginning or ending. I believe the sense in which Schopenhauer understands this conception of 'self' is as non-individuated will-to-life, outside of the 'illusory' forms of space and time applied to it by the *principium individuationis*. My body is simply a spatial and temporal manifestation of the will-to-life which, being in essence outside of time and space, is one and the same will-to-life that manifests within all empirical phenomena. In this sense, I am non-changeable, non-destructible and eternal – 'I can say: "death is my total end" but also: "my personal appearance is just a small part of my true being"' (WWR II:507). In this sense the self is indestructible both by death and by a negation of the will-to-life. My body is simply a temporal expression of an indestructible homogenous and omnipresent will-to-life. Thus – 'What dies perishes, but a seed is left over' such that the inner essence 'persists and obtains a new intellect, adopting the shape of a new being' (PP II:248-9).

As we have seen, in so far as I as knowing subject no longer identify with the will-to-life, I also no longer identify with the self as manifested will-to-life. Therefore, when Schopenhauer proclaims that – 'Your essence in itself...knows neither time, nor beginning, nor end, nor the bounds of a given individuality...but exists in everyone and everything', what he means is that the subject of willing is a mere expression of this deeper metaphysical truth (PP II:252). However, in so far as, in will-lessness, the subject of willing has been denied, so too has the pure knowing subject's claim to identify with this deeper metaphysical truth. As we have argued, with a denial of the will-to-life what has vanished is not willing as such which, being metaphysically indestructible continues even after the death of the individual, but that part of the brain that consciously identifies with willing – the subject of willing. Does this mean that the denier of the will-to-life continues after death? The answer to this depends on how we choose to approach the question. The denier of the will-to-life, in so far as he occupies a body that expresses an indestructible will is the manifestation of a will that will never cease. However, in so far as he has phenomenologically divorced himself from this will, he no longer associates with it or anything at all and, therefore, it is all the same to him whether this willing, that is no longer 'his', continues or not. Therefore, willing continues but it is no longer 'his willing'.

Unfortunately, this interpretation lays Schopenhauer open to new problems and difficulties.

The first being, in what sense is the self as thing-in-itself my 'true self' if it can be negated and 'I' survive this negation? I believe the only answer to this question is to claim that what Schopenhauer means here is that a negation of the will-to-life is a negation of my true self. If my true self is non-individuated will-to-life and, in a denial of the will-to-life, I no longer identify with the will-to-life in any form, then I no longer identify with my true self. Yet again there is the risk of confusion through equivocation. The 'I' that survives the negation of the will-to-life, the pure subject of knowledge, is not an 'I' or a 'me' in the conventional sense, it is neither my body nor any-body, it is the insubstantial vanishing point of the pure subject of cognition, and this itself vanishes altogether with the eventual death of the body to the extent that there is 'nothing' left of this 'I' when the pure subject of knowing ends along with the body. When this death takes place, presumably the will-to-life that manifested as the body's continued heart beat and hair growth for instance, which likewise persisted after the negation of the will-to-life, continues because it is, in essence, indestructible and non-individuated with this body. To the ordinary un-enlightened willing subject (Thrasymachus in Schopenhauer's small concluding dialogical diversion (PP II:251)) this universal non-individuated will-to-life is not 'I' while to the denier of the will-to-life it is likewise not 'I'. The only difference being that, for the denier of the will-to-life it has ceased being 'I' at the point of the denial of the will. To one who has seen beyond the 'veil of māyā' and yet has not denied the will-to-life (Philalethes in the diversionary dialogue), all manifestations of the will-to-life are the true self.

And yet, at least in this section of *Parerga and Paralipomena*, it appears that Schopenhauer is imploring his readers to take Philalethes' view and not the view of the denier of the will-to-life. It should be obvious that it is not possible to identify with the non-individuated will-to-life and at the same time deny the will-to-life, so how can this be resolved? One solution could be that in denial of the will-to-life one is only denying the will-to-life as it manifests in one-self and not as it manifests more widely in other things and thus the denier of the will-to-life can still be in agreement with Philalethes, that the true self survives death. This is, however, problematic because Schopenhauer wishes to maintain that one who has denied the will-to-life has a 'loathing for the essence that is expressed as his own appearance, the will-to-life' (WWR I:407), he must, therefore, loathe his true self. I therefore believe that the only possible way of making sense of these difficulties is to maintain that Philalethes' s position is not describing a denier of the will-to-life at all. Instead, there is a

hierarchy of epistemic attitudes to self as follows:

Lowest: Identity of self with this appearance of the will-to-life, the body (Thrasymachus' position)

Intermediary: Identity of self with the will-to-life manifested in all-bodies, non-differentiated by spatial or temporal categories (Philalethes' s position)

Highest: Non-identification with the will-to-life in any form and consequently, a non-identity, a state we cannot understand as willing subjects.

Therefore, perhaps because saintly world-denial is available only to some, the next best thing available to the majority of people is the intermediary path of seeing beyond the 'veil of māyā' without a full denial of the will-to-life.⁶¹

However, the above contentions raise a further problem. If the self in-itself as non-spatially and non-temporally delineated will-to-life continues in death and all that vanishes in the negation of the will-to-life is the willing subject, then why is suicide not also a means of liberation? If, in every death, both the liberated saints and the non-liberated individual, both the knowing subject and the willing subject come to an end while the will-to-life continues, combined with the fact that the pain of existence comes from being a willing subject, then what makes continued living as a pure knowing subject preferable? Is suicide not a speedier and less painful route to will-lessness? Schopenhauer's answer is that suicide is metaphysically misjudged because in suicide the willing subject continues to affirm his own will, he simply hopes for more favourable conditions in which to do it – 'the person who commits suicide wills life (*will das Leben*), and is only unsatisfied with the conditions under which life has been given to him. Thus, when he destroys the individual appearance he is relinquishing only life, not the will to life' (WWR I:425). However, both the intention and the assumed outcome of the suicide can be seriously questioned here. Firstly, is this really the intention of suicide? We may argue that far from performing an action that turns out to be an affirmation of

⁶¹ Incidentally, this is the position of the altruist who has not denied the will-to-life.

the will-to-life, the suicide is performing an action which turns out to be a rejection only of his own conscious manifestation of the will-to-life – if this is the case, then suicide begins to sound very much like a denial of the will-to-life.

Secondly, regardless of intention, the self as subject of willing does vanish permanently with suicide. This consciousness and subjecthood is a unique manifestation of the will-to-life and while the will-to-life that I am in essence may continue, the unique manifestation that is my consciousness does not. Therefore, the only difference between the suicide's death and the death of the renunciant who has denied the willing subject in advance is that the later has managed to live as a pure subject of knowledge for a while first – with the end result being the same. It is therefore, unclear why or how suicide is not preferable as a means of liberation into non-individuation nor why it is preferable to live as a renunciant at all. Julian Young makes the point well when he writes 'If life is as terrible as Schopenhauer makes out, why should we bother with asceticism when suicide presents itself as a speedier, more decisive alternative?' (Young, 2005, p191). Dale Jacquette states the heart of the problem as such:

The nonfinality of death is no more than the persistence of Will as thing-in-itself that endures regardless of the empirical world as representation, with or without its accidental habitation by living persons or intelligent subjects of individual will. That death is not total annihilation for Schopenhauer is true enough, yet death remains the total annihilation of the self, soul or subject in the sense of individual will or particular empirical personality.

Jacquette, 2006, p300

This is a serious problem for Schopenhauer and one I believe he is not able to easily manoeuvre out of. It may be that his own aversion to suicide is circumstantial and biographical (it has long been speculated that Schopenhauer's father committed suicide) and that his theory does not logically entail it. Indeed, the second part of the Silenian wisdom he is so fond of mentioning states that after not being born 'a close second, once you have appeared in this life, is a quick return, as soon as you can, to where you came from' (Sophocles, 2007, p202). The issue, however, becomes somewhat

tempered if one takes the approach espoused by Ryan, Atwell and Young (as well as myself) that, in denial of the will, the saint does not enter a state of total negation but in fact enters a positive state, a union with a higher metaphysical reality (Ryan, 2020, p364). If this is the case, then the Silenian wisdom would have it that only from the perspective of a willing agent is the best thing to die and die soon, and from the perspective of a negater of the will-to-life suicide is not truly advantageous because the positive fruits of the negation of the will-to-life are not simply an embrace of nothingness but an entry into a positive transcendent state that suicide cheats one of. Therefore, the only way of overcoming the difficulty with suicide is to suggest that there must be a positive dimension to the state of will-lessness. Difficulties with this position are of course that it is unclear why suicide is not still preferable as a 'second best' given the sheer difficulty and, for most, impossibility, of achieving a negation of the will-to-life.

3.5 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I have argued the following:

- a. The 'ordinary' sense of self is synonymous with the subject of willing who identifies with the body as objectified will-to-life.
- b. The negation of the will-to-life involves the negation of the subject of willing but does not involve the negation of the body nor the negation of the 'pure' subject of knowing.
- c. The subject of knowing, while dependent upon the body as objectified will-to-life for its continuation, is not reducible to it and therefore can subsist alongside it after a negation of the subject of willing.
- d. The self as indestructible thing-in-itself is the self as embodied will-to-life understood independently of the *principium individuationis*, beyond the forms of outer intuition of space and time, and, therefore, because the body continues to manifest the will-to-life after a negation of the willing subject, the self as indestructible thing-in-itself continues both after negation of the will-to-life and after the death of the individual. However, because this self is still nothing more than the willing subject, devoid as it is of time and space, the negater of the will-to-life no longer identifies with it nor considers it 'himself'.

To this solution should be added the caveat that there remains some unresolved equivocation in Schopenhauer's conception of the self such that:

- e. The subject of cognition in its 'pure' form should not be considered an individual in the ordinary sense but rather 'subject' in the special sense, not a 'thing' but instead an empty 'dark point in consciousness' (WWR II:507).
- f. In order to make sense of how the negation of the will-to-life is a state which remains ineffable, one must argue that it represents an existence unlike any we can ordinarily experience including in pure aesthetic contemplation as well as in 'witness-consciousness'.
- g. Any further problems with both e. and f. are both inevitable and expected, and, therefore, to some extent limited in their impact given Schopenhauer's insistence on abstract thoughts necessary confines in conceptualising spiritually transcendent states.

However, with this chosen way of interpreting and reframing the problems comes a serious difficulty:

- h. Given the above, it is not clear why suicide as a negation of the individual subject of both knowledge and willing is not preferable. This is because, while perhaps metaphysically misjudged, the suicide achieves the same end as the saint, only faster: the negation of the subject of willing (as well as the subject of knowing) despite the continuation of the will-to-life as indestructible thing-in-itself.
- i. The only way to resolve h. and still consistently allow, with Schopenhauer, that suicide is not a more attractive soteriological option is to suggest, along with Julian Young, Robert Wicks and Christopher Ryan that a denial of the will-to-life is not simply a negation of the world but is an entry into a new positive state beyond the will, one that cannot be achieved via suicide because it demands the continuation of a knowing subject, a *nihil privativum* rather than a *nihil negativum*.
- j. Given the above, the will should not be understood as constitutive of ultimate reality, the 'thing-in-itself' in Schopenhauer's system.

Chapter IV: Desiring Salvation – A Will to Will-lessness?

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we examined the difficulties that emerge when we approach questions of identity and persistence in the negation of the will-to-life. In this chapter, I wish to examine the consistency of a negation of the will-to-life at all. Christopher Janaway describes how certain problems arise because Schopenhauer appears to maintain that willing is in some sense necessary both before the achievement of a negation of the will-to-life and after it (Janaway, 2023, p19). Janaway illustrates how Schopenhauer describes a state in which the non-enlightened subject both greatly ‘urges’ or ‘stresses’ for (*Drang*) and ‘longs after’ (*Sehnen*) redemption – *der Drang des Herzens nach Erlösung* (WWR II:641), *die größte Sehnsucht* (WWR I:417). And yet both *Drang* and *Sehnen* are used elsewhere by Schopenhauer to describe the will (*Drang*: WWR I:174, 301; WWR II:224, 365; *Sehnen*: FOW:38). What is more, Schopenhauer describes how, once a state of denial of the will-to-life has been achieved, constant effort must be maintained to remain within it:

The peace and blissfulness we have described in the lives of saintly people is only a flower that emerges from the constant overcoming of the will, and we see the constant struggle with the will to life as the soil from which it arises... Thus we also see people who have succeeded at some point in negating the will bend all their might to hold to this path by wresting renunciations of every sort from themselves, by adopting a difficult, penitent way of life and seeking out everything they find unpleasant: anything in order to subdue the will that will always strive anew... I have often used the expression *asceticism*, and I understand by it, in the narrow sense, this *deliberate* breaking of the will.

WWR I:418-19

Janaway argues that a denial of the will-to-life appears to involve ‘both a *longing for salvation*,

which predates the redemptive state of so-called will-lessness, and a *trying to suppress the will*, which occurs after the redemptive state has been reached' (Janaway, 2023, p20). Janaway illustrates how Schopenhauer rightly is reluctant to straightforwardly label these phenomena 'willing' for fear of invoking a contradiction, but that they, nonetheless, appear to fit the description of willing all the same. How then can I remain will-less while desiring to remain will-less?⁶²

On one level this would appear to not be a problem because the state of will-lessness is not achieved through willing anyway. This is because, as we have already shown, for Schopenhauer will-lessness cannot be freely brought about by our own volition but is instead the result of a '*divine grace*' (WWR I:432). Therefore, our issue is not that there is a contradiction in the attempt to will will-lessness in so far as willing is understood as an act. This is because Schopenhauer is clear that will-lessness cannot be brought about through an act of will to begin with. However, willing is not just acting for Schopenhauer, it is also desiring. Our difficulty is, therefore: how can I become will-less when it is a state that I desire and desire is a species of willing? The problem can be summarized as follows:

Premise 1: In order to either become, or to remain, will-less, it is necessary, though not sufficient (because no one can bring about will-lessness themselves), that I do not will.

Premise 2: Desire is a species of willing.

Premise 3: Schopenhauer appears to be describing a desire for will-lessness, both before it is achieved, and once it has been achieved.

Conclusion: A state of desiring will-lessness means that it will not be achieved and, therefore, will-lessness is not possible for those who want it.

I will now set out to explore some approaches to the apparent difficulty.

⁶² A similar difficulty is expressed in the Zen Buddhist tradition through the popular Koan – 'to desire enlightenment is to wish to suffer eternally' (anon).

4.2 A desire to be without desire

One potential solution to the paradox may be found by borrowing from Harry Frankfurt's helpful distinction in 'Freedom of the will and the concept of a person' between first and second order desires (Frankfurt, 1988, pp11-25). A first order desire is what I cannot help but desire, however, a second order desire is to desire that I desire what I wish to desire (Frankfurt, 1988, p16). To use my own example, I may desire a cigarette, however, I also desire to not desire a cigarette, and both desires can be entertained simultaneously with the second being a higher order 'volition' (Frankfurt, 1988, p17). This is evidently not paradoxical as is evidenced by anyone who visits a rehabilitation center. With such an analogue, I can make sense of a will to no longer will because two contrary and opposed wills can be in operation at the same time without a contradiction. This appears a neat solution until we realize that the analogue breaks down in the case of willing will-lessness because this case of willing is a special example of two desires in tension with one another – while I may desire to not desire a cigarette, I do not desire not to desire altogether. Rather, I desire to keep desiring, but to simply not include smoking a cigarette under my list of desires. By contrast, with a will to be will-less what, at least *prima facie*, is being proposed is not a desire to not desire *something in particular*, but instead the desire to not desire *anything at all*. The apparent threat is then that my desiring such a desireless state necessitates that I will am prevented from achieving it because it is precipitated, and therefore nullified, by my state of desiring it.⁶³

There is perhaps another more promising solution: if I fulfil my will to no longer will, then with the vanishing of my will, my will-not-to-will simultaneously vanishes also. In much the same way as my desire to smoke a cigarette vanishes as I fulfil my desire not to desire it, so too does my desire to desire to not smoke a cigarette because it is no longer needed. Thus, I enter a state of resignation where I no longer will and I no longer will not to will and, because both states have been

⁶³ Through the lens of Janaway's solution (that the will-to-will-lessness is different to the will-to-life), first and second order desiring may still make sense. This is because with a desire for will-lessness we do not desire to not desire anything at all, instead we desire to not desire what we ordinarily egoistically desire, or to not desire in the way or to the extent that we ordinarily do – in short, not to *crave*. This, Janaway argues, is the more accurate reading of Buddhism before the influence of Schopenhauer himself on the reception of Buddhist thought in Europe which led to the misconceived view that Buddhism is a rejection of all desiring and not the more accurate view that Buddhism is a rejection of a particular kind of desiring only (Janaway, 2023, p24). This will be explored in more depth in section 4.3.

entered simultaneously, there is no contradiction. Thus, my willing in any direction is fulfilled in one moment and, therefore, no longer continues.

This solution may help us make sense of how an individual enters will-lessness, however, it does nothing to help us resolve the problem of the saintly person who has to continue to overcome the will after it has been achieved. Schopenhauer appears to maintain that a state of will-lessness is not permanent. It is not received once and for all as ‘inherited property’ (WWR I:418), but is rather, like the aesthetic state, one where concerted effort must be made to stay within it as a desired goal. If this is the case then I must invariably continue to will even after the fulfilment of my will-not-to-will. Schopenhauer states:

In the meantime, we must not think that, after cognition has become a tranquilizer of the will and give rise to the negation of the will to life, it will never falter and that it can be relied upon like inherited property. Rather, it must constantly be regained by steady struggle. Since the body is the will itself, but in the form of objecthood or as appearance in the world as representation, then as long as the body lives, the whole will to life still exists as a possibility and constantly strives to enter actuality and flare up again in all its blazing heat

WWR I:418

There appear to be two problems here. One is a return to the issue of desire – how can I remain will-less if, as Schopenhauer appears to describe, I must desire to remain-will-less and desire is a species of willing? The second problem is perhaps more profound – ‘adopting a difficult, penitent way of life’ and ‘seeking out everything they find unpleasant’ appear to not only be desires but also acts. How then can I be will-less if I must perform acts of will so as to remain will-less? This taps into a further problem for Schopenhauer – how can I do anything if I am will-less? If I attempt to mortify my will by, for instance, putting on a hair shirt or avoiding the company of the opposite sex, then this is an act of the will because I am moving my body towards an end or goal.

All things considered it is, therefore, unsurprising that Schopenhauer is keen to describe the state of the will-less subject both in action and in desire in terms other than the will, his preferred

term being ‘to struggle’ (*Kampf*) (see for instance WWR I:418). However, in what sense is ‘to struggle’ meaningfully different to willing? In Chapter I, we described willing as ‘conative striving’. This certainly seems to be what is meant by the will-less subjects ‘struggle’ to ‘maintain’ his will-lessness, whether that is as a desire or as an action – he has a goal which he, as an individual, wishes to attain for himself.⁶⁴ Therefore, in what sense is the will-less subject truly will-less? Thus, quite apart from the problem of willing as desiring being an issue for the saintly renunciant, we must face the threat of contradiction because acts of willing appear to be necessary for the will-less subject also.

One solution may be to point out that Schopenhauer does appear to allow room for the saint to continue willing. He states:

How blissful life must be for someone whose will is not merely momentarily placated as it is in the pleasure of the beautiful, but calmed forever, indeed extinguished entirely *except for the last glowing spark that sustains the body and is extinguished along with it.*

WWR I:417, (my emphasis)

The suggestion would then be that, in order to become or to stay will-less, there has to remain a bare subsistence level of will much like an organic life form in a coma or in hibernation – the will is incapacitated in 99% of its faculties but still requires a heart-beat/breathing lungs etc.⁶⁵

Furthermore, if we were to continue to hold on to the position that the will is ultimate metaphysical reality and there is nothing beyond it, we would need to admit that the will, in its

⁶⁴ Though of course for the subject who has already achieved the denial of the will and is only aiming to keep himself within it or to ‘re-achieve’ it, he should know that it is not truly ‘himself’ for whom he wishes to achieve denial of the will, this is because denial of the will is to deny the very idea of self as subject of willing.

⁶⁵ In fact, this must be the case because, as argued in the previous chapter, a state of will-lessness cannot be achieved in death. Therefore, the will must always be present in order to remain will-less (at the very least manifested as unconscious biological processes occurring to keep the subject who wills the will-to-will-lessness alive). As Schopenhauer argues, the suicide does not achieve will-lessness in death but instead the very affirmation of the will-to-life itself. The ‘final spark’ of will is only extinguished and death only occurs, not as the *cause* of will-lessness but rather as the *result* of it.

renunciation, does not vanish because, ontologically, all that exists is will and its phenomenal representation and so there could be no continuous ‘I’ who becomes will-less. If we propose then that the will were the sole metaphysical reality, we would have to maintain that the will simply changes its focus as it wills its own cessation. It would, therefore, be the same substance either side of a fulfilled will-to-will-lessness, it only changes what it wills. Consequently, the will remains but it only remains in order to will-not-to-will – to act only to impede itself. A passage suggestive of this interpretation comes in Volume II of *Parerga and Paralipomena* where Schopenhauer states ‘the negation of the will to life (*Verneinung des Willens zum Leben*) in no way signifies the annihilation of a substance’ (PP II:281).⁶⁶ Of course, Schopenhauer does not usually refer to the will as a substance to begin with and, therefore, the correct reading of this passage would be that Schopenhauer is proposing that there is no negation of the will as a substance but only because the will is not a substance anyway.

The issues with this view are, again, that Schopenhauer states that a great deal of effort is involved in becoming and remaining will-less. If this is the case, then to what extent can we see the process of being will-less as akin to a reduced state of willing? Furthermore, as was argued in the previous chapter, the state of will-lessness is a state where conscious volitional willing life ceases, any remaining will is only will-to-life that is manifested in my body – not the will that we are subjects of – conscious volitional desiring. Therefore, because will-lessness has been understood by us to mean no longer being a subject of willing and this is perfectly compatible with still expressing the will-to-life in our bodies, then the above passage should not be seen as suggesting that we need to continue as a subject of willing, but only as a subject of knowing who possesses a body that continues to manifest the will-to-life. Therefore, suggesting that the will-less individual still wills minimally will not be a solution because the will to will-lessness is conscious volitional willing and we have already argued that this does appear to have ceased in will-lessness.

Another solution may be to argue that the will-less individual does cease all willing and that there is no willing to remain will-less but only a willing to become will-less again. We may be able to argue for this if we attempt to pay closer attention to Schopenhauer’s choice of words when he states

⁶⁶ However, he arguably then complicates the matter by adding ‘but the mere act of not-willing; the same thing that willed hitherto will no more’ (PP II:281).

‘regained by steady struggle’ (*muß...immer aufs Neue errungen werden*) (WWR I:418) (my emphasis). The use of *errungen* (achieved), renders the translation as ‘must always be achieved anew’. This suggests that when the renunciant is ‘seeking out’ the conditions to become will-less again he has, in fact, left a state of will-lessness and is not willing to remain will-less but willing to become will-less *again*. We have already argued that willing to be will-less can take place before it is achieved because, in the fulfillment of my will-not-to-will, I relinquish both my will and my will-not-to-will simultaneously and hence there is no willing of any kind happening when I become will-less. If we could then argue that there is not a will to *remain* will-less but only a will to *become* will-less *again* then there would be no contradiction. Therefore, the will-less subject is truly will-less and does not desire nor seek out anything until the will-to-life re-emerges and he then only wills to become will-less again when he has already left this state of will-lessness. Thus, the saint is one who has succeeded ‘at some point’ and now, as a newly willing individual, wills again only to re-attain will-lessness and rejoin ‘this path’ (WWR I:418). I believe that this remains an attractive solution.

4.3 Different kinds of willing

I now wish to focus on the solution proposed by Christopher Janaway in ‘Different kinds of willing in Schopenhauer’ (Janaway, 2023), which provides a promising solution because of the possible new valuative insights it paves the way for. Janaway asks us to pay careful attention to the subheading of the fourth book of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation*. While in chapter I of this project it was stated that the will and the will-to-life are interchangeable for Schopenhauer, Janaway argues that this is, in fact, the least helpful way of understanding willing. Instead, potential insights into some of the above paradoxes may be forthcoming if we reconstructively view Schopenhauer as espousing different kinds of willing. Janaway argues that we should – ‘reject Schopenhauer’s claim that all willing is will to life, and reject his claim that redemption requires absence of all willing’ (Janaway, 2023, p25). Janaway suggests that we should see the will-to-life as only one kind of willing, and that it can be negated by another form of willing, namely the will-to-will-lessness. We should therefore define the will-to-life as an individual’s egoistic desires for his own individuated needs and wants and the will to will-lessness as an individual’s desire and longing to no longer will in such a way but rather to escape ordinary egoistic willing and be liberated from the ‘trap’ of the will-to-life and

the pain that comes with it. Therefore, we remain subjects of willing who no longer will life while still willing in other directions.

Another who has seen the need for such a reconstructive interpretation is John Atwell in *Schopenhauer: The Human Character* (Atwell, 1990). Atwell makes the distinction between the ‘will’ and the ‘will-to-live’ stating:

In Schopenhauer’s account of *human* salvation he allows us to make a fairly sharp break between willing and willing-to-live, and that, despite first appearances, their non-identity accords perfectly with nearly everything he actually says about (what I call) the ‘roads to salvation’. Specifically, my argument is that in the various areas of human life where salvation can occur or be approached - namely aesthetics, ethics, scholarship (and to a much lesser extent) religion - *willing goes on*, though willing-to-live does not. (I should say, to speak more cautiously, that activity goes on, though willing-to-live does not, I use the more dramatic expression here). The willing that does go on can be described in different ways in the different areas of its possible occurrence, but perhaps the most general description – the one that fits all areas – is, I suggest, ‘Objective’; accordingly, the will-to-live can properly be called ‘subjective’. In certain areas, more precise descriptive terms will come to mind, such as ‘disinterested’ versus ‘instrumental’, or ‘impartial’ versus ‘egoistic’, and so on. Even ‘spiritual’ versus ‘bodily’ might prove useful.

Atwell, 1990, p182

A promising solution to the paradox of willing-will-lessness is, then, to introduce this distinction and maintain that some form of willing does continue once the will-to-live has been negated. The solution draws the following distinction:

The Will-to-Life: Selfish desire felt for the continuance and maintenance of this body located in a particular place in space and time.

The Will to Will-lessness: The desire to no longer desire the continuation and maintenance of the body.

If it could then be argued that these are separate categories, then it could be maintained that the presence of *The Will to Will-lessness* does not necessitate the presence of *The Will-to-Life*.

However, before we go any further we should ask – does this solution threaten our argument in chapter III that in a denial of the will-to-life one is no longer a willing subject? For surely under the above distinction, I would remain a willing subject despite no longer willing life? Ultimately, I do not believe that there is a threat, this is because we have defined the willing subject as an individual who wills life for himself. Therefore, once the will-to-life has been denied, any subject who is left, while he may still will, is not willing life and certainly not for himself. Therefore, more accurately speaking, in a negation of the will-to-life, the willing-life subject is negated, but not the willing-in-other-ways-subject. This accords with Schopenhauer's contention that there is an ineffable 'something else' that remains despite a negation of the will-to-life. Janaway draws our attention to this distinction with the following passage:

In tragedy...we see before our eyes the state of the world diametrically opposed to our will. At the sight of this we feel called upon to turn our will away from life, to stop wanting and loving it. Precisely this, however, makes us aware that something else remains in us that cannot be recognized positively but only negatively as that which does *not* will life.⁶⁷

WWR II:450

Therefore, if there is 'something else' in us that is able to will despite not willing life, then it should be possible to negate one form of willing while remaining a willing subject who simply wills differently (Janaway, 2023, p22). Thus, properly speaking, the willing subject who is subject to the

⁶⁷ Schopenhauer refers to this 'something else' on more than one occasion, stating elsewhere that – 'that very will to life that must be negated if redemption from an existence such as ours is to be achieved. Behind our existence lies something else and it only becomes accessible to us when we shake off the world' (WWR I:432).

will-to-life has been negated but not the willing-in-other-ways subject who is the subject of some other kind of willing. Therefore, in one sense the saint is not a ‘pure’ subject of cognition because, while he may not will life he does still will in other ways.

We may, then, legitimately ask whether the notion of different kinds of willing threatens Schopenhauer’s account of a ‘pure’ subject of cognition. There are, it would seem, three responses to this – one is to admit that yes it does but that this does not matter because we may ask why a subject of cognition must be entirely ‘pure’ and without all willing in the first place?⁶⁸ A second response would be to argue, as I have done so in the previous section, that while one can will-will-lessness and this can be held to be a different kind of willing, this (as well as all other forms of) willing stops when one becomes will-less and achieves a denial of the will. Thus, one is in fact a pure will-less subject when one achieves denial of the will. As we will see later on, this will be my preferred approach. Another response may be to suggest that the state of purity that the subject of cognition achieves is as a result of no longer willing life rather than as a result of no longer willing at all and hence one can be a pure subject of cognition while still willing in other ways. However, we may then ask, if some willing is anathema to a state of pure cognition and some willing is not, then in what sense is it appropriate that they share the same word – ‘will’?

Janaway’s account is vulnerable to the criticism that the word ‘will’ is simply doing too much conceptual work and, consequently, Schopenhauer’s system cannot make room for different accounts of willing. In defence of Janaway, Schopenhauer does contend that the use of the word ‘will’ is inevitably equivocal and that we are somewhat conceptually stunted by language anyway. Schopenhauer states:

If we are to think objectively about this ‘thing-in-itself’, it must borrow its name and concept from an object, from something that is somehow objectively given, and thus from one of its appearances: but if this is to further our understanding, it can be nothing other than the most complete of all appearances, i.e. the clearest, most highly

⁶⁸ This appears to be Janaway’s preferred response, he states – ‘my reconstructive suggestion is that Schopenhauer would be better dropping the vision of the totally will-less mirror of the world, and clarifying that it is simply a kind of willing that it is desirable to lose, the kind that aims at individual happiness and well-being’ (Janaway, 2023, p20).

developed appearance, the one that is illuminated immediately by knowledge: but this is just the human *will*. It is nonetheless fair to say that we are only using a denomination from the superior term (*denominatio a potiori*) that gives the concept of will a broader scope than it had before...Accordingly, I will name the genus after its most important species; the more intimate and immediate cognition we have of species leads to the mediated cognition we have of all others.

WWR I:135-6

Therefore, there may be aspects to our nature which are different to the will-to-life and yet invariably must be described as ‘will’ nonetheless. Hence, if we are to follow Janaway’s distinction, it is clearly advisable that we do not view ‘different kinds of willing’ as the same as the will that wills life, it is just that, as the closest conceptualizable phenomenon that allows us access to our inner nature, ‘will’ is the only word we have at our disposal for both states. However, one could then ask – how are we then to make sense of Schopenhauer’s claims that in a denial of the will-to-life it is the will that denies itself? Take for instance when Schopenhauer states – ‘for those in whom the will has turned and negated itself’ (WWR I:439), surely, this would only be possible if *The Will-to-Life* and *The Will to Will-lessness* were the same thing? Perhaps this can be overcome if we admit, with Janaway, that a reconstructive project is needed in order to make sense of Schopenhauer’s assertions and that no reconstructive project will be without some textual inconsistencies.

However, the suggestion that one can be a will-less subject who still wills is clearly more than a little problematic. Since one is still a subject of willing if one continues to will differently, it is hard not to see how we are not then committed to jettisoning an integral part of Schopenhauer’s soteriology – will-lessness? If we attempt to keep both claims – that the willing subject is negated in the denial of the will-to-life and that a subject of willing in different ways remains, are we attempting to have our cake and eat it? There is the real danger here of getting caught in a kind of homunculus fallacy: proposing that the will is able to negate itself by suggesting that there are different distinct willing ‘selves’ acting within us. I do not believe that Schopenhauer would thank us for going down this particular path.

Perhaps there is no good rational or conceptual answer to these problems. Again, maybe we

have reached the upper limit of what conceptual thought alone is able to achieve in Schopenhauer's system – the 'boundary stone' we came up against in the previous chapter (WWR I:438). The resolution of paradoxes is a conceptual practice, and therefore, paradoxically, the fact that, Schopenhauer's philosophy continually churns out paradoxes and apparent contradictions at this juncture is perfectly consistent with his philosophy at large. Furthermore, in order to resolve these paradoxes, we would need to have positive conceptual knowledge of exactly what it is that the willing subject who no longer wills life is supposed to be willing. While the answer to this is, in one sense, obvious – will-lessness, in another sense, it is not, this is because the content of this state is simply unknowable and un-conceptualizable to us as subjects who will life. Janaway similarly argues this (Janaway, 2023, p21). Positive knowledge of whatever is left over after a denial of the will-to-life, this 'something else' (WWR II:450), will remain for us, as subjects who will life, a *nihil privativum* (WWR I:436), a relative nothing, it is simply not something that we can understand. As we argued for in the previous chapter however, a *nihil privativum* (relative nothing) can be distinguished from a *nihil negativum* (absolute nothing), and therefore, that which is willed in will-lenses may well be 'nothing' to us and yet be an ineffable and positive 'something' to a being who wills differently.

Ultimately, I find Janaway's assertions promising. If there are other kinds of willing and other kinds of being that lie beyond conceptual grasp, then the following highly important (and advantageous) conclusions are drawn to our attention:

1. The will-to-life is not the thing in-itself. It is simply one way that it can appear to us.
2. If 1. is the case, then not only do we have a further reason to maintain that ultimate reality is not the will-to-life and, therefore, that the world is not ultimately a place we have reason to despair at, but we can also argue that, because the fundamental nature of willing is not the will-to-life, even human willing may not be painful or insidious and something we should despair at. Therefore, not only is the nature of the world not necessarily painful or insidious, but the nature of willing may not be either. Instead the suffering of the world may be a feature only of ultimate reality under one particular veil, namely the will-to-life. Hence beyond the will-to-life the world takes on an entirely different aspect, as neither good nor

bad, painful nor pleasurable, pessimistic nor optimistic.

This would make sense of Schopenhauer's assertion – 'Thus I first posit will as thing in itself, something completely original; second the body as its mere visibility, objectivation' (WN:340). While in chapter II, we argued that the will should not be seen as the 'thing-in-itself', nonetheless, if it can be argued that the will, independently of how it normally reveals itself as the will-to-life – as 'something completely original' – is meaningfully different to the will-to-life, then an escape from an identification with the will-to-life and towards the will stripped of the spatial and temporal veils conducive of egoism, should lead to new valuations of the world as neither 'good' nor 'bad'. This is because it is only the will expressed as the will-to-life which provides the egoistic foundation for suffering such that 'I' suffer and 'I' crave. This is a point that Schopenhauer appears willing to make when he states that – 'the thing in itself (which we cognize most directly in willing) may have – entirely outside of any appearance – determinations, properties and ways of being that entirely elude our grasp or cognition' (WWR II:209).

If the above can be sustainably argued, then it represents a profound path for re-valuing Schopenhauer's philosophy. Sandra Shapshay argues for a similar point, stating that the will-to-life may in fact be metonymic for Schopenhauer – a way of making sense of the world by projecting only one of the veils through which we come to know it onto experience (Shapshay, 2019, p51). If there are different kinds of willing, as Janaway suggests, then the nature of the will-to-life is not necessarily indicative of the nature of the phenomenal world at all.

If we accept that there are different kinds of willing, some more pernicious than others, then we may find helpful analogues in Buddhism again. The second of the Buddha's four noble truths – *Tanha* – states that suffering comes from craving. Graham Priest suggests that we should be making a distinction here between desire and craving. Priest states:

Buddhism is not about the elimination of desire—in one sense...What is wrong is being attached to this aiming. This is the state of being mentally troubled until the aim has been fulfilled or after one has failed to fulfil it – desire in quite a different sense.

Though they may normally go together, a Buddhist ethics teaches divorcing them.

Priest, 2017, p106

Therefore, the cause of suffering is not desire itself, but rather a certain kind of desire – *Tanha* – and this is relinquished without relinquishing desire all together. Craving can be understood as a desire that carries a particular adverse psychological effect when it is not fulfilled whereas desire without craving is a desire where we are not attached to the outcome because, in greater awareness, we have detached from a notion of self as an entity we wish to placate with the satisfaction of cravings.⁶⁹ Janaway argues that his interpretation is attractive partially because it enables Schopenhauer's thought to sit more comfortably with Buddhism (Janaway, 2023, p22). Furthermore, Janaway argues that there is no outright contradiction invoked with the proposal of a will to be will-less or a desire to be without desires. He draws attention to the extensive scholarly literature within Buddhism which has always maintained such a distinction; for instance Paul Williams, who states – ‘Since the Buddhist path is...designed to bring craving to an end, to want enlightenment is to want the practices that will eliminate among other things craving after enlightenment itself. There is no contradiction in any of this.’ (Williams, 2012, p32).⁷⁰

However, there remain some puzzling questions surrounding the notion of different kinds of willing and it is, therefore, worth considering these now. Firstly, Schopenhauer makes no such distinction between willing and craving. Of course, we may be able to escape this problem if we, again, heavily caveat our discussion as reconstructive. However, the issue remains that Schopenhauer defines willing as having the necessary metaphysical structure of dissatisfaction, an object of desire is felt as a lack of possession or attainment of a desired object. Take for instance his definition in his *Prize Essay On The Freedom of the Will*:

⁶⁹ Similarly, the earlier Zen Koan should be read as – ‘to *crave* enlightenment is to wish to suffer eternally’ (anon).

⁷⁰ Bernard Reginster makes a similar point when he states – ‘while it [willing will-lessness] appears paradoxical, there is no inherent contradiction in the notion of willing not to will unless perhaps we take it to be the notion that one could stop willing simply by willing to stop. But Schopenhauer rejects this view: The negation of the will is a difficult and protracted process’ (Reginster, 2023, p47).

All desiring, striving, wishing, longing, yearning, hoping, loving, enjoying, rejoicing and the like, no less than not-willing or resisting, and detesting, fleeing, fearing, being angry, hating, grieving, suffering pain, in short all affects and passions, among the manifestations of willing as well; for these affects and passions are simply movements, more or less weak or strong, now violent and stormy, now gentle and calm, of one's own will that is either restrained or released, satisfied or unsatisfied, and they all relate in multiple variations to the attainment or non-attainment of what is willed.

FOW:38

Does this then mean then that, like all willing, the will-to-will-lessness is also felt as a lack and is, therefore, also a state of pain and suffering? This is a serious difficulty with Janaway's reconstructive project. What is more, we may even choose to argue that the state of willing will-lessness in fact represents one of more dissatisfaction and suffering than ordinary willing, not least because, presumably, one is still willing life when one is willing will-lessness and there is, therefore, a net increase of states of willing when one introduces second order willing. What is more, willing will-lessness is a desire that the renunciant on the path to enlightenment presumably fervently desires in such a way that it would appear no longer meaningfully different to craving. Schopenhauer describes will-lessness as – 'a state we cannot look at without yearning' (MR I:455). This may then lead us to propose that the solution presented in the last section (4.2), that once will-lessness is achieved one is no longer willing in any way, is preferable. This is because this appears to be the only solution which offers a meaningful reduction in willing. If I am no longer willing at all, which we suggested in 4.2 is achievable at least for certain periods of time if one no longer wills in any way when will-lessness has been achieved, then there can be a reduction in suffering at least some of the time. One would only will again (either life or will-lessness) and hence suffer again when one has been dragged back into the throes of the will-to-life.

The argument then is that Janaway has unnecessarily allowed for suffering to enter the will-less state and we would, therefore, be better off viewing all willing as coming to an end while one remains will-less. Of course, this does not mean that Janaway is wrong to introduce different kinds

of willing and his distinction should still be accepted because it explains how one can will to not will and hence take measures to become will-less, it is just that these other forms of willing should not be seen as continuing once one is will-less.

The second problem is a connected one. If all willing has as its structure a deficit then this can surely only be a deficit felt for a subject. Therefore, when one wills to be will-less in what sense is one not willing egoistically for oneself? This of course threatens to undermine the whole edifice that Janaway's novel suggestion is built upon because willing will-lessness has been defined as non-egoistic willing. The difficulty for Janaway's conception is that it is difficult to see how willing will-lessness is not a will for oneself. If this is the case, then so long as I will-lessness, it will not be achieved. There, therefore, seems to be a re-affirmation of the subject of willing when one wills will-lessness. This should be of great concern to us because in the previous chapter we argued that in denial of the will the saint's sense of self becomes untethered from the subject of willing and vanishes instead into a 'dark point in consciousness' (WWR II:507).

In response we may choose to argue that it is possible to have desires that are not about myself such that I can will non-egoistically. After all the subject who wills will-lessness wills the opposite of egoism, he wills to no longer be egoistic. Furthermore, I can will the best for another, which is non-egoistic. However, this poses difficulties because the body is, it would seem, the focus of my willing will-lessness, it is something that I want for myself as a deliverance from the pain that I experience. Furthermore, the nature of the will-not-to-will is such that I, as an embodied subject, am very much attached to its fulfilment – it is the deliverance from the wretched condition that I find my individuated self in as an embodied subject. Schopenhauer appears to be saying that at least one of the motives for a denial of the will-to-life is to end my own suffering (WWR I:419).

In Janaway's defence, there appear to be several motives for a denial of the will for Schopenhauer and some appear less egoistic than others. One such motive is a generalized revulsion at the will-to-life in all its manifestations felt not through personal suffering but as the result of correct cognition and compassion (WWR I:419). If the later motive is operative rather than the former (cognition rather than suffering) then it could be argued that willing will-lessness is not a will to satiate my own ego but a will to diminish the will-to-life felt in this as well as all bodies.

We could argue that another solution to the problem is, again, to take the approach from 4.2. As we stated, if my will to be will-less and my willing life cease simultaneously in the moment of my achievement of the denial of the will-to-life, then it does not matter that, before this takes place, I will it for myself. This is because, as we stated, both states are achieved at once and, therefore, as I become will-less I now no longer will anything for myself at all including will-lessness. This would, therefore, mean that willing will-lessness could still be an egoistic willing but that, like other forms of egoistic willing such as willing life, it ceases when one is actually will-less. Again, this is possible because it is not the state of willing will-lessness that actually leads to will-lessness anyway, it instead comes from without as the result of a ‘*divine grace*’ (WWR I:432). Therefore, one wills to be will-less and, in so doing, nurtures the fertile soil out of which will-lessness may be achieved, however the actual moment of achieving it ‘arrives suddenly, as if flying in from the outside’ (WWR I:432). This moment sees the relinquishing of all willing including willing will-lessness, one literally wills nothing at all for oneself including will-lessness.

Such a solution may bring Schopenhauer closer to Buddhist teachings which maintain that the path to enlightenment may require holding beliefs which are useful for a while but must then be relinquished. One such belief is that enlightenment is for oneself. This belief is initially useful in order to incentivize the practitioner to embark on their path, however, it is only the first vehicle in the path to enlightenment. It must eventually be relinquished as one’s practice matures and the realization comes that there is no self for whom enlightenment can belong. Jonardon Ganeri describes how Buddhism relies upon ‘indirect communication’ through the dialectic delivery of ‘partial truths’ or even ‘untruths’ in response to the spiritual readiness of the disciple (Ganeri, 2006, p99). This is the message of the parable of the ‘burning house’ found in the *Lotus Sūtra* where a father cajoles his children into leaving a burning building through the promise of toys. The method for safely delivering the children employs the use of an ‘untruth’ while, through skillfull means (*Upaya-kaushalya*), incentivizing those who hear it for a truth they are not quite ready for. Thus, in much the same way the promise of a deliverance for oneself in Schopenhauer’s system is a kind of ‘noble lie’.

Of course, it could be argued that Schopenhauer has simply left us with irresolvable paradoxes. We should of course be aware that he contends that will-lessness is a state that is simply beyond

rational cognition and will, therefore, inevitably be unresolvable via conceptual thought. The argument here is that the saint exists on a spiritual and intellectual plain that is so utterly other to our mode of thinking, governed as it is by the principle of sufficient reason, that we cannot make rational sense of the state, or the assumptions that constitute such a state in any way that do not lead to contradiction. If the individual has reached outside of ordinary existence and somehow ‘joined’ ultimate reality, then, in their utter loss of individuation, they are outside of the modes in which reality must make itself known to us in a transcendently ideal manner. If this is the case then the manner in which one can will and yet be ego-less or one can will in a way that is definable as something other than a lack in a subject is simply un-cognizable to us as willing subjects. Again, there is precedence here, Schopenhauer states:

What everyone *wills* that is he, and what this is that he is and wills is revealed to him by the mirror of the will, which we call life or the world. This mirror shows him *what* he wills and *how much* he wills it. If the will turns, then it is no longer to be seen in this mirror. In vain do we ask where it has now turned to, and we foolishly moan that it has become lost in *nothing*. The man whose will turns and abolishes itself cannot give any account of it to us and to his own reflection; for what then lives, exists and thinks is just the will-to-live itself, and that which consists in the abolition of this will cannot in any way be given to him and must be for him a *nothing*. Only the man who has grasped it and has abolished his will, perceives it, but only in so far as he is it in this act itself, not outside it, and still less for others.

MR I:426

Thus, like Kant’s postulates of practical reason, like the existence of God or freedom of the will (Kant, 2015, 5:133, p107), our ability to make sense of such a cognitive state – of a will that is at the same time not a lack in an ego – while in our current willed existence, will necessarily result in paradoxes. However, that such paradoxes are indicative of reality outside of our cognition is not necessarily the case.

As attractive as this position may be, for some it will be seen as, while beautiful mysticism, fundamentally lazy philosophy. The claim will be that we cannot expect to absolve Schopenhauer of any self-inflicted inconsistencies by simply brushing them under a carpet labelled ‘beyond our understanding’. To do so would be to beg the question – assuming the truth of the system in order to muster a defence for it. I however, do not agree with this analysis for reasons already stated – it is not simply that we are absolving Schopenhauer of inconsistencies by appealing to the limits of conceptual thought, we are actually making Schopenhauer’s system more coherent by admitting that there are areas which, necessarily, will not make sense. Thus, we are shown that the more we struggle with the upper limits of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, the more we give evidence in support of Schopenhauer’s point that philosophy may have reached its upper limit!⁷¹

4.4 Conclusion

I have tried to resolve some issues inherent in Schopenhauer’s soteriology by arguing that a will-to-will-less can make sense so long as we adopt at least one of the following approaches:

- a. There are different kinds of willing but the will-less individual does not will in any way while he is in the state of will-lessness.

Though the subject who wills life may will to be will-less, they no longer will-will-lessness after they have achieved it and thus there is no contradiction in willing will-lessness and becoming will-less because all willing is relinquished at the moment of the achievement of will-lessness. Similarly, there is no will to remain will-less but only a newly emergent will to become will-less again after the will-less subject has fallen back into willing. Thus, there is no contradiction because the will-less subject does not will.

⁷¹ Bernard Reginster argues that Schopenhauer’s metaphysics should always be seen as provisional and valid only in so far as it illuminates empirical experience – ‘If a metaphysical commitment impedes our ability to make sense of important portions of our experience, then it should be amended. This is presumably the spirit in which Schopenhauer invokes the problematic metaphysical notion of a “transcendental alteration” to make sense of the phenomenon of resignation, a phenomenon that cannot be easily dismissed since it is recorded in several of the world’s great religious and philosophical traditions’ (Reginster, 2023, pp47-8).

- b. There are different kinds of willing. The subject can will-life as well as will in other ways.

Only then can we make sense of how the will-to-life can cease but the ‘will-to-be-will-less’ and the ‘will-to-remain-will-less’ can continue.⁷²

Both a. and b. are attractive in their own ways but also because they both offer us room to argue that the fundamental nature of ultimate reality beyond the willing subject is not the will-to-life, this being only the nature of ultimate reality as it is ordinarily represented by us. They both, therefore, offer opportunities for new valuations because they suggest that the will-to-life is not constitutive of ultimate reality. In terms of choosing between each option, a. has the added advantage that it keeps intact the state of ‘purity’ of the pure-will-less subject because there is no willing of any sort happening once will-lessness has been achieved, this is something that b. lacks. In this sense a. provides a neater solution. Difficulties with entertaining a. include the fact that we would then have to ask how the will-less subject is capable of anything except for pure passive contemplation and this would threaten an account of the will-less subject behaving ethically – this is something that b. is able to answer.⁷³ We are, therefore, as with many areas of Schopenhauer’s thought, left with an either/or choice.

Furthermore, we must bear in mind that with either solution come the added difficulties:

1. Schopenhauer’s writings are littered with inconsistencies and, therefore, in order to make consistent sense, Schopenhauer’s philosophy requires some reconstruction which often involves bringing some passages to the foreground at the expense of others.
2. Far from simply being the result of bad philosophizing, inconsistencies and difficulties may in fact be in keeping with Schopenhauer’s contentions on the sheer limits of

⁷² Mathijs Peters also favours this view (Peters, 2023, p311-324).

⁷³ This is again addressed in chapter V.

conceptual thought when dealing with the issue of denial of the will-to-life. The very fact that every attempt to resolve inconsistencies raises new inconsistencies is perhaps indicative of a deeper Schopenhauerian contention that would in turn give an underlying consistency to the inconsistencies – that all philosophy, including Schopenhauer’s own, is only consistent in so far as it stays within its conceptual limits and, because the denial of the will-to-life goes beyond such limits, paradoxes are bound to ensue.

Fundamentally, regardless of any approach we take, I believe that the above discussion points in the direction of one salient fact – there is more to the state of will-lessness and denial of the will-to-life than are rendered by the typical treatments in the literature which at times appears to suggest either that it is simply an outright contradiction that must be dismissed altogether as an absurdity or that it is a totally pessimistic, will-to-nothingness, a kind of ‘death-drive’.

Chapter V: Salvation & Ethical Conduct

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to resolve the apparent conflicts between Schopenhauer's philosophy of salvation and his ethical pronouncements. This is a worthwhile task because such apparent conflicts have been a significant stumbling block in the perception of Schopenhauer's philosophy as consistent as well as contributing to the narrative that his thought is 'hopelessly pessimistic'.

Sandra Shapshay and Tristan Ferrell, in their article 'Compassion or Renunciation? *That is the question of Schopenhauer's Ethics*', argue that there is an irresolvable dichotomy in Schopenhauer's thought, one that demands an 'either/or' choice between – 'two independent, mutually antagonistic ethical ideals' (Shapshay and Ferrell, 2015, p54) – either we normatively pursue a path of world-renunciation or a compassion-based ethics, but not both. I wish to challenge Christopher Janaway's assertion that – 'it is doubtful whether this issue can ever be fully resolved' (Janaway, 2023, p23). I wish to argue for a compatibilist approach, with a focus on both renunciation and compassion as complimentary aspects of a holistic philosophy. I argue that a life of compassion may be possible alongside a life of resignation despite resignation being the highest soteriological path.

5.2 Renunciation and Compassion

Schopenhauer's writings on the relationship between asceticism and ethical conduct are somewhat ambiguous. At times he seems to think of them as compatible and even complimentary, writing:

We will go a long way towards a fuller and more detailed understanding of what we are calling...negation of the will to life, if we also consider the ethical injunctions issued in regard by people filled with this spirit...Christianity is closest to us; its ethics are entirely in the spirit of our present discussion, and lead not only to the highest degree of loving kindness but also to renunciation.

WWR I:413

However, at other times he appears to suggest that helping another fulfil their willing is no longer an option for the saint because the saint has made a commitment to – ‘renounce the essence that appears in himself and is already expressed through his body, and his deeds now belie his appearance and come into open contradiction with it’ (WWR I:407).

Shapshay and Ferrell argue in opposition to what they see as the ‘traditional’ view of Schopenhauer’s ethics – the ‘picture of the ethics of compassion as a step in the right direction, but ultimately a way-station to the normatively preferable option of renunciation’ (Shapshay and Ferrell, 2015 pp53-4). They argue in favour of two equal and competing espousals in Schopenhauer’s thought – life of renunciation *or* a life of ethical conduct. They suggest that compassion and renunciation are fundamentally opposed in their metaphysical commitments, stating:

But what of the other half of the principle: “help everyone to the extent that you can”? This second part is decidedly not served by renunciation, for the truly resigned person no longer actively helps anyone. Schopenhauer describes the transition from moral virtue to ascetic renunciation as one from “loving others as himself and doing as much for them as for himself” to having a “loathing for the essence that is expressed as his own appearance, the will-to-life [...]” (WWR I: 407). Consequently, the person on the way to achieving salvation is “careful not to let his will attach itself to anything, and tries to steel himself with the greatest indifference toward all things” (WWR I: 407); and for the fully resigned person “this world of ours which is so very real with all its suns and galaxies is—nothing.” (WWR I: 439). The resigned Saint seems to have achieved an existence that is beyond all caring and ipso facto beyond all compassion.

Shapshay and Ferrell, 2015, p55

Bryan Magee states the issue as such:

On the one hand he (Schopenhauer) tells us that all morality is based on compassion: on the other hand he says that the most ethically desirable state for an individual to attain is the renunciation of all willing. But clearly, it is impossible to be compassionately concerned for another without activity of will.

Magee, 1997, p243

Wittgenstein states it as:

To 'love one's neighbour' means to will!

Wittgenstein, 1969, p77

The problem appears to be twofold:

1. If the saint is will-less, how can he will his neighbour's good?
2. If altruism means aiding another in the satisfaction of their will-to-life, and the saint no longer answers to the will-to-life, how can he be both motivated to desire altruistic ends and perform altruistic deeds without threatening his own state of will-lessness?

Schopenhauer clearly does not want to suggest that the saint is cold or indifferent to the sufferings of others. In Volume II of *Parerga and Paralipomena*, he appears to create conceptual distance between the altruist and the renunciant by stating that asceticism – 'hardens the heart' and it is difficult to see how it (the heart) is 'supposed to be improved by sufferings if encased in a stony rind...[and]...does not sense them' (PP II:288). How then do we reconcile these difficulties?

The first problem can be dealt with rather swiftly. The problem is as follows:

Premise 1: Ethical non-egoism requires that I compassionately will to help others.

Premise 2: The true saint no longer wills.

Conclusion: A life pursuing both paths will lead to an irreconcilable contradiction and one must adopt an either/or approach.

Far from a new difficulty, this is, in fact, a problem we have already confronted. In chapter IV, we argued that there is no avenue for Schopenhauer to account for how someone who has denied the will can have desires or perform actions of any sort without the proposal that there are different kinds of willing. This is indeed one of the strengths of Janaway's reconstructive account – 'If the highest value were to attach to a cessation of egoistic willing brought about by "something in us" that wills otherwise, a continuity between redemption and moral action becomes easier to accept' (Janaway, 2023, p23). Perhaps then, the only way to account for how the saint can perform an action of any kind, let alone altruistic ones, is to maintain different kinds of willing. We may, therefore, choose to argue, as we did in chapter IV, that the will-less subject is not devoid of will altogether but only the will-to-life and thus he can still will in other ways. The resolution of this ethical difficulty provides another clear benefit to Janaway's reconstruction.

The second problem is much more difficult. It can be set out as follows:

Premise 1: Ethical altruism requires that I help others.

Premise 2: Helping others means helping them fulfil the will-to-life as if it were my own (for, in fact, it is my own).

Premise 3: The saint no longer answers to the will-to-life, nor values or is compelled into action by it.

Conclusion: The saint cannot help others.

The altruist is compelled to fulfil the demands of the will-to-life – albeit, the will-to-life as it manifests in another. Schopenhauer states of the altruistic individual:

Now it was in some people's character not to get in the way of the endeavours of the will of others, but rather to promote them, and they were thus thoroughly helpful, benevolent, friendly and charitable; they were called good human beings, because of the way their actions related to the wills of others in general.

And yet the saint no longer identifies with or listens to the demands of the will-to-life either in himself or in that of another, rather – ‘he is no longer satisfied with loving others as himself and doing as much for them as himself; instead, he has conceived a loathing for the essence that is expressed as his own appearance, the will-to-life’ (WWR I:407). What is more, as we have stated, the true saint, in so far as they have destroyed their own ego, no longer makes a meaningful distinction between his will and another’s will. He only sees the will-to-life manifested within his own embodied representation and the will-to-life as it is manifested in another’s embodied representation and, if his ego has been subdued, then his indifference should extend to both. He therefore cannot consistently have eliminated the will-to-life within himself and simultaneously be compelled to fulfil the will-to-life in another because, for him, there is no meaningful distinction between himself and another. To help another, for instance escape the suffering of physical pain, is therefore to be tied once more to the will-to-life which Schopenhauer cannot consistently maintain while arguing that the saint has escaped the will-to-life in all its manifestations. Altruism, for individuals who have not denied the will, is to will that another has their will-to-life fulfilled or at the very least not frustrated because the others will is, beyond the level of representation, also my will. This compassionate action may take many forms; for example, I may will to prevent the suffering of another by buying them food and giving them shelter, thus fulfilling the will-to-life manifested within them. This is the heart of ethical altruism for Schopenhauer and it is preferable to ethical egoism because I am extending the reach of my ethical concern to sentient manifestations of the will-to-life other than myself. If the saint has extinguished the will-to-life in themselves, then of course it is paradoxical to propose that there would persist within him a will to help others fulfil their will-to-life. This appears to be for three reasons which are broadly psychological, normative and metaphysical.

Psychologically, compassion requires that I can somehow identify with another’s experience, however the saint no longer identifies with the will-to-life at all and therefore compassion for another through identifying in common the will-to-life is no longer possible. Normatively, the saint views the will-to-life as pernicious and not something one should desire to fulfil or wish to identify with, rather the saint has a loathing for it (WWR I:407). Finally, the metaphysical reason why it is

paradoxical to propose that there would persist within the saint a will to help others fulfil their will-to-life is that the true saint no longer recognises the distinction between the will-to-life as manifested within himself and the will-to-life manifested in another and, therefore, the fact that they have transcended the will-to-life in themselves means they have transcended it in another too. There can, consequently, be no will-to-fulfil-the-will-to-life-in-another for one who has extinguished the will-to-life in themselves. John Atwell states the dilemma well when he says:

If I really 'see' the thing-in-itself 'in' another person, what I 'see' is the will-to-live - which is neither *my* will-to-live nor the *other's* will-to-live (hence both egoism and compassion drop out of consideration) – and I am facing something that I am more likely to shrink from in horror than I am to sympathize with. Moreover, once I delve beneath the surface of things and come face to face with the will-to-live, I am no longer aware of an unfortunate, suffering, hungry beggar (for that is merely phenomenal); I am aware of nothing that might move me to compassion. (How could one have compassion for the will-to-live)?

Atwell, 1990, p123

My proposed solution is to focus instead on what exactly is meant by a 'compassionate will to help others'? I believe that there only remains a contradiction if we view a compassionate will to help others as a will to help them fulfil the will-to-life. This may be what is expressed when non-saints who have not extinguished the will-to-life in themselves nonetheless show compassion to another, however, what I seek to argue is that the saint is able to show compassion not to the other as a manifestation of will-to-life but to the other as a being who suffers and that helping them to fulfil the will-to-life is an instrumental means of eliminating their suffering. This does not require that the saint relates to or wishes to fulfil the others will-to-life. Instead, the saint relates to, or shows compassion through the shared experience of, the other's suffering. This suffering is a universal language shared by all sentient creatures, including those who have successfully denied the will-to-life. Therefore, their compassionate will is to help reduce suffering, which is achieved, for most, via the instrumental means of the fulfilment of the will-to-life.

In Chapter IV of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer describes how the non-egoist, who has not reached the level of the saint identifies with the will-to-life in another:

he shows in his way of acting (*Handlungsweise*) that he *recognizes* his own essence (namely the will to life as thing in itself) in foreign appearances that are given to him in mere representations, and thus rediscovers himself in these other appearances to a certain extent, namely that of doing no wrong, i.e. failing to cause harm. This is the extent to which he sees through the principium individuationis, the veil of *māyā*: and to this extent, he equates the essence outside of himself within his own: he does not harm it.

WWR I:397

That it is suffering and not willing that is the locus of compassion is again expressed forthrightly by Schopenhauer in *On the Basis of Morality* where he states – ‘immediate sympathy towards the other is restricted to his suffering’ (OBM:202). Furthermore, he states that the altruist’s compassion arrives in so far as he – ‘participates with sympathy in their well-being and woe’ (OBM:255). I conjecture that the saint is able to understand suffering because he is still very much involved with suffering – it is the very experience of suffering that has allowed him to become ready for a state of will-lessness to begin with and it is his own personal suffering which is felt anew when the will-to-life re-emerges in his person. Indeed will-lessness is only a ‘flower that emerges from...the constant struggle with the will to life as the soil from which it arises’ (WWR I:418).

Furthermore, we suggested in chapter IV that the saint may continue to will to become will-less again. Schopenhauer states – ‘now if we see someone who has already achieved the negation of the will taking measures to maintain himself in that state’ (WWR I:419). In so far as suffering arises from the frustration of a will, such a state would necessitate that the saint can still suffer in so far as he periodically falls short of will-less-ness, namely the will-to-life reasserts itself. Therefore, in so far as we define suffering as the frustration of a will, the saint can still suffer because their will-to-will-

lessness is often frustrated with the re-emergence of the will-to-life. The saint is still capable of suffering in so far as the will-to-life reasserts itself and they suffer in the following ways:

1. The re-emergence of the will-to-life means that the will-to-will-lessness is frustrated.
2. The re-emergent will-to-life itself has suffering as its structure.

Therefore, because the saint is still capable of suffering, he can compassionately empathise with the suffering of another and have a will to reduce it because he wills its reduction in himself as the renewal of his ascetic commitment which has to be fought for periodically. Hence, we may argue that compassionate action from the saint towards most people will still involve helping the individual to fulfil their will-to-life but that this does not invoke a contradiction because he first and foremost has compassion for their suffering rather than the will-to-life. He wills the reduction of suffering in another which, as it so happens for most individuals who are not capable of a denial of the will-to-life, is only possible instrumentally through aiding them fulfil the will-to-life – this does not mean that he identifies with or values the will-to-life in himself or in that of another.

Therefore, I believe that the saint can – ‘harm no one [and] help everyone to the extent that [he] can’ (OBM:140) because his compassion is felt for the other’s suffering rather than the other’s will-to-life. Of course, with most people, suffering is identical with a frustration of their will-to-life, however the saint knows that they are separable, not least because he cognizes that suffering ultimately comes not from impediments to the will-to-life but from the will-to-life itself and because, correspondingly, he suffers more when the will-to-life re-emerges and disturbs his ‘peace and blissfulness’ (WWR I:418). Thus, the saint may still have a ‘loathing for the essence that is expressed as his own appearance, the will to life’ (WWR I:407), but this does not necessitate that he will not help others to fulfil the will-to-life as an instrumental means for the reduction of their suffering. Indeed, according to Janaway’s reconstruction (Janaway, 2023), this very ‘loathing’ is a manifestation of the saint’s own willing-to-remain-will-less and the suffering that may result when it is frustrated by the re-emergence of the will-to-life. It is this shared suffering, I argue, that constitutes the foundation of the saint’s compassion.

Furthermore, if all that was required for compassion to be operative were that the subject and object of compassion share in common the will-to-life, then I should be able to feel and be compassionate towards plants. I cannot do this.⁷⁴ My argument then is that compassion tracks suffering rather than the will-to-life and that it is only to creatures who are capable of experiencing the pain or pleasure that results from the frustration or satiation of the will-to-life that I can possibly feel compassion. That compassion for another is really first and foremost compassion for the other's suffering, and only contingently involved with the will-to-life as that which manifests a being that can suffer, is expressed by Schopenhauer again in *On the Basis of Morality*:

Obviously only by that other's becoming *the ultimate end* of my will, just as I myself otherwise am: by the fact that I will *his* well-being and do not will *his* woe, and that I do so quite immediately, as immediately as I otherwise do only *my own*. But this presupposes necessarily that in the case of *his* woe as such I directly suffer along with him (*geradezu mitleide*).

OBM:200

He further states:

However, the process analysed here is not one that is dreamt up or plucked out of the air, but a wholly real and indeed by no means a rare one: it is the everyday phenomenon of *compassion*, (*Mitleid*) i.e. the wholly immediate *sympathy* (*Theilnahme*), independent of any other consideration, in the first place towards another's *suffering* (*Leiden*), and hence towards the prevention or removal of this suffering, which is ultimately what all satisfaction and all well-being and happiness consists in.

OBM:200

⁷⁴ This could of course be disputed, however, I do not think that it would be a strong argument – in what sense can I cognitively empathise and ‘feel’ the suffering of a plant or a microbe who manifest the will-to-life but do not have my forms of cognition/psychological mechanisms, that produce suffering?

This is not a process whereby the saint identifies with the will-to-life but with the will-to-end-suffering which, as we have argued, the enlightened individual is still able to manifest.

Furthermore, I believe that my solution makes sense of the ‘miracle’ of compassion. Schopenhauer states – ‘These, then, are the elements from which egoism grows on the basis of the will to life, and constantly lies like a wide trench between one human being and another. If someone really leaps over it to help another, then it is like a miracle that provokes astonishment and wins applause’ (OBM:191). Firstly, we may like to suggest that if it is a miracle that compassion takes place at all, even with those who manifest the will-to-life, then why should it not be a miracle possible for the saint? Secondly what I believe Schopenhauer is describing here is not the miracle that we identify with the inner experience of another, but that we should care. Why should the will-to-life as it manifests in another be of concern to me?

I think the true understanding of how this is possible comes from ethical conduct and renunciation going hand in hand. The metaphysical truths that are realised in renunciation, that, from the perspective of ultimate reality, I am the other (*Tat Tvam Asi*), are such that I am able to care about another’s suffering as a form of extended egoism – their suffering really is my suffering. The saint understands this, and therefore, is perhaps in an even better position to empathise with the suffering of another. We may, therefore, like to suggest that far from being opposite paths, renunciation and compassion are actually complementary.

In summary then, I have attempted to argue that the saint is able to show compassion, but not through shared experience of the will-to-life in another but instead through shared experiences of suffering and that, ordinarily, helping them to fulfil the will-to-life is an instrumental means of eliminating the most suffering. The saint is still capable of suffering because he remains a manifestation of the will-to-life which always threatens to – ‘flare up again in all its blazing heat’ (WWR I:418) and thus still, on occasion, suffers. In the next section, I will attempt to argue that it may be possible to help those capable of becoming one in whom the will has denied itself further by actively frustrating their will-to-life so as to ignite spiritual awakening.

5.3 A Role for Suffering?

Thus far we have argued that it is possible for the saint to show compassion because they identify with the individuals' suffering rather than with the will-to-life and, therefore, aiding in the fulfilment of the subject of our compassion's will-to-life is, in fact, an instrumental means for the reduction of their suffering. In this section I would like to argue that, for those lucky few capable of a denial of the will-to-life all together, the saint may choose to help them by actually frustrating their will-to-life. This is because, for those capable of renunciation, a state of even less suffering awaits if this path can be properly cultivated.⁷⁵ For potential saints, ordinary ethical treatment – that is, helping fulfil rather than frustrate the will-to-life – may in fact be the foundation for further sufferings because the 'wheel of Ixion' continues to turn and spin with each new desire fulfilled (WWR I:220). Therefore, the only way to meaningfully help those capable of renunciation is to help them towards a denial of the will-to-life as the only possible and legitimate means of significantly reducing their suffering.

What would this in reality look like? Schopenhauer states that the most accessible means of salvation is via overwhelming personal suffering rather than the more arduous path – cognizance of the overwhelming suffering of others (WWR I:427). This may suggest that the compassionate saint could will the frustration of another's will-to-life as the instrumental means for their liberation – denial of the will-to-life through sheer despairing frustration at it. On this theme, Schopenhauer selects a quote from Meister Eckhart – 'the fastest animal to carry you to perfection is suffering' (WWR II:649).⁷⁶ He (Schopenhauer) further states – 'Suffering is in fact the cleansing process through which alone, in most cases, a human being is saved (*geheiligt*), i.e. led back from the false path of the will to life' (WWR II:652) and 'the very suffering that [we] avoid...could, in the form of mortification of the will, have lead to self-negation and redemption' (WWR I:426-7). Shapshay and Ferrell identify as much when they state in criticism that – 'By this line of reasoning, however, *egoistic or even malicious actions* to human beings may be ethically preferable to just or

⁷⁵ Indeed, as Christopher Janaway argues, renunciation of the will-to-life can be seen as the very moral purpose of the world and is, therefore, the highest good (at least figuratively) (Janaway, 2020).

⁷⁶ The idea that suffering (or at least discomfort) can be instrumentally good because it transports the subject to a state beyond willing is explored to good effect by Patrick Hassan in his analysis of 'Nichtigkeit' and the sublime for Schopenhauer (Hassan, 2023, pp170-184).

philanthropic actions, for these would better stand to help other human beings attain salvation by ratcheting up their suffering' (Shapshay and Ferrell, 2015, p58).

It is, however, vitally important to note that at no time does Schopenhauer appear to advocate for the frustrating of another's will-to-life as a form of moral conduct. It would, therefore, be wrong to propose that altruism towards another involves frustrating their will-to-life. Despite this, it is not at all clear why there cannot be a middle ground between, on the one hand an altruism that aims at fulfilling the will-to-life in another and an altruism that aims at causing suffering in another as a means of liberation. This middle ground, I suggest, is an altruism which aims to engender knowledge in another through allowing the will-to-life to be naturally frustrated.

Of course, again, at no point does Schopenhauer openly advocate for such a position, however, I do not believe that this means that it should not be considered. Attempts at mustering defences for Schopenhauer's assertions can and do involve reconstructive attempts at what might have been said. I believe that it is important to do this in so far as we are able to distinguish the philosopher from the philosophy. Arthur Schopenhauer was a finite human being and his own understanding of the ramifications and intricacies of his own system may have been incomplete to such an extent that we can make imaginative suggestions on his behalf.⁷⁷ In this spirit, I would like to suggest two different ways that we may choose to see suffering being operative in these discussions:

Episodic Suffering: A temporary episode of suffering: the result of a particular frustrated will-to-life, for example the pain of the death of a loved one who we willed to protect. This form of suffering, as

⁷⁷ Furthermore, my reading is supported by Schopenhauer's description of the aesthetic experience in tragedy. The pain and suffering that one experiences is not an intrinsic good or evil but instead only an instrumental good in allowing the aesthetic subject to relinquish their commitment to the will-to-life. Schopenhauer states of tragedy – 'this cognition, clarified and intensified through suffering itself, reaches the point where it is no longer deceived by appearance, the veil of *māyā* it sees through the form of appearance, the *principium individuationis*, and the egoism that rests on this principle slowly dies away, so that *motives* that had previously been so violent lose their power, and in their place, complete cognition of the essence of the world acts as a *tranquillizer* of the will and leads to resignation, the abandonment not only of life, but of the whole will to life. So in tragedy we see that, after a long struggle and much suffering, the noblest people eventually renounce forever the goals they had, up to that point, pursued so intensely, as well as renouncing all the pleasures of life, or even willingly and joyfully giving them up' (WWR I:280).

it is localised, can be avoided/alleviated/eradicated, for example by the creation of medicine to save the loved one's life.

The Fact of Suffering: The integral and inescapable condition of living in virtue of one being a creature who expresses the will-to-life per se. It does not matter how many instances of *Episodic Suffering* are eradicated or avoided, *The Fact of Suffering* will always remain and be a brute fact in so far as we express the will-to-life and, therefore, experience the omnipresent reassertion of *Episodic Suffering*.

In response to the above distinction, it may be argued that *The Fact of Suffering* is simply the aggregate of all instances of *Episodic Suffering* and that there is, consequently, no meaningful distinction between the two. If this were the case then, in theory, *The Fact of Suffering* would be able to be eradicated totally if we were to live a life where our desires were not frustrated so as to lead to *Episodic Suffering*. One response to such an assertion is that such a life, were it even possible, would in fact, as Schopenhauer argues, result in a net increase of suffering because boredom and the emergence of new sufferings would ensue. Schopenhauer states:

Suppose this race were transported to a *fool's paradise*, where everything grew on its own and the pigeons flew around already roasted, and everyone found his dearly beloved and held on to her without difficulty. There some would die of boredom, or hang themselves, but some would assault, throttle and murder each other, and thus cause more suffering for themselves than nature now places on them.

PP II:264

So much for a life of consistently fulfilled desire. But what if a life could be established whereby a careful equilibrium could be maintained between desire, fulfilment of desire and the staving off of boredom with new desires that were then fulfilled? Would this then lead to an absence of suffering such that we might say suffering is in fact non-inevitable? Schopenhauer again, preemptively acknowledges such a response, stating:

For most human beings, this is what life is all about: they will, they know what they will, and they strive after it with enough success to protect them from despair and enough failure to keep them from boredom and its effects. A certain cheerfulness of at least composure emerges from this.

WWR I:353

The reason that ‘a certain cheerfulness of at least composure’ does not equate to a total absence of suffering is because the very nature of willing requires that an individual is always at a deficit of pleasure/happiness over pain/suffering by the very fact of their existence. Because pleasure/happiness is not a positive phenomenon but only a negative one – ‘all satisfaction (*Befriedigung*), or what is generally called happiness (*Glück*), is actually and essentially only ever *negative* and absolutely never *positive*...thus satisfaction or happiness can never be anything more than the liberation from a pain or need’ (WWR I:345). This is why Schopenhauer states that the world – ‘expressed *practically*, should not be’ (WWR II:594). The happiest/most cheerful/most composed life will still, necessarily, be at a deficit of pleasure vs. pain because, existentially, to will, to exist, simply is to suffer and no amount of cessation of episodes of suffering through fulfilment of desire detracts from this. The very best that can be hoped for in ordinary willed existence, namely – ‘For desire and satisfaction to follow each other without too long or too short an interval in between...[reducing]...the suffering caused by both to the smallest quantity...[constituting]...the happiest course through life’ (WWR I:340), is still a state of deficit. We can minimize suffering through a life of willing but we will never reverse the imbalance of the hedonic ledger which is necessitated by our birth. This is what is meant by *The Fact of Suffering*.

Furthermore, *The Fact of Suffering* is not ontologically distinct from *Episodic Suffering*. *The Fact of Suffering* is simply a description of our nature as willing beings that necessitates the omnipresence of *Episodic Suffering*. Episodes of suffering come and go but the space in our lives reserved for suffering remains. This is what Schopenhauer means when he says – ‘our present suffering occupies a space which, if vacated, would be immediately filled by a new suffering that is being kept at bay by the present one, that fate cannot really affect us in essential matters’ (WWR

I:342). This ‘space’ is what I mean by *The Fact of Suffering*. This existential predicament appears to be, to some extent, uniquely Schopenhauerian. In a different philosophical system, we could presumably experience *Episodic Suffering* and yet not be faced with *The Fact of Suffering* – we would suffer on occasion, not as an inevitability in virtue of our essential nature, but contingently as a result of circumstance or accident. However, for Schopenhauer, suffering, regardless of individual episodes, is an omnipresent consequence of our nature and can never be eradicated so long as we manifest the will-to-life – it is a necessary condition of willing.⁷⁸ Therefore, it is important to note that what I am not attempting to do is to describe two different ontological ‘kinds’ of suffering, but rather two ways that suffering should be referred to when we discuss Schopenhauer’s soteriology.

Importantly, because *The Fact of Suffering* is a consequence of the will-to-life, all suffering can be overcome if the individual transforms his nature through a negation of the will-to-life. This, I would argue, is the meaning behind Schopenhauer’s subheading to book IV of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation* – ‘*With the achievement of self-knowledge, affirmation and negation of the will to life*’ (WWR I:297) (my emphasis). Therefore, the ultimate cessation of suffering will result not from overcoming instances of *Episodic Suffering* but, via the appropriate acknowledgment of the *Fact of Suffering*, through the transformation of oneself into a non-willing agent. Despite this, because they are not ontologically different kinds, once the individual appropriately realises the *Fact of Suffering* and the will-to-life has been denied, *Episodic Suffering* will also cease because it too is dependent on the will-to-life.⁷⁹ Therefore, somewhat paradoxically,

⁷⁸ As suffering has its root in the individual’s constitution, the amount of suffering will change dependent on the ‘character’ or nature of the individual such that it varies from individual to individual (WWR I:342-3). However, differences in innate preponderance to suffering between individuals does not take away from the fact that all humans share suffering as the essential characteristic of their being.

⁷⁹ I say that *Fact of Suffering* ‘appropriately realised’ because it is clearly not enough to simply cognitively and rationally understand the fact of suffering as, arguably, we do in this discussion. For the transformation of the will-to-life there has to be some sort of deep, spiritual, existential realisation of the truth of the fact of suffering leading to the transformation of the will that cannot itself be willed – some ‘*effect of divine grace*’ (WWR I:432). Schopenhauer argues that the realisation of the spiritual truth is not just a rational activity but, to some extent an experiential one. A greater understanding of this can again potentially come from Buddhism and the story of Kisa Gotami in particular – this will be explored more later in this section.

only once we have ceased trying to eradicate *Episodic Suffering* – only once we have stopped caring about episodes or instances of suffering – can we truly eradicate episodes or instances of suffering.⁸⁰ Conversely, only when we see suffering as accidental and non-inevitable do we feel it's 'sting' (WWR I:342). Ivan Soll expresses this well when he writes:

Schopenhauer eventually argues that it is the very inevitability of our unhappiness that furnishes us with consolation. If one does not accept the inevitability of one's unhappiness, one experiences it as a condition that might have been avoided by more prudent behaviour, and one is tormented by one's own failure to have behaved appropriately. But if one understands that one's unhappiness is inevitable, one is at least no longer tormented by the thought that one might have done something to avoid it.

Soll, 2012, p312

Further textual precedence for how knowledge can transform willing, as well as willing's hedonic result, is given when Schopenhauer states:

Nothing exacerbates a trouble we have experienced so much as thinking about the ways in which it could have been avoided; accordingly nothing can give us greater peace of mind than observing what happened from the perspective of necessity, where all accidents appear as tools of an active fate, and recognizing the trouble as an inevitable result of the conflict of inner and outer circumstances which is fatalism. We really only rant and rage for as long as we hope to affect others or drive ourselves to unprecedented exertions. But children and adults both know very well how to give in as soon as it is clear to them that things are not going to change... We are like elephants in captivity who struggle and rage horribly for days until they see that it is fruitless and suddenly offer

⁸⁰ The essential structure is identical here to the paradox at the heart of Buddhism's four noble truths – only once we acknowledge the inevitability of suffering does suffering become non-inevitable.

their necks for the yoke, tame forever.⁸¹

WWR I:333

Thus, it is knowledge, or lack of it, that tempers our unhappiness such that:

Countless people endure countless lasting evil like lameness, poverty, low rank, ugliness and bad living conditions with perfect indifference, and do not even feel them anymore, like wounds that have scarred over, simply because they know that inner or outer necessity shows that nothing can be done about them; while more fortunate people cannot imagine how anyone can put up with the situation...nothing reconciles us so well as a clear awareness of it.

WWR I:333

Thus, we might expect that a change in knowledge would accompany a change in potential to suffer. Schopenhauer puts it well when he states that the former situation, though depressing, may help us to – ‘achieve a Stoic indifference towards our own, present troubles’ (WWR I:341). Schopenhauer further states that the moral incentive against suicide is that it would ‘waste’ the opportunity to experience transformative suffering:

But if purely moral incentives have ever kept any human being from suicide, the inner meaning (*Sinn*) of this self-overcoming (regardless of the concepts his reason clothed it in) is the following: ‘I do not want to avoid suffering, because it can help suppress the will to life (whose appearance is so miserable) by strengthening the recognition that is beginning to stir in me of the true essence of the world, so that this recognition can ultimately become a tranquillizer of my will and redeem me forever.’

WWR I:427

⁸¹ Nietzsche likewise says of hope that – ‘it is the most evil of evils because it prolongs man’s torment’ (Nietzsche, 1994, p58).

If we can agree that renunciation is the path of least suffering, how can one best help another to achieve it? Shapshay and Ferrell seem concerned with the ethical altruist in so far as he/she reduces *Episodic Suffering*. However, they do not pay enough attention to the mechanism within Schopenhauer's system that necessitates that a decrease in *Episodic Suffering* makes no impact whatsoever upon *The Fact of Suffering*. This is because helping another fulfil the demands of the will-to-life, while ostensibly compassionate, is a false enterprise because a fulfilled desire will invariably lead to the emergence of fresh desires to be felt in myriad different ways. The will-to-life is temporarily satiated and suffering quietened, but then swiftly re-directed in other directions (or boredom, which is just as painful, ensues). Schopenhauer states that – 'our present suffering occupies a space which, if vacated, would be immediately filled by a new suffering that is being kept at bay by the present one' (WWR I:342). Therefore, a temporarily alleviated suffering in fact leads at least to a fresh suffering. However, the saint, who has achieved the full negation of the will, knows that all attempts to reduce *Episodic Suffering* are ultimately futile as they make no impact whatsoever on *The Fact of Suffering* which will always be present so long as we manifest the will-to-life. This is the tragedy of life for Schopenhauer. If, however, I allow *Episodic Suffering* to run its course and take its toll in order that the individual then releases their commitment to the will-to-life, I can decrease overall suffering because they will no longer will-to-life and, therefore, no longer suffer from it.⁸² Schopenhauer appears to suggest such a thought in a highly poetic passage from Volume II of *Parerga and Paralipomena*:

When in heavy, terrifying dreams anxiety reaches its highest point, then by itself it will awaken us, causing all those nocturnal monsters to disappear. The same happens in the dream of life when the highest degree of anxiety compels us to break it off.

⁸² That what is considered ordinarily as an 'evil' may nonetheless be considered 'good' in relation to the future is a more complex meta-ethic that does have some textual precedence: Schopenhauer states: 'The concept of the good falls into two sub-categories, namely that of directly satisfying some present will, and that of satisfying it only indirectly, sometime in the future: in other words, the pleasant and the useful' (WWR I:387).

Therefore, the highest form of ethical conduct towards those capable of a denial of the will-to-life comes in helping by not helping rather than not helping by helping.

A critical response here may be to suggest that, rather than not alleviating *Episodic Suffering*, the greatest catalyst towards a denial of the will actually comes from having many cases of *Episodic Suffering* alleviated through fulfilment of the will-to-life. This is because it leads the individual to the realisation that there is no end to the cycle of willing, fulfilment and renewed willing. It is not suffering *per se* that leads to renunciation, it is the epistemic realisation of the *inevitability* of suffering which can only be felt when one has alleviated *Episodic Suffering* enough times that the omnipresence of *The Fact of Suffering* is felt. Thus, if knowledge sets the individual free, then it is knowledge of *The Fact of Suffering* that sets the saint on their path. As early as 1814 Schopenhauer states:

The purpose of life (here I use an expression that is only allegorically true) is knowledge of the will. Life is the mirror of the will whose true nature, consisting in inner dissension, becomes an object therein; through that knowledge the will can turn and salvation is possible. Were we merely willing and not knowing beings, we should be abandoned to eternal damnation and perdition. Therefore life is a blessing only in so far as we are *knowing* beings, for to the extent that we are *willing* beings it is an affliction. *Knowledge* is the promise of salvation, the true gospel; willing, on the other hand, is hell itself.

MR I:182

Therefore, we may in fact argue that the best way for a saint to help the potential saint is to help them to fulfil the will-to-life over and over again only for them to reach a frustrated apathy with the will-to-life itself by a process of experiential understanding that the will can never be satiated permanently. It could, however, be argued that Schopenhauer is not promoting this method because the continual fulfilment of the will-to-life may be understood as a ‘delaying’ of the transformative

recognition of suffering. He states – ‘the more one suffers, the sooner the true goal of life will be achieved; while the more happily one lives, the further it is delayed. This corresponds to Seneca’s final letter: “you will have your happiness when you see that the happiest people are the unhappiest”’ (WWR II:651). This is the case since ‘it is precisely pain and suffering that work towards the true goal of life, the turning of the will away from it’ (WWR II:651). Therefore, which is the best method for awakening transformative knowledge of *The Fact of Suffering* – continual fulfilment of the will-to-life or persistent frustration of the will-to-life?

As interesting as this question is, for the purposes of my argument the answer is immaterial: regardless of how transformative knowledge of *The Fact of Suffering* is instigated in another, whether it is helping by helping or helping by not helping, the point still stands that the saint is able to significantly reduce suffering in an individual by igniting the will-to-will-lessness within them. This, the saint knows, is the ultimate goal for sentient creatures. There is no contradiction in claiming that the saint wills this for another because, as we have already argued, compassion comes from willing the reduction of suffering in another and this is the ultimate means of reducing suffering by relinquishing the effects of the will-to-life. Furthermore, if we assume Janaway’s reconstructive ‘different kinds of willing’ (Janaway, 2023) we can argue that the saint can continue to will will-lessness because they continue to will-to-remain-will-less and, therefore, there is no contradiction in arguing that the saint can will that the other be will-less too.

As already stated, for many, this will not be a convincing argument because it can easily be seen as a path to instrumental cruelty. If *Episodic Suffering* is, despite being intrinsically bad, instrumentally good for the reduction of suffering by igniting the will-to-will-lessness, then surely the virtuous is he who causes the most *Episodic Suffering*? This is what Shapshay and Ferrell mean when they warn – ‘by this line of reasoning, however, egoistic or even malicious actions to human beings may be ethically preferable to just or philanthropic actions, for these would better stand to help other human beings attain salvation by ratcheting up their suffering’ (Shapshay, Ferrell, 2015, p58). Again, the difficulty comes when we realise that at no point does Schopenhauer propose this because:

1. Both the ethical and the saintly subject are compelled to help reduce others' *Episodic Suffering*, not to increase it.
2. Schopenhauer describes suffering as accidental and without purpose and, therefore, in no way is it conceived of teleologically as having a goal nor, therefore, should it be engineered.

It would appear then that we are encouraged to help fulfil another's will-to-life rather than to frustrate it. What is true altruism then, should we be frustrating or fulfilling another's will-to-life?⁸³

There are a variety of ways we may choose to respond to these undeniable problems. A 'softer' version of helping another by frustrating their will-to-life might be to propose that rather than being actively cruel, we should passively step back and let accidental suffering run its course. After all, if the essential feature of the will-to-life is suffering then there is no need to engineer any further suffering. This does appear to have textual support, for instance in the passage mentioned already – 'it is precisely pain and suffering that work towards the true goal of life, the turning of the will away from it' (WWR II:651). Of course, if suffering has no greater purpose or teleology then we may legitimately ask: how is it supposed to 'work towards the true goal of life'? In response to this I would argue that what Schopenhauer means here is that while suffering has no intrinsic purpose it nonetheless can be given instrumental purpose by the compassionate individual if it can be used as a means of liberating a potential saint from his tether to the will-to-life. Suffering can then be made to work towards the purpose of life, the denial of the will. Therefore, we should not engineer further suffering, however, we may choose, through compassion, to allow suffering to run its course in so

⁸³ The tension between these two 'purposes' or aims may be one that Schopenhauer admits is, to some extent, irreconcilable, as he states – 'in truth what gives our life its amazing and ambiguous character is the fact that in it, two diametrically opposed fundamental aims are constantly crossing paths: that of the individual will, directed to chimerical happiness in an ephemeral, dreamlike deceptive existence...and, on the other hand, that of fate, which is quite clearly directed at the destruction of our happiness and hence at the mortification of our will and the abolition of the delusion that keeps us fettered to the bonds of the world' (WWR II:655).

far as it is instrumentally useful for awakening the transformative realisation of *The Fact of Suffering*.⁸⁴

The problem however remains that Schopenhauer does not at any point (except for implicitly in the above cited passage) condone such a method. In almost all instances altruism for Schopenhauer takes the form of reducing another's *Episodic Suffering* by removing the obstacles that frustrate their will-to-life – for example, by giving another money when they desire it because I identify with their suffering. Such altruistic acts, as we have argued, will make no impact on the *The Fact of Suffering*, namely the individuals' continued suffering in virtue of being a willing agent. How then can we argue that true altruism lies with not reducing another's *Episodic Suffering* by leaving intact the obstacles to the frustration of their will-to-life if:

- a) Schopenhauer clearly does not advocate this.
- b) Most people are not capable of negation of the will-to-life anyway.

I believe that b. answers a. Schopenhauer does not clearly advocate for the frustration of another's will-to-life (other than implicitly with very occasional passages such as those cited above) because most people are not capable of negation of the will-to-life. If only very few are capable of a transformation then 'ordinary ethical conduct' cannot be located in allowing suffering to take its toll on the individual. This explains why the practical side to Schopenhauer's ethics focusses on a description of altruism as helping other's to fulfil their will-to-life whereas when it comes to

⁸⁴ This method perhaps more closely aligns Schopenhauer with Nietzsche who, far from always condemning compassion, writes in places that compassion is in fact best exercised in allowing others to suffer in order to achieve greatness. In *Beyond Good and Evil* §225 Nietzsche suggests that compassion is possible and even desirable but that it should be exercised in order to help others have their suffering increased rather than decreased because it is not evil but instrumentally good. He states of those who wish only to reduce suffering – 'you want if possible – and there is no madder "if possible" – to abolish suffering; and we? – it really does seem that we would rather increase it and make it worse than it has ever been' (Nietzsche, 1973, p136). Of course, there are dissimilarities too, primarily with each philosopher's understanding of the purpose of suffering. For Nietzsche, suffering is a means to the greatness of overcoming resistance and the accompanying feeling of an increase in power within oneself, whereas for Schopenhauer, the ascetics' suffering is still ultimately a means to minimizing suffering and this is achieved by dampening feelings of power and the very self who feels resistance.

renunciation of the will-to-life, he describes the opposite: ratcheting up of suffering, for instance in the following passage – ‘ascetics, intentionally make their lives as poor, hard and joyless as possible, because they have their true and ultimate well-being (*Wohl*) in view’ (WWR II:654-5). What is more, Schopenhauer does suggest in passing a fourth ethical incentive in his footnotes to *The World as Will and Representation* Volume II where he states:

To the extent that one accepts asceticism, the list of the ultimate incentives of human action that I gave in my prize essay *On the Basis of Morals*, namely (1) one’s own well-being (2) another’s woe and (3) another’s well-being, must be supplemented by a fourth: one’s own woe. I mention this here in passing merely in the interest of systematic consistency. Since the prize question was posed in the context of the philosophical ethics dominant in Protestant Europe, this fourth wellspring had to be passed over in silence.

WWR II:622

That there may be a fourth motive of ‘one’s own woe’, makes it easier to suggest that one can will another’s woe also as a means of altruism. Why he fails to mention this in his works is given the explanation that asceticism would not have a fair hearing in the background of ‘Protestant Europe’.

I believe, therefore, that correct ethical conduct comes primarily from an understanding of the cognitive and spiritual potential of the individual we are confronted with. For Schopenhauer suffering is intrinsically bad, however can, for some, be instrumentally good for the cessation of further instances of suffering if it leads to a relinquishing of the will-to-life. Therefore, for the minority capable of renunciation of the will-to-life and, consequently, a life of least suffering, an increase (or at least no decrease) in *Episodic Suffering* is good. Indeed – ‘if we pay close attention to someone like this, he looks somewhat like an invalid undertaking a painful cure; he endures the pain caused by the cure willingly and even with satisfaction, since he knows that the greater his suffering, the greater the destruction of the morbid matter (*Krankheitsstoff*), and that *his present pain is therefore an index of his cure*’ (WWR I:424, my emphasis).

However, for the vast majority of people, including all non-human animals, not capable of renunciation, the best that can be offered is the reduction of *Episodic Suffering*. This is done with full knowledge that such individuals will never stop suffering from the will-to-life because they will never be on the ascetic path and will always be trapped behind the ‘veil of *māyā*’ (WWR I:397) not recognising the will-to-life as the very genesis of their suffering. Notwithstanding this, they can at least be made more comfortable. This is because, presumably, some suffering is worse than others. Therefore, while I cannot eliminate *The Fact of Suffering* because it is unavoidable in virtue of your condition as a subject who is not capable of a denial of the will, I can reduce the severity of said suffering by alleviating the worst of it. I can, for instance, prevent the murder of your family, despite knowing that you will continue to suffer from your desire to keep them safe in the future. This is because, while you will still suffer despite my compassionate action, you will not, at least in the episodic sense, suffer *as much*. What is more, I will only increase suffering if I let the murder of your family take place because, as an individual not capable of renunciation, this instance of *Episodic Suffering* will not be instrumental to a denial of the will-to-life. This is supported by the various places where Schopenhauer argues that the true ascetic is a rare occurrence because most are simply not capable of it. Therefore, the general schema is:

Premise 1: There is no hope for most people for *Episodic Suffering* to take on a transformative ‘purifying’ role as is encouraged in asceticism.

Premise 2: Some suffering is worse than other suffering, for instance the suffering of torture and the suffering of a headache.

Premise 3: The will-to-life necessitates that the ordinary individual wills the least suffering.

Conclusion: For the vast majority of people, the only form of compassionate action available for them to receive will involve fulfilling their will-to-life and replacing instances of *Episodic Suffering* (for example torture) for other instances of *Episodic Suffering* (for example, a headache).

The above schema becomes somewhat more complex when we realise that reducing suffering is not always as simple as replacing one instance of a more intense *Episodic Suffering* for another

(though it often is). This is because suffering can be meted out and measured in myriad different ways. For example, in helping another at the dentist we ought to will the more intense suffering of a tooth extraction over the less intense suffering of going home with some mild pain killers. This is because we are concerned with total net suffering. The schema may require us to consider many factors and variables in a Utilitarian manner, however, the ultimate principle remains the same – the minimizing of total suffering for an individual not through eradication of all suffering but through replacing the worst for the lesser.

Despite being the path least trodden, renunciation is still a ‘higher’ path. This is because, renunciation of the will-to-life, while it, as we have argued, does not lead to a life of no suffering whatsoever (because the will to life invariably ‘flare[s]’ up again (WWR I:418)), it does lead to a significant reduction in suffering because the will-to-life is, at least periodically, denied. We suggested earlier that any suffering that the denier of the will-to-life is still capable of is either a) less frequent than the suffering resulting from the will-to-life in the non-saint or b) less painful than the suffering resulting from the will-to-life in the non-saint or c) no longer suffered alongside suffering from the will-to-life, meaning it represents a net-reduction in suffering. ‘Ordinary’ ethical consideration, helping another to fulfil rather than frustrate their will-to-life is, literally, the ‘lesser good’, it involves the reduction of less suffering. This is because the fulfilment of the will-not-to-will eliminates all (or at least many) future instances of *Episodic Suffering* by making the individual impervious to them and hence negating them before their birth. Of course, the saint is still open to suffering, but in so far as he has become one in whom the will has denied itself (or continually re-denies itself), he is protecting himself from the very worst instances of suffering which are the product of the will-to-life.

This form of ethical conduct is not, however, a preferable mode of treatment for the vast majority of willing subjects for whom all that is available to them is the ‘second best’ of an alleviation and replacement of the worst of *Episodic Suffering*. Despite not being ripe enough for the ascetic path, being helped through the fulfilment of their will-to-life in replacing one instance of suffering for a lesser one is still preferable to the suffering of all evils with no hope of a transformative renunciation.

Therefore, the soteriological and normative hierarchy of paths taken is as follows:

Highest: Those who are capable of the denial of the will-to-life who are compassionately helped to do so through non-reduction of *Episodic Suffering* and, consequently, through transformative realisation of *The Fact of Suffering*, relinquish their commitment to the will-to-life and its negative stranglehold on their being.

Lowest: Those who are not capable of the denial of the will-to-life and hence can only be compassionately helped through a replacement of the worst of *Episodic Suffering* for lesser instances. And hence – ‘for desire and satisfaction to follow each other without too long or too short an interval in between’ (WWR I:340) reduces the suffering caused by both to the smallest quantity, and constitutes ‘the happiest course through life’ (WWR I:340).⁸⁵

Because will-less-ness represents the path of least suffering, we should encourage the path of the saint in our treatment of others – it is the path ‘least trodden’ and yet it is the ‘better’ one. However, as we have said, such a proposal belies a real danger – while the best form of treatment for a potential saint may be in providing encouragement towards the ascetic path, this represents the worst way of treating someone who is not capable of it. Treating someone who is not capable of being someone in whom the will comes to deny itself as though they are would be to increase *Episodic Suffering* without the subsequent transformation – they would simply suffer more than if we had left them alone. The issue therefore becomes an epistemic one as well as a normative one. How do we tell apart those who are able to deny the will-to-life from those who are not?⁸⁶ This is a serious problem and one Schopenhauer does not give us easy answers to.

Despite this, I do not view such a hierarchy as an inconsistent message in Schopenhauer’s soteriology because he is still able to maintain that, despite being the path least trodden and one that

⁸⁵ Indeed, Schopenhauer gives over an entire section of Volume I of *Parerga and Paralipomena* entitled ‘Aphorisms on the wisdom of life’, to a discussion of how one can make the most of a life of willing given that one first concedes, perhaps paradoxically, that it is a false assumption that any positive degree of happiness can be achieved in this way (PP I:273-449).

⁸⁶ Sandra Shapshay notes this in *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics: Hope, Compassion and Animal Welfare* and gives thanks to Allen Wood for pointing this out (Shapshay, 2019, footnote to page 31).

we cannot easily identify as appropriate for all, the denial of the will-to-life is the highest good and (arguably) the ultimate aim of life. The fact that most sentient beings are not ‘ripe’ enough does not detract from this. This is a thought that Schopenhauer is consistent in, stating as early as 1812:

When we compare the moral and ascetic elements breaking away from everything earthly – in other words *freedom* in man – with being tied to the natural laws of animals, then the comparison clearly suggests that the whole of the long graduated series of animals is like the unripe fruits of the tree which cling to it more or less and absorb the sap, but man is like the ripe fruits which at the point of highest perfection are detached from one another.

Mephistopheles: “But the majority are medlars that rot at the trunk.”

MR I:41

The similarities with Buddhism are again striking. Our argument has been to suggest that, paradoxically, through recognition of *The Fact of Suffering* and the corresponding denial of the will-to-life, suffering is no longer inevitable. As mentioned in passing earlier, at the heart of Buddhism’s four noble truths is found the same paradox – acceptance of *Dukkha* (the inescapability of suffering) means that the cessation of *Dukkha* (*Nirodha*) is then possible. The Buddhist tradition has its own attempts at resolving this paradox. The highest soteriological path is echoed in the Buddhist story of Kisa Gotami (*Dhammapāla* and *Saṃyutta Nikāya*) who came to the Buddha imploring him to bring her recently deceased son back to life (*Dhammapāla* in Panaïoti, 2012, pp199-200). Because death is both inevitable and irreversible, Siddhārtha’s response was to help her to notice the inevitability of death and to correctly identify her pain with its actual source which was rooted not with her son’s death, but with her craving that the world be other than that which it is. This he does not through helping her fulfil what she, in ignorance, believed would end her suffering, nor through helping her to quieten her craving through conceptual or abstract knowledge that all must die, rather it is through direct and experiential recognition of death and suffering. He gives her hope that he will bring her son back to life but only after she has successfully collected a handful of mustard seeds

from a household where no one has died. She of course fails and immediately becomes a disciple. Therefore, drawing on such an analogy, in Schopenhauerian language, there are at least three useful correlates for our discussion:

1. The enlightened saint, despite being someone in whom the will comes to deny itself in all its forms, is able to compassionately help another, even if the nature of this help is to help them first to despair. Once this is achieved, the will-to-will-lessness can be nurtured as they are helped towards the realisation that there is no material help, only a profound re-alignment/re-evaluation of willing in response to the truth of suffering.
2. The enlightened saint achieves their aim, not by decreasing the disciple's awareness and experience of suffering, but by, at least in the short-term, actually *increasing* it.
3. The enlightened saint achieves their aim not through active cruelty but through passive inaction and the encouragement of awareness.

Therefore, as argued for in the previous section of this chapter (5.2), from the perspective of the enlightened subject, care for another is possible so long as he (the saint) compassionately empathises with the initiate's suffering which the will-not-to-will can help to eradicate. All the while – 'he gazes back calmly and smiles back at the phantasm of this world that was once able to torment and move his mind as well, but now stands before him as indifferently as chess pieces after the game is over' (WWR I:417). The chess game entitled 'will-to-life' is over for him, however this does not mean to say that he has stopped playing all games. He is still, both within himself and in that of another, committed to the 'will-to-will-lessness game'. This game he plays within himself and, correspondingly, it provides the basis for a special means of compassionate empathy for potential saints. Shapshay, Ferrell and Magee's concern is that the saint becomes a cold, uncaring individual who has let go of all earthly attachments including attachment to come to the aid of others. What I am suggesting is that we view the Schopenhauerian approach to those capable of renunciation as

akin to the Bodhisattva's of the Mahayana school.⁸⁷ The Bodhisattva aims to help others to achieve enlightenment by remaining partially attached to the world. Thus, the ascetic must make a commitment to – ‘however innumerable sentient beings there are; I vow to save them’ (Mahayana saying).

5.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to resolve the apparent conflict between Schopenhauer's philosophy of salvation and his ethical pronouncements. This has been a valuable task because the apparent conflict has been a substantial road block in the perception of Schopenhauer's philosophy as consistent while also contributing to the narrative that his thought is ‘hopelessly pessimistic’. This is because the saint cannot help others if he has totally withdrawn from the world as a place not worth his efforts. It has been my aim to argue that, contrary to the pre-dominant view in the literature, there is a possible way in which both commitments, ethical as well as soteriological can be consistently maintained at the same time. My attempt can be summarised as follows:

1. The saint is still able to be compassionate without contradicting his state of indifference to the will-to-life because the saint's compassion is with another's suffering.
2. This is because the saint retains the possibility of suffering in so far as:
 - a. The will-to-life, whose nature is suffering, re-asserts itself.
 - b. The saint continues to will to remain will-less and this is frustrated as the will-to-life periodically reasserts itself and he/she must reassert will-lessness
3. The saint, therefore, can will to end the suffering of those not ‘ripe’ for renunciation through instrumental means – helping them to fulfil the will-to-life.

⁸⁷ Though the conception could just as easily be compared with the Arahant of the Theravada school. The common misconception of the Arahant is that he is cold and uncaring and in a state of enlightened indifference. This has been argued to be incorrect by Keown (Keown, 2001, pp82-105) and Harvey (Harvey, 2000, p43). Nevertheless, the Bodhisattva image is still the most compelling one for our discussion because it represents one who has made an active choice to re-enter the world, in some sense forsaking his own Nirvana or highest spiritual potential for the sake of others.

4. This is not contradictory because the saint does not value the will-to-life as an ultimate end but only as an instrumental means to reducing suffering for those who cannot deny the will-to-life.
5. The highest form of compassion, for those who are able to receive it, may be through aiding others in their journey to the denial of the will-to-life, which may involve allowing episodes of suffering to take place.
6. Paradoxically, because of the very fact that suffering is indiscriminate and without a greater teleology it can be given purpose and teleology if it is used in order to move individuals away from willing and towards the normatively preferable will-lessness.

Chapter VI: Is Salvation Good?

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I wish to resolve some tensions that arise between Schopenhauer's soteriology and his meta-ethics. The central question I will be exploring is – why, if at all, is a life of will-lessness good? The answer to this should, in theory, be quite obvious – it is because will-lessness is salvatory, it delivers us from the suffering and dissatisfaction inherent in the will-to-life. However, the question becomes more problematic when we note that Schopenhauer defines good only ever in relation to a will (WWR I:389). How then can a state of having no will be good?

In one sense, Schopenhauer's meta-ethics is very straightforward – 'good' is defined as that which fulfils a will. He states that good – 'is a relative thing, which is to say that every good is essentially relative: because its essence is to exist only in relation to a desiring will' (WWR I:389) as well as – 'everything that is in accordance with the strivings of any individual will is called, relative to it, *good* – good eating, good roads, good omen; the opposite is called bad (*schlecht*), and in living beings *evil* (*böse*)' (OBM:249). 'Good' and 'bad' are, therefore, simply terms we give to the fulfilment or frustration of our own or other's wills. In theory then, the greatest or highest good is a life of maximal fulfilled willing. At first this does appear to be what we want. We may often say that a 'good life' is one that sees someone's desires, for a good job, a good house, a good car, a good family etc., fulfilled. However, Schopenhauer argues that such a life is, in an importance sense, a false promise – we want it, however, as soon as it is gained, its lustre vanishes and we are left as dissatisfied as ever, this time not by unfulfilled willing but by a state just as painful – boredom. He maintains:

If on the other hand it [the subject of willing] lacks objects to will, its former objects having been quickly dispelled as too easily achieved, it is seized with a terrible emptiness and boredom: i.e. its essence and its being itself become an intolerable burden to it. Thus, its life swings back and forth like a pendulum between pain and boredom.

WWR I:338

The life that we may have once labelled ‘good’ now becomes a burden for us and what is ‘good’ is measured instead against a renewed willing – a will to be delivered from boredom. Consequently, because our wills are perpetually and restlessly striving after new goals, what is good is never really stable. Schopenhauer states that the best situation that can be hoped for for most individuals is to maintain a carefully managed equilibrium between these two states:

For most human beings, this is what life is all about: they will, they know what they will, and they strive after it with enough success to protect them from despair and enough failure to keep them from boredom and its effects. A certain cheerfulness or at least composure emerges from this.

WWR I:353

It may be partially for this reason that Schopenhauer is reluctant to allow conceptual space for the term ‘highest good’ or the ‘*summum bonum*’ in his philosophy. If what is good is relative to a will, and once gained, such a good is no longer willed, then there can be no good that stays good indefinitely. He states:

Absolute good is thus a contradiction: highest good or *summum bonum* mean the same thing, denoting properly an ultimate satisfaction for the will, following which there will be no new willing, an ultimate motive whose accomplishment will give lasting satisfaction to the will. But according to the discussion so far in this Fourth Book, such a thing is unthinkable. It is no more possible for some satisfaction to stop the will from willing new things than it is for time to begin or end. The will can have no lasting fulfilment that gives perfect and permanent satisfaction to its strivings. It is the vessel of the Danaids: there is no highest good, no absolute good for the will, but rather only ever a temporary good.

We are, therefore, left with at least two problems:

1. If 'good' must be relative to a will, then how can it be the case that it is good to have no will at all?
2. If will-lessness is good, in what sense is it *better* than willing?

6.2 'Good' as cessation of the pain of willing life

Christopher Janaway illustrates in his article – 'What's so good about negation of the will? Schopenhauer and the problem of the Summum Bonum' (Janaway, 2016) that many commentators have labelled will-lessness as the 'highest good' in Schopenhauer's philosophy because, as Schopenhauer states, it can 'staunch and appease the impulses of the will forever' (WWR I:389).⁸⁸ However, as we have seen, to suggest that anything at all could be an ultimate good risks an equivocation on the term 'good' because Schopenhauer defines 'good' in relation to willing alone. Janaway suggests that Schopenhauer could, therefore, be accused of violating his own system of value by outright stating that will-lessness is good and consequently he is careful not to do so, instead Schopenhauer gives it only the title 'Summum Bonum' as an 'emeritus' status (Janaway, 2016, p655). Schopenhauer states:

But if we would like to retain an old expression out of habit, giving it honorary or *emeritus* status, as it were, we might figuratively call the complete self-abolition and negation of the will, the true absence of will (*Willenslosigkeit*), the only thing that can staunch and appease the impulses of the will forever, the only thing that can give everlasting contentment, the only thing that can redeem the world, all of which we will discuss at the end of our whole investigation – we might call this the absolute good, the *summum bonum*. We can look upon it as the one radical cure for the disease against

⁸⁸ Janaway cites Julian Young and John Atwell as foremost among these (Janaway, 2016, pp649-50).

which all other goods – such as fulfilled wishes and achieved happiness – are only palliatives, only anodynes.

WWR I:389

Why must will-lessness be relegated to the highest good only in ‘emeritus status’? Firstly, as we have stated, Schopenhauer wishes to define ‘good’ as relative to willing only, and willing by its very nature will never be permanently satiated. The idea of a literal highest good, as satiation of a will that does not reoccur, is, therefore, a ‘contradiction’ (WWR I:389) and, consequently, not a term Schopenhauer wishes to introduce. Secondly and implicitly, if it were the case that will-lessness were good, then against what standard could it possibly be judged as good if good is that which satiates a will? What is more, assuming will-lessness were the highest good, against what measure or standard could the state of will-lessness be said to be a higher good than the good of a satiated will? To make such a judgement would require an independent valuative system where ‘good’ meant something above and beyond its use in either willed or non-willed existence from which to make such a second order evaluative judgement. Janaway’s response is to suggest that the use of the word ‘good’ to describe the will-less state can still be univocal to the good of a fulfilled will. This is because the denial of the will is, at heart, the fulfilment of a will – that is, the will to be without the will (Janaway, 2016, p663).

Regardless of whether or not we choose to accept Janaway’s distinction between different kinds of willing,⁸⁹ we are still left with the problem of why the good of will-lessness can be thought of as better than the good of a satiated episode of the will-to-life. One answer could be that will-lessness gets us closer to ultimate reality. If we continue to maintain the distinction made in chapter II, that stripping away willing exposes ultimate reality minus one further veil, then we could argue that will-lessness is good cognitively – it gets us closer to the truth. However, why should seeing the world more clearly, more truly, be ethically preferable? Schopenhauer does not provide the meta-ethical framework with which to answer such a question. Rather Schopenhauer appears to assert that will-lessness is preferable on an instinctive level. He states – ‘we cannot help feeling the greatest

⁸⁹ This was discussed in great depth in chapter IV.

longing, since we acknowledge that this alone [will-lessness] is...infinitely superior to everything else' (WWR I:417).

Janaway argues that will-lessness is good because it is something that we want and thus it can be accommodated for in his meta-ethics – it is something that we will and is, therefore, good. Why exactly is it the case that will-lessness is a higher good though? For surely if all goods are relative to a will, and, therefore, unstable and fleeting, then what makes will-lessness a higher good as opposed to just another good? Janaway states that this is because the negation of the will is a – ‘unique state of final value, which transcends both egoistic and moral goods, it is a kind of good higher than those other goods’ (Janaway, 2016, p664). In what sense does the good of will-lessness have value that transcends the value of other objects of our will? Janaway states that it is because will-lessness – ‘achieves finality by terminating willing’ and, consequently, gives lasting satisfaction – it ‘transcends the goodness of individualistic desire-satisfaction, whether concerning the agent’s own desires toward individual well-being or the corresponding desires of other individuals’ (Janaway, 2016, p661).

Does this then mean that what separates the good of willing from the good of will-lessness is that the latter is a more effective means of achieving what we ultimately desire? And what is it that we ultimately desire? Bernard Reginster argues that ultimately Schopenhauer values will-lessness not as an end in-itself but instead as a means to the end of the reduction of pain and suffering, stating – ‘Schopenhauer’s pessimism has its source in a wholesale condemnation of suffering, which informs both his conception of the supreme principle of morality as *compassion*, and his view of the highest good (happiness) as the absence of pain and suffering, which he believes can only be achieved through *resignation*’ (Reginster, 2008, p12). He further states:

In broad outline, Schopenhauer argues that what the will “really” strives for is not any particular goal but deliverance from pain, an aim for which the attainment of particular goals is ultimately ill suited. It is because the will itself ultimately aims at deliverance from pain that “will-lessness,” which effectively eliminates pain, “stills and silences for ever the pressure of willing.” In this view, resignation would be the absolute good, not in the sense that it is not relative to the aim of the will, but in the sense that,

since it answers to what the pursuit of any particular desire is really after, namely, the elimination of pain, it is good for everyone.

Reginster, 2008, p174

Reginster's view is that the true reason we will anything at all (a good house, a good job, a good car, a good spouse etc.) is for the ultimate end of the deliverance from pain. Therefore, the highest good really is painlessness. In 'ordinary life' we erroneously believe that willing will achieve this, however, we are mistaken. It is only through will-lessness, as a final elimination of the pain that continually re-asserts itself after the completion of acts of willing, that we can achieve this end. Will-lessness is, therefore, something that we should, and in many cases do, want.

Somewhat in departure from Janaway and Reginster, and as novel as it sounds, we could argue that will-lessness is therefore good because it pre-emptively fulfils the demands of the will-to-life before they arrive. If all attempts at fulfilling the will-to-life are attempts at a return from the unease that results from its fresh demands and all pleasure or happiness is simply returning to the neutral state felt before any instance of the will-to-life imposed itself, then, paradoxically, the negation of the will-to-life represents the ultimate fulfilment of the will-to-life because it is the ultimate return to the neutrality existent before its assertion. When Schopenhauer states that the – 'acquisition [of the object of the will] does not achieve what desire had expected, namely the ultimate quenching of the fierce impulse of the will' (WWR I:391), the ultimate end of the desire appears to be the quenching of the very desire itself. Under this reading, perhaps paradoxically, what we are really willing when we manifest an instance of the will-to-life is the cessation of that very same instance of the will-to-life. We are perturbed by the interruption of the will-to-life and yet each instance of the will-to-life is ultimately only willing a return to the state we were in before its interruption. The negation of the will-to-life therefore pre-emptively fulfils all future episodes of willing by negating and silencing them before their birth.

Is this what Schopenhauer means when he suggests that correct cognition allows us to long for will-lessness as an extended state of equanimity without the interruptions of new impulses of the will – 'how blissful life must be for someone whose will is not merely momentarily placated as it is in the pleasure of the beautiful, but calmed forever' (WWR I:417)? We have already described in

chapter IV, how will-lessness is a state that one longs for, and that this is because one senses it as the final cure to the impositions of the will-to-life which de-stabilises our baseline state of equanimity.⁹⁰ This may further align Schopenhauer's thought with 'eastern states' described in chapter III, both witness-consciousness as well as the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition which suggests that a state of equanimity or enlightened awareness is our stripped back 'natural state'. Therefore, perhaps paradoxically, denial of the will-to-life is the ultimate fulfilment of the will-to-life.

It could of course be argued that it is simply nonsensical to claim that a denial of a will before it emerges and asserts itself can represent a fulfilment of that same will. It seems fairly uncontroversial to insist that the structure of willing is such that a will must be existent before it can be fulfilled. However, we may like to approach this criticism by suggesting that the denial of the will is not the fulfilment of any one single instance of willing life, but rather the fulfilment of the true end of the entire misguided project of willing life in general – pain-free equanimity. Furthermore, if we understand time as transcendently ideal and, therefore, fundamentally not a feature of ultimate reality, then all individual instances of willing are merely instantiated emanations from the 'dark abyss' of the time-less, space-less metaphysical will, then all instances of the will-to-life are ultimately outside of both space and time. It may not, therefore, be contradictory to assume that we can fulfil a will before its phenomenal manifestation is felt in time.

Under this reading then, will-lessness is good because it achieves what in willing we only hope to achieve – the silencing of the will and therefore the absence of pain.

6.3 'Good' as cessation of the suffering of willing life

At first it seems relatively straightforward that the denier of the will no longer experiences any pain at all – it is one point that Schopenhauer is fairly consistent on, stating that – 'all hating, grieving, suffering pain, in short all affects and passions are simply movements...of one's own will' (FOW:38). Furthermore, Schopenhauer states that the will-lessness of aesthetic experience is 'painless' (WWR I:201). Is pain, therefore, to be understood as just a memory for he who has negated the will-to-life?

⁹⁰ What is more, the pain of boredom would not result from will-lessness because the structure of boredom is such that willing continues, it is only that there is no object for the will to attach to.

If one is no longer a subject who has a will able to be affected or moved, then all bodily sensations are, seemingly, neutral observations and, therefore, representations only.

However, we have a difficulty – in earlier chapters we have already seen how we are, at times, required to view the will-less individual as, to some extent, capable of pain and suffering. This is because:

1. As argued for in the previous chapter, in order to feel compassion for another, the saint must have a ‘shared language’ that allows him to feel as the other does and this, we said, is a shared understanding of pain and suffering.
2. As argued for in the previous chapter, in order to achieve a state of readiness for a negation of the will-to-life, one must accept that pain and suffering are inevitable and cannot be overcome – *The Fact of Suffering*. Only then (perhaps paradoxically) can pain and suffering be overcome.
3. If we accept Janaway’s account of different kinds of willing, discussed in depth in chapter IV (Janaway, 2023), then the structure of all willing, whether will-lessness or life, because it is capable of frustration, leads to some pain.

Therefore, at the very least, in order to allow that will-lessness is redemptive, there should be no pain and suffering in the will-less state, and yet we have stated that pain and suffering is both inevitable and needed for compassion. There is a further issue – if the will-less individual still experiences pain and suffering, and any pain and suffering at all means that life is not worth living, then in what sense, if at all, should we value will-lessness as true redemption rather than simply another state where one is, albeit less so, nonetheless still in pain and suffering? Furthermore, given the negative nature of happiness, even assuming that there is no pain and suffering whatsoever in will-lessness, because the will-less individual has felt pain and suffered previously to being will-less, in what sense would it still not be better to have never been born? Thus, because of the negative nature of happiness, no state of existence involving any degree of pain or suffering at all (including one where there is no pain or suffering at all) can make existence more preferable to non-existence and we are confronted with Silenus’s problem once again. In summary – Schopenhauer has created

an incredible standard against which to measure any form of existence as ‘good’ rather than just ‘less bad’. I now wish to propose how to deal with these issues.

First of all, in response to 3, we could propose that we don’t accept Janaway’s account of different kinds of willing and instead adopt the first proposal offered at the end of chapter IV (a.), that no willing of any kind continues after one denies the will-to-life and, therefore, there is no more pain or suffering for the will-less individual. The problem with this approach, as we noted earlier in this chapter (IV), is that it is difficult to see how the will-less person could then be capable of doing anything at all which threatens our account of the compatibility between will-lessness and ethical conduct.

1 provides us with a far more difficult problem, for how is it possible to be compassionate towards someone if we do not have a ‘shared language’? In the previous chapter we escaped Shapshay and Ferrell’s criticism of the compatibilist view of Schopenhauer’s ethics by arguing that it is through shared pain and suffering that the denier of the will-to-life empathizes with another. We could argue that the will-less subject is able to have a memory of pain and suffering as something he once felt and that it is through this memory that he is able to show compassion towards those who experience pain and suffering. Furthermore, we could argue that the saint, despite no longer feeling pain and suffering, can still understand pain and suffering because the will-to-life still manifests as his body and, therefore, threatens to – ‘flare up again in all its blazing heat’ (WWR I:418). Therefore, despite not feeling the pain of the will-to-life, he is able to understand it and know it as a close correlate of his will-less state that has threatened it before and always threatens it again from within – he manifests the will-to-life, if not in actuality then, in potentiality.

However, then we have a further problem. Schopenhauer appears to suggest that it is simply not possible to live a life totally devoid of willing because even the will-less subject must contend with a state where – ‘the will will always strive anew’ (WWR I:418). If this is the case then it is not possible, even for the saint, to live a life altogether devoid of pain and suffering. We could argue that only some will-less individuals experience renewed willing and not all because Schopenhauer states that – ‘we also *see people*’ who must ‘bend all their might’ to suppress the will that ‘always strive[s] anew’ (WWR I:418). The use of the term ‘people’ suggests that perhaps not all saints must experience renewed willing once they have achieved will-lessness, but only some. However, even

given the assumption that some saints never will live again (The Buddha for instance), the fact that they have willed life before they became will-less means their life, taken as a whole, inevitably contains some pain and suffering and is, therefore, at a hedonic deficit. When this is taken alongside Schopenhauer's negative account of value, it is hard to see how any human existence, even that of a saint is preferable to non-existence. Schopenhauer states:

It [evil] can never be cancelled out by any good that might exist alongside or after it, and cannot therefore be counterbalanced:

Mille piacer' non vagliono un tormento.

(Petrarch: A thousand pleasures are not worth a single sorrow)

For even if thousands had lived in happiness and delight, this would never annul the anxiety and tortured death of a single person; and my present wellbeing does just as little to undo my earlier suffering. If therefore the evil were a hundred times less in the world than is the case, then the mere existence of evil would still be sufficient to ground a truth that can be expressed in different ways although only ever somewhat indirectly, namely that we should be sorry rather than glad about the existence of the world; that its non-existence would be preferable to its existence; that it is something that fundamentally should not be, etc.

WWR II:591-2

If the existence of any pain and suffering devalues existence and the will-less individual must feel pain and suffer both before he becomes will-less as well as perhaps continue to feel pain and suffer, albeit less so, after he 'achieves will-lessness', then we are presented with a profound problem – while the life of the saint does represent a life of less pain and suffering, the saint's life is still not worth living because nothing can possibly compensate for even the smallest amount of pain and suffering. Why then is the ultimate good for Schopenhauer not, as Silenus states, to – 'never to have

been born...and a close second, once you have appeared in this life, is a quick return, as soon as you can, to where you came from' (Sophocles, 2007, p202)?

I believe that the only way to rescue Schopenhauer from this problem is to maintain that when he states – 'it (evil) can never be cancelled out by any good that might exist alongside or after it, and cannot therefore be counterbalanced' (WWR II:591), this value dynamic is not applicable to the saint. This is because the saint does not experience 'happiness' or 'pleasure' as the counterbalance to evil and pain because 'happiness' and 'pleasure' come from fulfilled willing – therefore, whatever the state of 'bliss' is for the saint it is not happiness or pleasure univocal to happiness or pleasure as we experience it as fulfilled desire. This is a point that Janaway makes – what the saint experiences is not happiness and pleasure because these are the result of fulfilled willing, what he instead experiences are – '*Seligkeit, Friede, Ruhe, Heiterkeit, Erhabenheit, Gelassenheit, Freudigkeit, Zufriedenheit*—blissfulness, peace, rest, cheerfulness, elevation, composure, joyfulness, contentment' (Janaway, 2016, p653). Thus, the saint could still have his life considered valuable because it is not 'happiness' or 'pleasure' that gives his life value but 'peace' and 'bliss' – the cessation of all willing.

However, as stated, it is hard to see how Schopenhauer's meta-ethics can make sense of this state as one that is 'good' unless 'good' can be measured against some other standard than simply the cessation of pain or the presence of pleasure. It is for this reason that I disagree with Bernard Reginster's understanding of the highest good as the cessation of pain and suffering alone (Reginster, 2008, p12). I do not believe that this is an accurate assessment for two reasons. Firstly, Schopenhauer does not promote suicide despite suicide being the fastest and surest way of reducing pain.⁹¹ Secondly, Schopenhauer describes the fruits of will-lessness as beyond our understanding and a 'relative' nothing to us who continue to will-life (WWR I:436). If will-lessness were a reduction or even a cessation of pain only then the claim that will-lessness is beyond our understanding could no longer be the case because we do know what it is like not to experience pain as willing subjects even if this is only momentarily – this is under the assumption that there is a respite between a fulfilled

⁹¹ Of course, there are other reasons why he does not promote suicide, but these, as we have discussed in section 3.4, appear quite weak.

will and the onset of boredom.⁹² I will continue to explore this interpretation in the proceeding section as well as in the next chapter. The conclusion that I will come to is that the only way for the saints' existence to be deemed preferable to non-existence is to conjecture that he experiences a state not only of reduced suffering, but also a positive 'something else' – against which his existence might be redeemed.

In response to 2, is there a contradiction in maintaining that suffering is both inevitable and that it is avoidable? I think not because Schopenhauer wishes to maintain that pain and suffering are the result of the will-to-life and its corresponding frustrations which would then suggest that when the will-to-life is vanquished so too is pain and suffering. If this were not the case then it would be impossible to see how will-lessness could be a state that is legitimately hoped for or seen as preferable. Therefore, the individual who has become will-less no longer views suffering as inevitable, they only view it as inevitable for the individual who continues to will life and, correspondingly, only viewed it as inevitable for themselves when they were willing life. Thus, when they are no longer willing life they know that they have escaped the necessity of suffering which was, in reality, a condition of a state of willing-life only. Schopenhauer, consequently, seems committed to the view that suffering is both inevitable and avoidable but, in reality, he is describing two states – inevitable for one who wills life, avoidable for one who does not.⁹³

⁹² This of course is assuming that there is time between the fulfilment of a will and the onset of boredom. If there is not, then there really is no equanimity in ordinary existence (because to be bored is to be in pain too) and my argument that will-lessness cannot be equanimity alone because will-lessness is supposed to be a state beyond our understanding and we do understand equanimity in ordinary willed existence, falls apart. However, I would argue that neither a new will nor boredom (as a species of willing-life, albeit without an object of the will) follows immediately after the fulfilment of a will because Schopenhauer does claim that fulfilled will, however momentarily, is felt as a positive experience. If it were not then it would be hard to see how willing could be seen as 'good' and as 'palliatives' and 'anodynes' (WWR I:389) for total will-lessness. Furthermore, we do not need to know what it is to experience moments of no pain in ordinary willed existence because we know what it is like to experience this in moments of aesthetic contemplation anyway – all that is required for my argument to work is that we are aware of the equanimity that comes from painlessness in at least one of these states.

⁹³ This interpretation aligns Schopenhauer closer with the puzzle found within the four noble truths of Buddhism – that the only way to escape suffering is to admit that suffering is inescapable. The first noble truth, *Dukkha*, is indeed that suffering is an inescapable feature of existence. And yet the third noble truth, *Nirodha*, is that there is a way to escape suffering. That this paradox appears to not give cause for

Another response could be to draw a distinction between pain and suffering so as to claim that it is only pain that is inevitable and not suffering. It is important to realise that, were we to do this, it would be highly reconstructive and our definition of pain would be deviating some distance from Schopenhauer's definition. If, however, we could maintain such a distinction and also argue that Schopenhauer is better off viewing pain but not suffering as inevitable, we would be better positioned to defend our earlier contentions that the grounds for the saints' ethical conduct can still be through shared experience (of pain but not suffering). Such a distinction has the further advantage of more closely aligning Schopenhauer with Buddhism which appears to contend that it is not so much pain that devalues existence as our mental attitude towards it. Can we then conceptually separate pain and suffering such that it is only suffering that devalues existence and not pain? if this can be maintained then we may like to argue the following:

1. There is a difference between pain and suffering.
2. Pain can exist without suffering.
3. It is suffering not pain that devalues existence.
4. Because the saint experiences pain but not suffering, existence is redeemed for him.

The problem that we have with this distinction is that Schopenhauer does not make it – for Schopenhauer 'suffering' and 'pain' are used interchangeably. If they indeed are, for Schopenhauer, philosophically identical and one is only substituted for the other for linguistic emphasis or effect, then we cannot maintain that there could be a presence of one (pain) while the other (suffering) is absent. If this is the case, then we cannot argue that an absence of suffering without an absence of pain no longer devalues existence such that it could be good to be will-less. Furthermore, the criticism could still be levelled that regardless of linguistic separation the very fact that any negative adverse response to our environment (whether we choose to call it pain or suffering) is felt by the

concern for Buddhists gives credence to the view that Schopenhauer's construction of this paradox should not give us cause for concern either.

denier of the will-to-life necessitates that his life has no positive value because there is no positive pleasure or happiness against which it could then be seen as justified other than its own absence.

Nonetheless, it may prove to be fruitful to attempt to do so. How would we proceed to do this? Firstly, we could suggest that, for an individual who has denied the will-to-life, pain is no longer a negative adverse response, nor is pain perceived as either good or bad as it does not move the will. Instead pain is simply a registered bodily condition that no longer moves him – a representation ‘for the understanding’ only (WWR I:126). Secondly, could we propose that Schopenhauer’s very system of value is a description only of ordinary willing existence anyway such that the description of pain (or indeed suffering or anything else) as ‘bad’ makes sense only relative to a willing subject? How would the will-less subject then view pain and suffering? This question can, necessarily, never be answered by ordinary means because we are willing subjects for whom a system of value that could designate will-lessness as ‘good’/‘bad’ or anything else, is not available.

The criticism could be levelled that we have defined the word ‘pain’ to mean something that it does not for Schopenhauer. If pain is devoid of the corresponding suffering and is simply a representation like any other, then in what sense is it pain? If the will-less subject registers a broken leg in the same way as a willing subject registers the feeling of their trouser on their leg (neither sensation moving the will), then in what sense is the will-less subject experiencing pain? Perhaps the difference is that the will-less subject recognizes the sensation of the broken leg as something that would once have moved his will and could move his will again. This would differentiate pain from a mere representation which one would take no affective attitude towards. Therefore, we may like to argue for the following:

1. We may be better placed if we argue that pain as a physiological response does occur to a denier of the will-to-life in so far as he is the occupant of a physical body.
2. Having said this, the denier of the will-to-life no longer suffers from pain because it no longer moves his will (because he no longer has one) – pain is simply a representation like any other.
3. The denier of the will-to-life is able to show empathy because he still knows what it is to experience pain.

4. The system of value against which the presence of any pain at all makes life not worth living is a system of value that the denier of the will-to-life no longer recognizes.
5. The system of value the denier of the will-to-life now recognizes is, to us, this side of a denial of the will-to-life, a relative nothingness (WWR I:436). It is not something we could understand nor conceptualize standing as we do this side of the ‘boundary-stone’ of conceptual knowledge (WWR I:438).

How then might we begin in making a distinction between pain and suffering? First of all, it should be noted that it is not at all novel to suggest that there is a distinction. It is a hallmark of much academic thought within diverse traditions from psychotherapy, physiology and medicine to eastern traditions to maintain that pain is a physiological fact and thus, to some extent, unavoidable, whereas suffering is a second order emotional or cognitive response to pain.⁹⁴ The argument then is that the negater of the will-to-life may experience pain as a physiological response but that he does not suffer as a result of unhelpful desires he attaches to such sensations based on an incorrect understanding of the nature of his world – namely the craving for them to not be or for them to end.

Could it, therefore, be argued that the negater of the will-to-life experiences pain as a physiological fact but not the associated suffering that would usually accompany it? The true enemy of passive equanimity is then expectation and the craving that comes with it. This would suggest that suffering, as well as the resulting optimism and pessimism as mental attitudes towards one’s life, are not absolutes but are rather contingent upon willing. To a ‘pure cognitive subject’ (WWR I:209) who beholds the world in an objective and disinterested manner there would, consequently, be the recognition of pain as a neutral, non-emotive, physiological fact without the suffering that is entailed by the willing subject’s opposition to reality, a willing subject who has any desires in association with

⁹⁴ See Shauna Siler’s article *Pain and Suffering* for a medical distinction – ‘pain is a physical sensation or signal indicating an event within the body. Suffering is the interpretation of that event and involves thoughts, beliefs, or judgments, and reflects the human experience of pain. Pain can cause suffering when it is uncontrolled or persists’ (Siler, 2019, p310).

it.⁹⁵ What is more, judgements are dependent upon the cognition of self as subject. I make a judgement about my world relative to myself as a subject whereas from the position of a non-subject, one who is the ‘vanishing point’ of pure groundless knowing, such judgements do not take place. Similarly, expectation is a feature of temporal as well as spatial categories. I hope for better circumstances or despair at current or past events because I am trapped within the web of ‘māyā’ and do not see, as the negater of the will-to-life does, that all is present in the current moment and there is no past or future about which to have regret or expectation. In so far as the state of negation of the will-to-life is cognizable to us as willing creatures it is cognizable thus (that is in terms of what it is not rather than what it is – it is not subject to the subject/object distinction) and therefore, with pure acceptance of the present, the will has nowhere else to turn. In such a sense we may even go as far as to argue that the will is only pernicious and negative at all in so far as it manifests in space and time and is hence divided against itself. There are many interesting passages where Schopenhauer argues that the will only manifests as cruel and pernicious in so far as it is separated and divided against itself in appearance, for instance – ‘in the external as well as the internal teleology of nature, what we necessarily think of as a means and ends is everywhere only *the appearance of the unity of the one, internally coherent will* that has been broken up into space and time for our mode of cognition’ (WWR I:186).⁹⁶

Therefore, while we may argue that the will-to-life is pernicious and that there may be another existence – a positive ‘something’ beyond the will-to-life that is not, it could also be argued that the will-to-life is only pernicious in so far as it makes itself known to us through appearance in inner-intuition – the *principium individuationis*. Indeed, there is nothing inherently pernicious or evil in a rock shattering another rock or an animal eating another animal, it is only when the willing subject, in error, isolates itself as a unique individual and then projects expectations and judgements upon the world that such events become so relatively. Therefore, we may argue that there is a distinction between pain as a neutral physiological event and suffering as an additional quality that is introduced

⁹⁵ The Buddhist tradition does appear committed to such a distinction – after his enlightenment, the Buddha is said to have escaped suffering however, he still had a body and so, in theory was capable of feeling pain if he stubbed his toe for instance.

⁹⁶ This claim is, however, made far more problematic if we argue, as I have done, that the will is not ultimate reality and that it is, therefore, still in some sense manifested in appearance.

by the willing subject— pain by itself is not necessarily negative or positive, good or bad, conducive of suffering or not.

This may be a neat distinction, however, as we have argued it is not what Schopenhauer understands by pain. And yet Schopenhauer describes individuals who appear to both experience ‘evil’ and to be indifferent towards it:

That is why countless people endure countless lasting evils like lameness, poverty, low rank, ugliness and bad living conditions with perfect indifference, and do not even feel them anymore, like wounds that have scarred over, simply because they know that inner or outer necessity shows that nothing can be done about them; while more fortunate people cannot imagine how anyone can put up with the situation. It is the same with external necessity as it is with internal necessity: nothing reconciles us so well as a clear awareness of it.

WWR I:333

Of course, Schopenhauer is not describing individuals who are indifferent to pain here, his point, in fact, is that ‘lameness, poverty, low rank’ etc. are not causing them pain. However, what this passage does suggest is that it is possible to be indifferent towards something that would otherwise be thought of as evil. Could one therefore be indifferent to pain if it were thought of as no longer evil but instead as beyond good and evil?

In what sense is it evil if one is indifferent towards it? Perhaps it is only evil to us who are not indifferent towards it. Perhaps the denier of the will-to-life does feel pain in the same way as the above-mentioned people do still, in some sense, ‘feel’ ‘lameness, poverty, low rank, ugliness and bad living conditions’ (WWR I:333). Along with the aforementioned individuals however, what they do not experience is the suffering that is resultant from it. And why is this? For the ‘countless people’ Schopenhauer mentions it is because of the ‘inner necessity’ of their condition – if they are cognizant that nothing can be done about it then there is no realistic desire or movement of the will in connection with it. Similarly, to the denier of the will-to-life who has accepted that pain is inevitable, perhaps the ‘edge’ comes off the pain because there is no willing subject left to struggle with it. What

is more, the individual who has escaped the will-to-life is no longer a willing subject but is instead a 'pure cognitive subject' (WWR I:209). There is, therefore, no subject-object distinction upon which any struggle with the mere sensation of pain could lead to suffering.⁹⁷ The acceptance of pain therefore leads to the diminishment of suffering.

We, therefore, may like to argue that in denial of the will-to-life, the renunciant is able to escape suffering while still experiencing the pain that is able to connect him with others through compassion. This does not leave him at a value deficit because it is not pain that devalues life, but the suffering that is resultant from it. Similarly, the frustration that results from the resurgence of the denial of the will-not-to-will, if we should choose to see this as a willing that continues when one has denied the will-to-life, does not result in suffering because suffering requires a subject of willing and the individual who is struggling to maintain himself in a state of will-lessness is not a willing subject because he does not will-life and does not see himself as a subject. This, we argue, brings Schopenhauer closer in line to the sentiments of the Upanishads, which in describing transcendent states, utters:

When his mind sheds every selfish desire, he becomes free from the duality of pleasure and pain and rules his senses. No more is he capable of ill will; no more is he subject to elation, for his senses come to rest in the self. Entering into the unitive state, he attains the goal of evolution. Truly he gains the goal of evolution.

Paramahansa Upanishad 4, Easwaran and Nagler, 2007, p293

⁹⁷ That a 'pure cognitive subject' (WWR I:209) who 'gazes back calmly and smiles back at the phantasm of this world' (WWR I:417) should also cease being a subject who apprehends an object is of course a problem. One resolution was discussed in section 3.2 where it was maintained that the pure knowing subject is a subject only in a special sense, one that we, as willing subjects, may not be able to make philosophical sense of. In defense of my position, there are passages where Schopenhauer appears to wish to maintain that the noetic state of will-lessness is not manifested in the subject/object distinction, for instance where he states - 'But this state cannot really be called cognition, because it no longer has the form of subject and object' (WWR I:438).

There, of course, still remains the charge that the negater of the will-to-life is in a value deficit because, while he may be able to live a life of no suffering, there is still no positive aspect of existence beyond the absence of 'suffering'. Furthermore, the will-less subject still returns to willing on occasion as the will-to-life 'flares up again', therefore, in reality a life of being will-less is not a life of no suffering but just a life of less suffering and thus, so the argument goes, it would still be better had he not existed.

How might we respond to this charge? I would argue that both criticisms are built upon circular arguments. This is because the very system of value that dictates that life is not worth living is a system of value premised upon willing. Therefore, all that is being said by 'life is not worth living' is 'a life of willing is not worth living'. Whether a life outside of willing is worth living or not or whether or not moments of will-lessness in fact redeem, and make worthwhile, moments when one slips back into willing are unanswerable to us as willing subjects. This is why the merits of such an existence will always appear as a relative 'nothing' to us, whereas to the denier of the will-to-life our systems of value as well as the whole world of representation with all its 'suns and galaxies' are 'nothing' (WWR I:439). I have, however, attempted to argue that it need not be the case that the will-less state is entirely negative and does not represent a positive 'something' that is nonetheless ineffable to us as willing-subjects that justifies and perhaps even redeems continued existence. In reality however, this state is beyond 'good' and 'bad' because, being one that is unconceptualizable to us, we cannot will it.

6.4 Salvation as neither good nor bad

So far then, we have argued that salvation is good because it represents a life of less suffering and it is suffering that devalues life not pain. Furthermore, we have argued that the system of value that enables a life of any suffering at all to not be worth living may be a system of value that the will-less individual no longer subscribes to. There, is however, a further issue that comes with proposing that ultimate good is the equanimity that comes from the absence of suffering. It is hard to see how the state of will-lessness could remain an ineffable, unconceptualizable 'relative' nothing (WWR I:436) to us who will-life if it is simply an extended absence of suffering. This is because, as I have argued, the willing subject can certainly conceptualise a state of being without suffering – it is achieved both

in aesthetic contemplation and/or, momentarily at least, in the cases where we do temporarily achieve the goals of our will. In this section, I will attempt to use these difficulties to demonstrate that while will-lessness remains good for us as beings who will to be free from suffering, it must also be good in ways that we cannot possibly comprehend. Another way of putting this is that will-lessness would be neither good nor bad relative to beings such as we are, ones who can only measure goodness in relation to willing.

Schopenhauer affirms that the state of will-lessness is fundamentally unconceptualizable to us as beings who will life. He states – ‘we confess quite freely: for everyone who is still filled with the will, what remains after it is completely abolished is certainly nothing. But conversely, for those in whom the will has turned and negated itself, this world of ours which is so very real with all its suns and galaxies is – nothing’ (WWR I:439). It does seem to be the case that suffering-free equanimity alone would not fit the full description of a state that is to us as willing subjects a ‘relative’ nothing (WWR I:436). This is because we do have an idea of what it means to be in a state of suffering-free equanimity – it is not ‘nothing’ to us but a ‘something’ and it is for this reason that we will it. Part of the problem at least comes down to deciding what Schopenhauer really means by ‘everlasting contentment’ as the state constitutive of will-lessness (WWR I:389). Reginster believes that this means an indefinitely prolonged state of painlessness that we are familiar with in shorter intervals as will-fulfilment. I have argued that it is in fact an indefinitely prolonged absence of suffering. It is for this reason that will-lessness is preferable – it is a much more effective means of achieving the state that we desire. Will-lessness would then be a state which is good in relation to a will in so far as it is an absence of that which is bad to a will – suffering – and thus do we will it.

While this state may be one feature of will-lessness and perhaps even the most important one in so far as it, as a readily conceptualizable goal, sufficiently motivates the potential saint towards an attempt to make himself ready for will-lessness, I do not believe it provides an exhaustive description of the state of will-lessness or the ‘fruits’ of such a state. This is because the state of will-lessness cannot be good negatively as a ‘cure for the disease’ (WWR I:389) of willing only. This is because to desire something is to be able to conceptualise it and in order to maintain Schopenhauer’s assertion that the state of will-lessness is unknowable, it must be unconceptualizable. The state of will-lessness must, therefore, have positive unknown aspects and these aspects may (or may not) be good in ways

that we cannot possibly comprehend as willing subjects. Therefore, while an absence of suffering may be one feature of the value of will-lessness, will-lessness may also be good in ways that would be unknowable and ‘nothing’ to us as beings who continue to will-life.

However, a word of caution is required – if we continue to define ‘good’ univocally, as relative only to willing, then we (as willing subjects) ought to designate the features of will-lessness, which are unknowable to us but may have value for he who is will-less, as, to us, neither good nor bad. Nonetheless, to the will-less subject, who operates under a new system of valuation that we are not privy to, his state may appear good – this would, however, be an equivocal use of the word ‘good’ – not ‘good’ as we, as subjects of willing, could possibly understand it.

Despite the conceptual space, in my view, for will-lessness to be good for the will-less individual in ways that we cannot conceive, it remains, at the very least, necessary that will-lessness also appears good to us because it is a state of reduced suffering. This, at the very least, seems necessary for Schopenhauer to be justified in his claim that will-lessness is an escape into something ‘better’ and thus to motivate ascetic practices. The fact that there are some difficulties with seeing will-lessness as totally pain and suffering free, I believe, further invites us to suggest that will-lessness might be good in the eyes of the saint in ways that we cannot possibly comprehend. For, because the existence of an individual who willed-life and then became will-lessness is not a life totally absent of suffering (for no-one is born will-less!), and the existence of any suffering at all necessarily makes life not worth living, then, in order to make will-lessness preferable to a state of never having been born – it ought to be good in other ways.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has had two interconnected and overlapping aims. The first has been an attempt to understand what Schopenhauer could mean by the term ‘good’. The second has been an attempt to understand why or how will-lessness could then be seen as good. In response to the former, on the surface it appears that Schopenhauer’s understanding of the term ‘good’ is that which is conducive to a will and what we really want, both when we will and when we will-not-to-will, is the reduction of suffering – ‘good’ then is relative to the minimizing of suffering. This is why, in ordinary willed existence, that which is conducive to our will is seen as good, it is because we believe, usually

erroneously, that willing will minimize our suffering. However, with the advent of correct cognition, we realise that will-lessness is better than willing as it is a more suitable instrument in our search for this end. We have also argued that it may be necessary to conceptually separate pain and suffering such that good is the minimizing of suffering and not pain. This has been necessary in order both to maintain that the saint is able to continue to be compassionate as well as to bring Schopenhauer closer to Buddhist conceptions.

However, with ultimate good being the reduction in suffering alone there appears to be a problem – would there not be less suffering if, and would it not be better, had I never been born? Therefore, while a significant reduction in suffering is one of the goods of the will-less state and is important as an incentive towards will-lessness, there remain difficulties in maintaining that it is the only thing that is good about being will-less.

However, Schopenhauer may have provided us a way of dealing with such a problem because he maintains that the state of will-lessness is fundamentally unknowable and unconceptualizable to us as subjects who will life and this could not be the case if the good of being will-less were simply the absence of suffering alone. This is because we are periodically aware of this state both in moments when our wills are fulfilled and in aesthetic contemplation. Therefore, there is room to assert that there is something about being will-less that may be good in ways that we cannot conceptualise nor imagine as subjects who will-life.

However, a word of caution is required – if good is only possibly conceptualizable for us (as willing subjects) relative to a will, and we agree that the will-less subject no longer wills, then whatever it is about the will-less state that the saint could possibly designate as ‘good’ would be an equivocation on the word ‘good’. This ‘good’ would therefore not be good as we understand it and this is tantamount to saying that there are aspects of will-lessness which are not good or bad, or, to put it another way, there are aspects of will-lessness that are beyond both good and evil.

Chapter VII: Salvation & Pessimism

7.1 Introduction

The first five chapters of this project have had one overarching aim which has been to carefully probe at the inconsistencies in Schopenhauer's soteriology. The purpose underlying this has been to provide what I believe is the most coherent presentation of this somewhat puzzling area of his philosophy. The aim of this chapter is decidedly different. Armed with our new reading, I wish to bring a fresh approach to what has become the standardized reading of Schopenhauer – the 'Philosopher of Pessimism'. I wish to question whether this remains a fitting description of his thought given my proposed interpretation. I hope to argue that there is room for a reevaluation of this 'traditional' position. Schopenhauer as 'arch-pessimist' is most notably asserted by Frederick Copleston in his monograph – *Arthur Schopenhauer: Philosopher of Pessimism* (Copleston, 1946) but can be traced back as early as 1853 with John Oxenford's article in the *Westminster Review* – 'Iconoclasm in German Philosophy' (Oxenford, 1853). As Bryan Magee states, such a label has become so entrenched and unquestioned as to often be the first thing people learn about Schopenhauer – 'in most people's minds the identifying feature of Schopenhauer's thought has always been its pessimism. Indeed, his name is more closely associated with pessimism than any other writer's' (Magee, 1997, p13). I wish to argue that the Schopenhauerian assertions that have led critics to make such valuations (for Schopenhauer himself never describes his philosophy as pessimistic), for instance that 'life is a business that does not cover its costs' (WWR II:589), or that the world is something that 'should not be' (WWR II:594), should be re-examined in the light of my interpretation of his soteriology.

Much has been written on the exact structure of Schopenhauer's pessimism.⁹⁸ It will not be necessary or indeed possible to provide an in-depth analysis of the reasons, both philosophical and cultural, underwriting the ascription of 'pessimism' to Schopenhauer's work. It is not possible for this project because, as David Woods demonstrates, this is an entire project of its own (Woods,

⁹⁸ See Woods 2014, as well as Janaway 1999, Soll 2012, Migotti 2020 and Simmons 2023.

2014). It will not be necessary because I wish to use my reading of Schopenhauer's soteriology to question and hopefully undermine the standard interpretation of only one claim – that life is in 'error' and 'should not be' (WWR II:594). I believe that undermining the standard interpretation of this claim is enough to significantly undermine the charge that Schopenhauer's philosophy is hopelessly pessimistic. This is because this claim lies at the very heart of Schopenhauer's negative philosophy of value, with all other claims, to a greater or lesser extent being extensions and offshoots of this central assertion. Of course, Schopenhauer is the author of such an assertion and it is, therefore, not wrong to say that he is in some sense pessimistic. What I wish to do, therefore, is not to argue that Schopenhauer's philosophy is not pessimistic whatsoever but instead argue that his philosophy is not pessimistic only. I believe that this is an important distinction and one that has not been given enough attention. It will, therefore, be my position that Schopenhauer's philosophy is, in an important sense, pessimistic. My issue is not with Schopenhauer's pessimism but with the way in which said pessimism has come to define his philosophy above anything else. I will, therefore, attempt to dissect exactly what is meant by the claim that the world 'should not be' with the hope of resolving one question only – is it reasonable that this claim above all others has come to define Schopenhauer's philosophy? Ultimately, I hope to show that a fresh perspective on what Schopenhauer is really doing in his pessimistic moments is enough to significantly undermine the charge that Schopenhauer's philosophy, taken as a whole, is pessimistic.

7.2 Schopenhauer's pessimism

The assertion that life is in some sense in 'error' and 'should not be' (WWR II:594) relies on an understanding that human existence is built upon a value deficit. It is this assertion that leads to Schopenhauer's (partial) embrace of the often remarked upon 'Silenian Wisdom' from Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, that – 'never to have been born is best...and a close second, once you have appeared in this life, is a quick return, as soon as you can, to where you came from' (Sophocles, 2007, p202).⁹⁹

⁹⁹The embrace is 'partial' because Schopenhauer does not condone suicide (WWR I:307).

Schopenhauer writes:

Awoken to life from the night of unconsciousness (*Bewußtlosigkeit*), the will finds itself as an individual in a world without end or limit, among countless individuals who are all striving, suffering, going astray; and it hurries back to the old unconsciousness, as if through a bad dream. – But until then its desires are unlimited, its claims inexhaustible, and every satisfied desire gives birth to a new one. No possible worldly satisfaction could be enough to quiet its longing, give its desires a final goal, and fill the bottomless pit of its heart. Moreover, we can see what usually becomes of a human being with any sort of satisfaction: it is for the most part nothing more than the meagre daily preservation of this existence itself, amid endless trouble and constant care, in the struggle with need and with death in view. – Everything in life proclaims that earthly happiness is ordained to be in vain or recognized as an illusion.

WWR II:588

At its core Schopenhauer's claim is one about the inherent eudemonic unsuitability of the world and the human condition such that 'it would be better not to exist at all' (WWR II:590). What I will argue is that, given our understanding of Schopenhauer's soteriology, perhaps this need not be true.

What leads Schopenhauer to such gloomy assertions? As we saw in the previous chapter, at least until later in book IV of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation*, 'good' and 'bad' have only relative value for Schopenhauer. To ascribe anything normatively is to judge its efficacy in relation to a will. Schopenhauer states that good 'is a relative thing...because its essence is only to exist in relation to a desiring will' (WWR I:389). Moreover, satisfaction, pleasure and happiness do not have positive value but are rather the privation or absence of dissatisfaction, pain and unhappiness, a temporary respite only. Therefore, a statement of the kind the world 'should not be' (WWR II:594), is a designation of value made by a willing agent. It is a statement of the kind: 'according to the structural impotency at the heart of my very nature, that is, as a subject who wills life

and never draws true satisfaction from the world, this is a world that, relative to such a will, should be designated as 'bad'.

The world, as a manifestation of will, is unsuitable for (at least) human contentment because:

1. Things that are 'good' and 'bad' have value only in a relative sense in relation to the satiation (or lack thereof) of my (or others) desiring wills.
2. The world is not capable of satiating my will in any permanent sense and, in fact, will more often lead to its dissatisfaction.
3. If I am ever satisfied, this does not have positive value, but is simply the name given to a temporary respite from suffering. Satisfaction itself only has meaning when placed alongside dissatisfaction, from which it is a temporary cessation and is simply a '*privatio malorum*'.
4. An ultimate state of satisfaction would therefore be a cessation of all dissatisfaction, or, because the world is the basis of dissatisfaction, a cessation of the world itself.
5. It would therefore be 'better', or 'more good', if the world had not existed at all.

Because 'good' is defined only as an absence and therefore has no positive status, there is nothing in the world that can compensate for the existence of even one iota of suffering. Another way of putting this is that there is nothing in the world that can compensate for the existence of the world as such. Because satisfaction is nothing more than the cessation of pain (this is what is meant by pleasure), a state in which the world was not would be the highest possible cessation of pain. It is, I believe, this assertion more than any other, that has led to the label 'pessimist' sticking to Schopenhauer so firmly. For surely there can be nothing more pessimistic than to assert that existence is not even theoretically capable of bestowing upon our lives positive value. Copleston for instance states – 'if he [Schopenhauer] believes that finite existence is a metaphysical evil, something that ought not to be, he is logically debarred from adopting an optimistic attitude towards human life in the concrete' (Copleston, 1946, p74). Such an analysis was in no way novel in Copleston's time, being prevalent from the moment Schopenhauer's work first received a wider audience. Schopenhauer's first English reviewer, John Oxenford, described his philosophy as 'the most

disheartening, the most repulsive, the most opposed to the aspirations of the present world, that the most ardent of Job's comforters could concoct' (Oxenford, 1853, p394). Even Nietzsche, while still an enamored disciple at the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, depicted Schopenhauer as the Dürer 'knight' who 'lacked all hope' (Nietzsche, 1993, p98).

It is certainly correct to describe Schopenhauer as in no way optimistic, not least because of Schopenhauer's own professed abhorrence for optimism. He states that optimism is 'not only an absurd, but even a truly *wicked* way of thinking, a bitter mockery of the unspeakable sufferings of humanity' (WWR I:352). His loathing of optimism stems from optimism's tendency to minimize the fact that the world as will does manifest in irresolvable suffering for which, in his view, there can and should be no theistic justification, as well as the practical effect of optimism – that it prevents one from being motivated to deny the will-to-life.

And yet, Schopenhauer did not describe himself as a pessimist. What is more, Schopenhauer describes the negation of the will-to-life, if not quite optimistically then at least, in highly hopeful terms as 'peace and blissfulness' and 'the flower that emerges from the constant overcoming of the will' (WWR I:418). What are we then to make of Schopenhauer's apparent pessimism? Christopher Ryan usefully illustrates how problematic terms such as 'pessimism' and 'optimism' can be because they are imprecisely used. He states that assessments of pessimism and optimism...

...might be said to reach their conclusions by "playing with concept-spheres and shifting them about" (WWR II, 71), for they turn on either reducing the concept-sphere of pessimism so that it applies to Schopenhauer alone, or expanding the concept-spheres of optimism and soteriology so that they merge. Not much is changed thereby, apart from rescuing either a favored religion or a favored philosopher from a dirty word and an accusation regarded as ugly and unfortunate.

Ryan, 2018, p375

There is a great deal of truth to this. To different minds a world described as terrible but with the hope of a deliverance through its own negation may reasonably be called either pessimistic or non-pessimistic for no other reason than the imprecise ways in which each applies language. In short:

how are we to define pessimism? Should pessimism be devoid of all hope, and if it is not, is it no longer pessimism? If we choose to argue, as I will, that Schopenhauer was a pessimist in one sense but not in another and, consequently, he should not be considered a total pessimist, the charge will be that all we are really doing is playing with language – deciding simply how to appropriately use words. Ryan argues that attempts to re-assess the pessimism label, rather than saying anything philosophically meaningful, simply represent vain efforts to linguistically ‘rescue’ a philosopher ‘from a dirty word and an accusation regarded as ugly and unfortunate’ (Ryan, 2018, p375). While this may be the case, what I do not accept is that such efforts represent the rescuing of a philosopher from a ‘dirty word’ or ‘accusation regarded as ugly or unfortunate’ only. This is because the label ‘pessimist’ has come to totally define Schopenhauer’s to the detriment of a more considered focus on other equally important aspects of his thought, such as his hope for a deliverance. Furthermore, pessimism is not a ‘dirty word’ or an ugly ‘accusation’ in the context of Schopenhauer’s philosophy – indeed it is to a great extent an apt word and one that Schopenhauer appears to embrace. However, pessimism is not the only word that should be used and it is, therefore, inappropriate that it should have come to eclipse all others such that, as Magee states – ‘in most people’s minds...[it is]...the identifying feature of Schopenhauer’s thought’ (Magee, 1997, p13). It is, therefore, the centrality of the pessimism claim that I wish to challenge rather than the pessimism claim *per se*.

It is, therefore, imperative that we try to understand how the term ‘pessimist’ is being used and to what extent this is justified. What I would like to argue is that it is not incorrect to label Schopenhauer a pessimist – he really is pessimistic about the world as manifestation of will. What I wish to add, however, is that not enough attention has been drawn to the fact that his pessimism is quite clearly qualified in scope rather than total – Schopenhauer is deeply pessimistic about the world as manifested will-to-life, however, because he lays the groundwork for at least the hope of a deliverance, it is not right to define him as simply ‘The Philosopher of Pessimism’ and nothing more. Frederick Beiser puts this point well when he states:

It would seem, then, that Schopenhauer’s pessimism is not as grim and bleak as it first appears. If Schopenhauer is promising redemption, a path to escape the evil and suffering of the world, then life really cannot be all that bad. There is indeed a striking

tension between Schopenhauer's pessimism and his doctrine of salvation: his pessimism tells us that life is not worth living; but his doctrine of salvation tells us that life can be redeemed and made worth living after all. The apparent tension can be resolved if we distinguish between two forms of life: the life not worth living is that which is caught in the cycle of desire and that which affirms the will; the life worth living is one that escapes that cycle and denies that will. But the mere need to make this distinction shows that life in general or as a whole cannot be so bad, at least not if there is one kind of life in which we find redemption and serenity.

Beiser, 2016, p52

Beiser goes on to illustrate that much of the reason why the 'pessimist' label initially attached itself so firmly to Schopenhauer's philosophy is because of the frosty reception his soteriology initially received (Beiser, 2016, p52). Because of the philosophical inconsistencies that were perceived in the denial of the will, many readers in Schopenhauer's time felt compelled to see his philosophy even more pessimistically because salvation is seen as a promise that Schopenhauer's philosophy could not make good on. If much, or at least some, of the rationale for the pessimism label comes directly from these dismissals of his soteriology then, because this project has aimed to smooth out some of these difficulties, it seems fitting that in light of the partial sense we have made of his soteriology we should re-assess the pessimism label also.

Before we begin, it will prove useful to introduce some terminology that may help make better sense of the differing ways in which pessimism can be intellectually approached. This is an attempt to univocally pin down what we mean when we speak of pessimism. On the one hand we may say that a *total pessimist* is an individual who believes there is no hope whatsoever. When confronted with a very ill patient, a doctor who is a *total pessimist* will view the patients' condition as hopeless – they will not get better. On the other extreme, a *total optimist* may view the patient's condition as one that is certain to improve. In either of these senses, Schopenhauer's philosophy is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. I would instead conjecture that Schopenhauer is a *qualified pessimist* – he is pessimistic about the world as it makes itself manifest to an individual who wills life, however, because he both holds hope for a condition that delivers us from this and he believes that it is possible

to see the world from a redeemed perspective – his pessimism is not truly *total*. It is my view that most critics have seen Schopenhauer as a *total pessimist* rather than the *qualified* one that he really is.

Ultimately, I wish to argue that from the redeemed perspective of the denier of the will-to-life, Schopenhauer's Silenian wisdom would appear misjudged and, as a final judgement about the world is, to borrow a Buddhist term, 'unskillful'. In such a transcendent state as the denier of the will-to-life is privy to, the world can no longer appear 'good/bad', 'satisfying/dissatisfying' because one has escaped the structures from which such valuations are meaningful. This is because the true denier of the will-to-life is no longer a subject of willing and therefore has no affective attitude towards the world at all.

7.3 Redemption from suffering.

The first challenge I would like to make against the traditional charge – that Schopenhauer is a *total pessimist*, comes from an examination of the necessity of suffering. At the heart of Schopenhauer's pessimism appears to be a claim about suffering. The traditional reading of this claim is that, unlike Christian theodicies, suffering has no redemptive element the consideration of which could bestow upon it any meaning. Bernard Reginster argues that Schopenhauer remains 'stuck' within a Christian moral framework – that suffering requires redemption, but that Schopenhauer is bereft of the Christian metaphysics whereby such a redemption is forthcoming. He states:

Schopenhauer's own pessimistic answer to the question (of suffering), however, 'remains stuck' in the Christian moral perspective because, even though he denies the existence of the providential Christian God, he continues to subscribe to the Christian view that suffering is evil and to the ideal of a life free from suffering. And so, absent the hope of another life free from suffering, the inescapability of suffering in this one becomes for him 'sufficient to establish a truth that may be expressed in various ways (...) namely that we have not to be pleased but rather sorry about the existence of the world; that its non-existence would be preferable to its existence; that it's something

which at bottom ought not to be'¹⁰⁰

Reginster, 2008, p161

While Reginster is correct that Schopenhauer does not provide hope for 'another life free from suffering' understood as a literal Christian afterlife in heaven, this does not mean to say that Schopenhauer provides no hope for such a life in all senses. This is because Schopenhauer does provide hope for a new mode of existence free from suffering, albeit on earth rather than in heaven – will-lessness. Indeed, according to Schopenhauer's allegorical reading of Christian metaphysics, both 'heaven' and 'hell' can only be understood as states of being on earth anyway (WWR II:175). If suffering can then be seen as redeemed through an escape into will-lessness, then it is difficult to see how Schopenhauer's soteriology does not justify suffering in the same way that Christianity does. Indeed, Schopenhauer states as much – that in his system, like Christianity as well as 'Brahmanism and Buddhism' – 'we need a complete reconfiguration of our meaning and essence, i.e. a rebirth that results in redemption' (WWR II:619). Thus, Schopenhauer argues that his system is entirely in keeping with the 'innermost kernel and spirit of Christianity' as he sees it (WWR II:619). This may at first appear odd because Schopenhauer vehemently argues that there is no personal creator God. What then is the innermost kernel of Christianity as Schopenhauer sees it? For Schopenhauer, this innermost kernel is asceticism – the need to deny the 'original sin' of existence which is the sin of willing. All the rest of Christianity, including the belief in a deity, is, in his view, Judaic 'dressing' for this fundamental Christian message.

It is this interpretation of Christianity that so frustrated Nietzsche because Schopenhauer appears to keep one foot within the Christian universe despite his 'honest atheism' (Nietzsche, 2018, p248) – whilst Schopenhauer denies the existence of God, he does not deny the ascetic values at the heart of Christianity. Thus, for Nietzsche, Schopenhauer's answer to the question of the meaning

¹⁰⁰ Christopher Janaway argues a similar point – that while Schopenhauer's continuation of Christian values does not necessitate that he is 'stuck' within them, to continue the 'quest for a substitute metaphysics to ensure the kind of meaning Christianity seemed to provide', does indeed represent a sticking point (Janaway, 2018, p368).

of the world is ‘a mere half measure, a way of remaining stuck in the very same Christian and ascetic perspectives of morality, faith in which had been annulled along with the faith in God’ (Nietzsche, 2018, p249).¹⁰¹ Is Schopenhauer, therefore, trying to have his cake and eat it by suggesting that there is no Christian God or Christian afterlife and yet there is a ‘Christian’ resolution to the dilemma of life? Nietzsche and Reginster seem to think so, as do I – Schopenhauer is attempting to keep Christianity whilst denying God. However, where I differ (with Reginster at least) is with the claim that Schopenhauer provides the Christian dilemma of suffering without the Christian solution. Yes, Schopenhauer does not provide the ‘standard’ Christian solution that most, including Nietzsche and Reginster recognise – redemption through transcendent union with a benevolent creator God – but then such a solution is, in Schopenhauer’s view, not the core of Christianity anyway. The core of Christianity, for Schopenhauer, is simply salvation through self-denial; the religious language and deifying of such a message is only dressing to make the message more digestible to those less philosophically minded. Therefore, because Schopenhauer understands that the world is able to help us achieve redemption, and this redemption comes via suffering and the denial of the will-to-life, and this is, in his view, the very core of Christianity, it is, in a sense, wrong for Reginster to say that he does not provide the Christian solution. Such criticisms of Schopenhauer seem themselves to be ‘stuck’ within an interpretation of Christianity that Schopenhauer simply did not subscribe to. Whether or not it is the case that we require a ‘providential Christian God’ (Reginster, 2008, p161) in order to resolve the Christian moral perspectives in Schopenhauer’s soteriology, it is unfair to simply claim that Schopenhauer fails because he does not make room for God because this is not what Schopenhauer understood by Christianity anyway – Christianity does not require God!¹⁰²

Let us assume then that Schopenhauer is right to see the core of Christianity as asceticism. Redemption then comes through denial of the will-to-life. Take for instance Schopenhauer’s supplement to the fourth book of Volume II of *The World as Will and Representation* – ‘The Way

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche’s criticism of Schopenhauer’s ascetic values is less of a conceptual one than a moral one. It is not so much that Schopenhauer cannot conceptually make sense of asceticism without God (after all, Buddhism does this pretty well), it is that asceticism is itself symptomatic of decadent life denying valuations of the world.

¹⁰² Indeed, despite Schopenhauer’s open atheism, Paul Deussen labelled Schopenhauer the Christian philosopher par excellence – the *philosophus christianissimus* (Janaway, 2020, p273).

to Salvation (*Heilsordnung*)’ – where he states – ‘the more one suffers, the sooner the true goal of life will be achieved’ (WWR II:651) or elsewhere where he states that – ‘the world always manifests itself as a means to a higher purpose’ (PP II:94). He argues that it is in such a manner that tragedy finds its potency, because, through such suffering one discovers the ‘deepest meaning of life’ (WWR II:651). Similarly, he portrays the world not as an irredeemable ‘error’, but instead as a theatre for redemption – once one has ‘distanced himself from that a priori inherent error’, that ‘first false step’ of our existence then we will ‘soon see everything in a different light’ (WWR II:651). This is the ‘sanctifying force’ of suffering (WWR II:653). Christopher Janaway describes Schopenhauer’s relationship with the core of Christianity as follows:

The world does not just exist, but rather contains within itself the higher purpose of turning us away from itself. It is a normative truth that the world ought not to exist; its essential nature, as will, is such that we have reason to regard its nonexistence as preferable. “[P]ain and trouble are the very things that work towards the true end [*den wahren Zweck*] of life, namely the turning away of the will from it” (WWR II, 635). This is the “great fundamental truth,” the pessimistic truth about the meaning of existence that Schopenhauer finds at the heart of Christianity.

Janaway, 2018, p361

If, therefore, Schopenhauer’s philosophy is to be given the ascription ‘pessimistic’, then so too should Christianity as well as Buddhism and ‘Brahmanism’, for all four describe ‘ordinary’ existence as in error and likewise all four provide hope for a deliverance such that the world, as such, is not in error, it is simply that our ordinary modes of existence within it are.

Schopenhauer does of course label Christianity (and by extension, because he believes their moral essence is the same, Buddhism and ‘Brahmanism’ also (WWR II:600, 619, 649)) as ‘pessimistic’ (WWR II:179), but the very fact that this label can be questioned of these religious traditions means that it can be questioned of Schopenhauer’s thought too. Christopher Ryan argues that Schopenhauer’s depiction of Buddhism in particular as pessimistic has always been criticized (Ryan, 2018). Ryan compiles an impressive list of those who either see Schopenhauer as incorrect in

his assertion that Buddhism is pessimistic (Johann Joachim Gesterling, Douglas Berger) or those who make the stronger claim that neither Buddhism nor Schopenhauer's thought should necessarily be seen as pessimistic (Charles Muses, David E. Cooper).¹⁰³ Ryan states:

Other commentators seem to have set out to rescue Schopenhauer from himself, by showing how a comparison between his notion of the denial of the will-to-live and Buddhist soteriology demonstrates that neither are pessimistic! Charles Muses's comparative study of Schopenhauer and the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra* leads up to the conclusion that it is "a grave and prejudicial error to call Schopenhauer's philosophy pessimism", while David E. Cooper argues that Schopenhauer may have obtained from his Buddhist studies "the thought that an initial immersion in *saṃsāra* is a precondition of the emergence of the kind of knowledge that is constitutive of liberation or salvation", with the result that "it is inappropriate to categorize the tone of Schopenhauer's overall philosophy as 'pessimism.'"

Ryan, 2018, p374

What is it then that delivers the promise of redemption for Schopenhauer as well as for Christianity, 'Brahmanism' and Buddhism? I believe it is the promise of the ending of suffering. There is, I would maintain, room to argue that will-lessness represents an existence from which suffering is absent. If this is the case then one could argue that, at the very least, for us as subjects who continue to will life, total pessimism is misjudged because Schopenhauer does provide an escape valve – we can hope for will-lessness. As we have stated, such an existence may even be seen as the very purpose of life and that which justifies pain and suffering. Sufferings' eschatological justification can be seen hinted at, for instance, when Schopenhauer states, in direct Buddhist imagery – 'The peace and blissfulness we have described in the lives of saintly people is only a flower

¹⁰³ R. Raj Singh argues that Schopenhauer's asceticism and pessimism is partly the result of his lack of understanding of Buddhism. Singh argues that Schopenhauer focusses too much on the first noble truth at the expense of the other three and that he fails to take into account that the Buddha rejected extreme asceticism in his recommendation of the 'middle path' (Singh, 2020, p390).

that emerges from the constant overcoming of the will' (WWR I:418). Similarly, he describes ascetics as 'ripe fruits which at the point of highest perfection, are detached' (MR I:41). We may even be able to suggest that there is inherent teleology at work when we suffer – Schopenhauer states that it is 'absurd' to think that endless pain is 'accidental' and 'pointless' (PP II:262). Rather those who do not understand this have 'missed out on the point of his existence' because they should instead 'regard work, deprivation, misery and suffering, all crowned by death, as the goal of our lives (as Brahmanism, Buddhism, and genuine Christianity do); for it is these that lead to the negation of the will to life' (WWR II:600). Thus 'everything in life is certainly suited to the task of bringing us back (*zurückbringen*) from that original error and convincing us that the goal of our existence is not to be happy' (WWR II:651). Janaway also makes this point well when he states – 'We might say: the pathos of Schopenhauer is that, revealing to us our "true nature" in the will to life, he sees precisely this as what we must disown before our existence can claim to have value' (Janaway, 1999, p341).¹⁰⁴

Therefore, as we have explored in the previous chapter, Schopenhauer does wish to gift willlessness with its 'emeritus' status as the *summum bonum* and thus, to some extent, he gives us hope:

But if we would like to retain an old expression out of habit, giving it honorary or *emeritus* status, as it were, we might figuratively call the complete self-abolition and negation of the will, the true absence of will (*Willenslosigkeit*), the only thing that can staunch and appease the impulses of the will forever, the only thing that can give everlasting contentment, the only thing that can redeem the world...we might call this the absolute good, the *summum bonum*. We can look upon it as the one radical cure for the disease against which all other goods – such as fulfilled wishes and achieved happiness – are only palliatives, only anodynes.

¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Janaway argues that, for Schopenhauer – 'the world as will does not just exist, but rather points beyond itself to a higher purpose. The world reveals to us that it ought not to exist and indicates that its higher purpose is to turn us away from itself by liberating us from the "I" that the world tricks us into thinking we are. Those who remain unenlightened as to this purpose and cling to the principle of individuation are condemned to the vacuous and meaningless round of striving and suffering. It is the pessimist who finds the meaning of the world and the path to salvation' (Janaway, 2020, p279).

As we have seen, Reginster argues that in order to make sense of the above passage we should view Schopenhauer's meta-ethics as establishing 'good' not as relative to willing but as relative to deliverance from pain. He argues that the satisfaction of a desire can be understood either because the object of desire itself has intrinsic worth or because the possession of the object instrumentally eliminates the corresponding pain that a lack of its gratification was felt as. Therefore, because ultimate satisfaction is the absence of pain, will-lessness represents the highest good because it is the deliverance from the structure that necessitates pain to begin with (Reginster, 2008, pp174-5). Thus, does Reginster consider Schopenhauer's soteriology as achieving its goal through a negation of the world. The problem that we then face is that Register's presentation of Schopenhauer's axiology does nothing for a refutation of the pessimism claim. This is because, an ultimate form of cessation of pain would be, as Silenus admits to Midas, to never be born at all. And so, the objection will go, it does not make sense to say that the purpose of suffering is to enter a state where one is no longer suffering because such a value dynamic is self-referential and without foundation – 'The purpose of life is to escape suffering and the purpose of suffering is to help us escape life'. This is tantamount to 'the purpose of life is to negate life'. Would it not still be 'better' had we not been born at all?

My response is to argue the following: if the purpose of life is not a negation of life *per se*, but rather a negation of life in only one of its forms – the will-to-life – it would not be better to have never been born because then one would miss the opportunity to embrace life in another form – about which we, as willing subjects, cannot even begin to conceptualize. Schopenhauer's system should, therefore, not be seen as 'irremediably' pessimistic because the pessimistic claim that the world would be better off not existing does not conflict with the hopeful claim that, now that we do find ourselves existing, there is a hope for a deliverance. Therefore, at the very least we might argue that Schopenhauer is not a pessimist in every sense.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ David Woods appears to make a similar point arguing that – 'it is reasonable to assume that his [Schopenhauer's] pessimism is diluted by the chance for salvation offered in his philosophy' (Woods, 2014, p189). Woods also illustrates how Julian Young believes that this means that Schopenhauer is not 'an *absolute* pessimist, a pessimist about all possible worlds' (Young, 1987, p53 in Woods, 2014, p189).

It could, of course, still be argued that any grounds for hope, because it is to be found in a deliverance from a state it may be better had we not entered to begin with (not least because will-lessness is so very rare) is caveated and compromised to such a degree as to in no way be distinguishable from a position of *total pessimism*. For surely, we ought not to be glad about an existence that we require a deliverance from and it would, consequently, still ‘be better if nothing ever were’ (Goethe’s *Faust* quoted in WWR II:589). Schopenhauer seems fairly resolute in this position stating – ‘we should be sorry rather than glad about the existence of the world; that its non-existence would be preferable to its existence; that it is something that fundamentally should not be’ and – ‘it would be better for our situation not to exist’ (WWR II:591-2).

How should we approach these assertions? One response may be to argue that if there is an inconsistency in claiming that the hopeful aspect of life is discovered in an escape from life then this is not an inconsistency that Schopenhauer is alone in invoking. It could be maintained that the same inconsistency lies at the heart of both the Christian and the Buddhist message as Schopenhauer sees them, where, in the former, the purpose of life is to atone for life, and in the latter, a life of suffering (*Dukkha*) is redeemed by escaping suffering (*Nirodha*). We could, therefore, just as easily ask of a Christian – ‘would it not be better had God not created a world with the possibility of evil?’ or a Buddhist – ‘Would it not be better to have not been born into samsara at all?’ Therefore, Schopenhauer’s thought need not be perceived as any more (or less) pessimistic than Christianity or Buddhism. Of course, because Schopenhauer views these religions as essentially pessimistic anyway, for him, this would not be a particularly profound insight (WWR II:179). And yet, most people do not see Christianity or Buddhism as philosophies of pessimism. The fact then that they bear similar if not the same eschatological structure as Schopenhauer’s philosophy should give us pause for thought.

My position throughout this project has been that the state of will-lessness is more than just a negation of the pain and suffering of the world and rather represents an initiation into a new

Though, in the end, Woods argues that the possibility of salvation is not enough to negate Schopenhauer’s pessimism and that it should not ‘pass as an optimistic flourish at the end of Schopenhauer’s philosophy’ (Woods, 2014, p195). While I agree that Schopenhauer’s soteriology should not be seen as optimistic, this does not entail that it should be seen as totally pessimistic either.

ineffable state, against which the pain and suffering of the world, as a necessary means of its achievement, becomes justified. While this state appears to us as willing subjects as a ‘nothing’, to he who has negated the will – ‘this world of ours which is so very real with all its suns and galaxies is – nothing’ (WWR I:439). It should not escape our attention that this sentiment is the last word of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation* and, therefore, it could be conjectured that it represents in some way, its fruition. That this ‘fruition’ is not just a ‘nay-saying’ but also a ‘yay-saying’ to the world, albeit the world in a different guise, is significant. Thus, the purpose of life is not to negate life, but to negate life in one of its forms and to be initiated into it in another.¹⁰⁶

Is there really a secret ‘buried’ hopefulness to Schopenhauer’s thought? Should we choose to defend this position we would have to account for why there appears so little to be truly hopeful about. Again, it is not an accident nor a mistake that Schopenhauer has been called a pessimist – he really is almost unrelentingly negative in his description of the world. There are a number of ways we could go about accounting for this. Firstly, we could maintain that Schopenhauer is trying to remain consistent with his claim that the state that we are delivered into in will-lessness is ineffable and beyond conceptual thought and, therefore, if there is anything to be hopeful about, it cannot be the remit of philosophy to speak on it. If this is the case, then it would be inconsistent and indeed impossible for Schopenhauer to include it in his philosophy not least because Schopenhauer, the author, was himself very much not a denier of the will-to-life and consequently had no first-hand experience of it to begin with. Thus, all that he can do is to point beyond his work to the life of ascetics and saints. This would explain Schopenhauer’s words in the last pages of Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation* where he states:

Nonetheless, if someone persisted in demanding positive cognition of what philosophy can express only negatively, as the negation of the will, then all we could do would be to point out the state experienced by everyone who has achieved a perfect

¹⁰⁶ Douglas McDermid argues that there is a contingent connection between Schopenhauer’s idealism and Schopenhauer’s pessimism (McDermid, 2018). If this is the case, then we could further argue that pessimism as an outlook should be reserved for the phenomenal world and not the world as such – a ‘qualified’ rather than a ‘total’ pessimism.

negation of the will, and that has been called ecstasy, rapture, enlightenment, unity with God, etc.

WWR I:438

Secondly, we could argue that Schopenhauer would be undermining his salvatory message were he to overemphasize the redemptive quality hidden in existence. This is because it is not through hope that one can be made fertile for the possibility of a denial of the will-to-life. Therefore, it is in Schopenhauer's interests as a compassionate author that he does not provide too much ground for hope and this is so as to make his readers ready for redemption. This we may argue, takes Schopenhauer closer to the teaching of *Upaya-kausalya* or 'skill-full means' found in Mahāyāna Buddhism (a similar practice is also found in the Advaita Vedanta tradition), whereby the master prepares the initiate for truth according to their (the initiates) own needs. Jonardon Ganeri illustrates how the Buddha employed the technique of the 'compassionate lie' in order to dialectically prepare the initiate for their ascent into enlightened awareness (Ganeri, 2007, p99). This was discussed in chapter III – Ganeri describes the parable of the 'burning house' in the Lotus Sūtra whereby a father cajoles his children out of a burning house with the promise of toys and, in such a way, skillfully manages to save them with the allure of an untruth (Ganeri, 2007, p99).

Finally, we may argue that Schopenhauer in fact does litter his texts with grounds for hope but simply refuses to 'do the work' for us. Again, and again he implores us to go to the only arenas that can possibly redeem life – art and the examples of saints and ascetics. Only then, he says, can we see beyond the apparent nothingness of a negation of the will and get a glimpse of something positive beyond it. He states:

We can look at the lives and the conduct of saints; of course we rarely encounter them in our own experience, but they are brought before our eyes in their recorded histories as well as in art, which is vouchsafed by the mark of inner truth; and this is how we must drive away the dark impression of that nothing that hovers behind all virtue and holiness as the final goal, and that we fear the way children fear darkness.

It is, therefore, reasonable to expect that Schopenhauer is taken as a pessimist and this much explains why he made very little effort to shake off the label – the world should be seen negatively. However, this pessimism should only be an instrument, a vehicle aiding us towards ‘something else’, towards a realization that it is not the world that is dire, but the world of willing-life.¹⁰⁷ That so many critics have become ‘stuck’ at the pessimism stage without realizing that it is not a terminus for Schopenhauer but an instrument, is in my view, perplexing. According to the above passage they are children who ‘fear darkness’ (WWR I:439).¹⁰⁸

This interpretation of Schopenhauer’s pessimism, that it is a vehicle rather than a destination, would certainly make more coherent sense of why Schopenhauer both refuses to call his philosophy pessimistic and yet continues to praise religions he labels ‘pessimistic’ (WWR II:179). Schopenhauer understands religion as one vehicle for truth, often dressed in allegory and symbolism (WWR II:175). In my line of argument, the vehicle for the discovery of truth, whether Schopenhauer’s pessimistic claims or the assertions of Christianity, ‘Brahmanism’ or Buddhism, are supposed to deliver us to a destination which is ultimately beyond pessimism. Schopenhauer may have been happy to have his philosophy labelled ‘pessimistic’ if this is what it would take for people to both be made ready to rise above the will-to-life and to combat the true evil which is the ‘trite optimism’ he believes modern Christianity has degenerated into (WWR I:433). In my reading, optimism is insidious not only because it is metaphysically unfounded, but also because it does not encourage the denial of the will-to-life, but instead embraces and perpetuates it. Schopenhauer states:

¹⁰⁷ Patrick Hassan, in his analysis of ‘Nichtigkeit’ and the Sublime in Schopenhauer, illustrates how aesthetic experience of terrifying sights can also elevate the subject of knowing into a state of bliss beyond willing, thus illustrating that the mechanism already exists in Schopenhauer’s thought for objects which stand in opposition to the will being instrumentally useful for the production of transcendent states (Hassan, 2023, pp70-184).

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Janaway has argued something similar stating that pessimism does not mean meaninglessness for Schopenhauer but rather that pessimism is ‘the key to the world’s *having* such a meaning...[and, therefore]...It is the pessimist who finds the meaning of the world and the path to salvation’ (Janaway, 2020, p279).

I cannot consider the *fundamental distinction* between religions to rest, as it commonly does, with the question of whether they are monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, or atheistic, but instead with the question of whether they are optimistic or pessimistic, i.e. whether they present the existence of the world as justified by itself and therefore praise it, or whether they regard it as something that can only be comprehended as a consequence of our guilt and that therefore should not really exist, since they recognize that pain and death cannot be part of the eternal, original, and immutable order of things, part of what should in every respect exist.

WWR II:179

Should a philosophy that perceives ‘ordinary existence’ pessimistically but leaves room for new valuations be labelled pessimistic? Christopher Ryan argues that it should, stating that both Buddhism and Schopenhauer’s thought should be ascribed the label ‘pessimistic’:

If the term ‘pessimism’ is taken in its non-esoteric sense, then both Schopenhauer and Gotama constructed *pessimistic philosophies of life*, and this stands irrespective of whether this constitutes only their point of departure rather than their final word on the matter. Indeed, it is difficult to know how else to characterize the thought of a founder of a world religion whose opening proposition was the pervasive reality of suffering (*dukkha-sacca*), and a philosopher who aimed to show his readers “how essential *suffering is to all life*” (WWR I, 337). To claim that either, or both of them, were optimists because they offered a soteriological solution to life’s suffering that turns on the abandonment of all life-goals, is akin to saying that an optimistic doctor is one who, upon examining my ingrown toenail, recommends the removal of my entire leg, insofar as it is preferable to diagnosing my condition as hopeless.

Ryan, 2018, p376

Of course, when it comes to the world as manifested will-to-life, Ryan is certainly not incorrect in stating that Schopenhauer was a pessimist. However, that such pessimism should come to dominate Schopenhauer's legacy such that he is defined as a pessimist only seems unjustified.

Firstly, the perspective from which such a claim is made, that Schopenhauer's thought is pessimistic because he recommends the total negation of this world, is not a state of will-lessness but a state of willing life and, because it is a mistake to will-life, any evaluation made from this perspective should equally be seen as a mistake. If I state that the world is in error and yet my very assertion is itself a product of that world, in what sense have I uttered a statement that is not in its own turn ultimately in error? Is it not rather the case that a negative ascription of value about the world from a being enmeshed in that very world, nullifies itself? The statement – 'the world is an unsatisfactory place for the fulfillment of a being such as I currently am (one who, in error, wills life)' amounts to an issue with me just as much as an issue with the world. To use Ryan's example, having a leg removed is only a negative event for someone who is enmeshed in the will-to-life. Whether or not such an event is perceived either optimistically or pessimistically for one who no longer wills life is, to us as beings who continue to will life, simply unknowable. Therefore, a transformation in the agent who assigns value from a state of willing life to a state of will-lessness should enable a transformation in his ascription of value.

Secondly, to use Ryan's analogy, the doctor is not simply removing a leg. Perhaps he is from the current perspective of the patient, however he is doing so in order to replace it with an ineffable 'something else' against which the removal of my leg may be seen as a non-negative event. If the world of willing life is not indicative of ultimate reality then the removal of a state of being should not be viewed as excluding the possibility of a new state replacing it. Thus, under one reading, it would still be better to have been born than to have not been born at all because to have not been born at all may be to miss out on the chance to experience this ineffable 'something else'.¹⁰⁹ In this one sense at least then, it is not accurate to describe Schopenhauer as an anti-natalist. However, in

¹⁰⁹ This is indeed what Schopenhauer says about suicide, that it prevents us from achieving true liberation by living as an ascetic, he states – 'someone who commits suicide is like a sick person who, having started undergoing a painful operation that could cure him completely, does not allow it to be completed and would rather stay sick' (WWR I:427).

another sense, even if it would be better had we never been born, this does not negate from the fact that there is also hope once we have come into existence.

In this section I have attempted to argue that if Schopenhauer's thought is to be considered pessimistic then it is not so *totally* because he does leave hope for something else. Both pessimism and a hope for something more can be entertained at the same time.

7.4 Beyond Pessimism and Optimism

Thus far, we have seen how an ascription of pessimism to Schopenhauer's philosophy may be considered, at the very least, not the whole story and, at most, misjudged. In this section I wish to suggest that we should attempt to consider both the world as Schopenhauer presents it and his philosophy's place within it from the vantage point of the will-less individual. I believe that, despite Schopenhauer being very much a pessimist, he describes a state of being from whose perspective both pessimism and optimism would dissolve away as meaningless attributions of value relevant only to willing subjects. Critics of this attempt may conjecture that this project has already rightly illustrated that such an attempt is a folly because will-lessness is an ineffable state that cannot be understood nor communicated conceptually and, consequently, we can neither know nor speak of how the world may appear to the will-less individual. I would respond that, to the contrary, within my reading of Schopenhauer, while it remains impossible to state what the experiential nature of the state of will-lessness positively is, it has never been my claim that we can never say what this state is not. The will-less state is not subject to spatial nor temporal categories as well as the subject/object distinction of ordinary cognition. I would like to add to this list that the state of will-lessness is one where there is no willing 'I' for whom the world could either please or frustrate. If this is the case then there is no possibility of the will-less subject having any affective attitude towards the world at all. Hence, from the perspective of the will-less subject, both the world and Schopenhauer's philosophy within it, would appear neither good nor bad and neither would he be pessimistic nor optimistic about either.

Of course, no critic is guilty of incorrectly claiming that Schopenhauer states that the world 'should not be' (WWR II:594). However, my issue is that no critic appears to take into consideration that when Schopenhauer makes such pessimistic claims he is clearly making a statement about the

attitude that a subject of willing should take towards the world. Rather than stating that ‘the world should not be’, the statement I believe that Schopenhauer is truly delivering is – ‘from the perspective of a willing subject, the world should not to be’. This may appear to be a minor correction but it is, in fact, a highly important distinction because it turns a purely normative statement into a partly factual or descriptive one – rather than making a statement about the moral value of the world alone, Schopenhauer is making a statement about how the moral value of the world must appear to someone who is still enmeshed within it.

Presumably, from the ‘corrected’ position of will-lessness the world would not appear in a pessimistic light because the expectations against which we become disappointed with the world would not be present. Thus, while much of what Schopenhauer says is pessimistic, this is pessimism about a life of willing from the perspective of one who continues to erroneously will life. The assumptions from which pessimism is able to pollute our thought, that the world is a place that could and should fulfil the willing ego, are themselves in error. That the world, and Schopenhauer’s philosophy within it, appear to us pessimistically is only because we are rooted in the original error that a life of willing is all that we are capable of alongside a false belief that this is where true value and fulfillment lies.

In his best moments I believe Schopenhauer simply describes a state of affairs – how the world is – and then describes another – how the world should appear to a willing subject who is hopelessly ‘lost’ within that world. That the world ‘should not be’ (WWR II:594) is not Schopenhauer’s only valuative statement, it is Schopenhauer’s conditional valuative statement – that is, a valuative statement made from one position – that of an individual who aims to be satisfied through willing life in this world. Of course, from the perspective of a willing subject (who incidentally Schopenhauer remains throughout his life) the world ‘should not be’ (WWR II:594). However, as we have said, to be a willing subject is to be in error to begin with. A similar charge can then be levied against Oxenford and Copleston: Schopenhauer’s philosophy is given the ascription ‘pessimistic’ because they will life. Thus, when Oxenford describes Schopenhauer’s philosophy as ‘disheartening’ and ‘repulsive’ (Oxenford, 1853, p394), he is caught in the same trap of willing life that Schopenhauer urges us to escape from. The world, as well as Schopenhauer’s philosophy within it (being itself a feature of the world), from the perspective of the will-less subject simply is – whether

or not it is disheartening or repulsive is a value judgement made relative to the will of the reviewer – the I of ‘egoism’ that the will-less individual has escaped from. The philosophy Schopenhauer presents the reviewer with is abhorrent to the reviewer’s will-to-life and is thus labelled as such. However, as we have argued, it is our ‘false path’ (WWR II:652) to view the world as a place that should please us, about which we should have ‘aspirations’ (Oxenford, 1853, p394) and, therefore, the reviewer’s will stands in the way of a fair and correct assessment of Schopenhauer’s philosophy and does both (the reviewer and the reviewed) a disservice.¹¹⁰

Schopenhauer cautions against extreme joy or extreme pain in consequence of the satiation or frustration of ones will, stating – ‘consequently, both could be avoided if people were always able to survey things with perfect clarity and in a broader context, and were constantly on guard against painting things in the colours we only wish they had’ (WWR I:344). Is the critic then guilty of wishing as a willing subject that the world was not as it is, of ignoring the broader context of the world when it is judged next to the salvation that it promises? Does he judge Schopenhauer’s philosophy pessimistically in relation to the ‘colours (he) only wishes(s) it had’ (WWR I:344)? Oxenford continues in his review to state that Schopenhauer’s philosophy repulses him because it stands in opposition to ‘all that the liberal mind looks forward to with hope, if not with confidence – the extension of political rights, the spread of education, the brotherhood of nations’ (Oxenford, 1853, p394). Of course, Schopenhauer appears pessimistic to Oxenford, but this is not necessarily a symptom only of Schopenhauer’s thought, it is a symptom of Oxenford’s. If one were to see such

¹¹⁰ R. Raj. Singh argues that the standard reading of Schopenhauer as a world-denying pessimist in fact betrays a lack of understanding of Vedantic and Buddhist philosophies which have always maintained that while Samsara and re-birth should be avoided this does not entail that the world is a place that should be despaired at and despised – what should be despaired at is not the world as such but only one form of being within this world – ‘mineness (*mamta*) and *moha* (attachment)’ (Singh, 2020, pp392-3). Interestingly, Singh also suggests that Schopenhauer need not have focused on asceticism as the only path to the dissolving of self but that, had he known about the practice of *bhakti* (loving devotion), he could have identified his system with a less pessimistic reading of Hindu philosophy (Singh, 2020, p395). The issue of course is, for Schopenhauer, devotion to what? There seems to be nothing in the world that would be worthy of devotional love. Of course, if ultimate reality were not the will then there could be possible conceptual space in Schopenhauer’s metaphysics for devotion to an entity worthy of it.

things ‘with perfect clarity’ (WWR I:344), and a knowledge that such hopes are vain to begin with, then the disappointment at Schopenhauer’s philosophy may not be felt.

If pessimism and optimism can be seen, not as features of the intellect, but as features of the will then I believe an even greater blow can be dealt to the traditional ‘Philosopher of Pessimism’ epitaph. Pessimism and optimism do appear to have more in common with willing. Take for instance the following passage:

Now, if intellect and will were not completely distinct, but instead...cognition and willing were at root the same...then the intellect would be intensified along with the excitation and intensification of the will...but as we have seen, the intellect is instead hindered and depressed by this process...In fact, the intellect is like the mirrored surface of water, while the water itself is like the will, the agitation of which destroys both the purity of the mirror and the clarity of its images as well. The *organism* is the will itself, it is embodied *will*, i.e. will intuited objectively in the brain: as a result, the joyful, and especially vigorous affects elevate and accelerate many of its functions...The *intellect*, on the other hand, is a mere function of the *brain*, which is carried and nourished by the organism as a mere parasite: as a result, every perturbation of the *will*, and with it of the *organism*, must paralyse or disturb brain function, which is self-subsistent and has no other needs than those of rest and nourishment.

WWR II:228

The value judgements that lead to both pessimism and optimism alike, that this world is or is not conducive to our will – that it should or should not be – ought to illustrate to us that, as manifestations of the will, they stand in the way of the intellect as a cool clear ‘mirrored surface of water’. Schopenhauer goes on to say that the will is a ‘disruptive influence in that ‘*Hope* lets us see what we want, and *fear* lets us see what we are afraid of’ (WWR II:228). Both pessimism and optimism are, therefore, better understood as agitations of the will and consequently, when Schopenhauer appears pessimistic, he is making a descriptive statement not about the world from the vantage point of pure intellect, but about the way that it must appear to an agent who continues

to will life. Thus, to the individual who has denied the distorting effects of egoism, the world appears in neither a pessimistic nor an optimistic light, but simply as it is – he becomes a ‘clear mirror’ (WWR I:201) of the world no longer introducing any of his own distortions.¹¹¹

I believe a deeper understanding of Schopenhauer’s philosophy can be reached if we pay more careful attention to such passages and diagnose the pessimism with which he has been labelled from the perspective of his own assessment of the genealogy of value judgements – that they result from willing. I believe that once this has been addressed, we will see that both pessimism and optimism are categories that are unhelpful if we are to truly engage with Schopenhauer’s thought in its full fruition.

David Woods intimates something similar when he suggests that, because we can have no positive knowledge of the will-less state, any perspective that the saint may or may not have cannot be understood as either pessimism or optimism. He states – ‘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’ (Woods, 2014, pp206-7). I would like to agree with Woods’ analysis and to suggest that there are further good Schopenhauerian reasons to do so. While we can have no positive knowledge of the state of will-lessness, this does not mean that we cannot have negative knowledge – of what the state of will-lessness is not. Pessimism and optimism are dependent on an ‘ordinary’ sense of self as subject of willing because there has to be a willing ‘I’ against which ‘I’ judge the world as dissatisfying or satisfying, good or bad and yet the will-less individual is no longer a subject of willing who identifies with a sense of self in any ‘ordinary’ way and thus would no longer perceive the world either optimistically or pessimistically in any sense. Therefore, from the perspective of the denier of the will-to-life notions such as optimism and pessimism will no longer make any meaningful sense at all.

¹¹¹ Indeed, Arthur Schopenhauer the author is often far from a calm ‘clear mirror’ (WWR I:201) but is often very much agitated – one need only see his treatment of philosophers he disliked or those he felt slighted by (See for instance the preface to the second edition of *On the Basis of Morals* (OBM:29) – one could hardly imagine the Buddha or Christ reacting to dissenters with such venom).

Such a view potentially more closely aligns Schopenhauer with Buddhist notions of Nirvana. Moria Nicholls explains how the concept of Nirvana has long confounded because it cannot be described in positive terms – being beyond the world of ordinary cognition (Nicholls, 1999). She describes how Buddhist monk and philosopher Sri Rahula explains that this does not mean that Nirvana is to be understood negatively as only ‘extinction’ but that such a state can only be described negatively to those who have no awareness of it. Rather than Nirvana appearing as a negative ‘extinguishment’ or ‘snuffing out’ only, one should understand that, from the perspective of he who has reached Nirvana, there can be no valuation of negativity or positivity at all, not least because there is no self for which such valuations can be a relative measure. Therefore, Nirvana appears as a negative phenomenon to us as un-enlightened beings, but this is not the full measure of the state. From the enlightened state – ‘the notions of “positive” and “negative” are themselves misleading. For they belong to the realm of relativity, whereas Nirvana, or Absolute Truth, is beyond such relational categories’ (Nicholls, 1999, p190). The obvious parallels between Sri Rahula’s description of Nirvana and Schopenhauer’s description of the *nihil privativum* – of the state of will-lessness – should allow us to draw the parallel further and argue that because positivity and negativity would have no meaning to those in a state of Nirvana, pessimism and optimism would have no meaning to an individual who is no longer willing life. Schopenhauer instead argues that this state is not an absolute nothing but, because he (as well as any others) can go no further philosophically, we can only discover ‘supplements’ for a knowledge of this state:

For if something is nothing of all that we know, then it is certainly nothing at all for us. But this still does not mean that it is absolutely nothing, that it has to be nothing from every possible perspective and in every possible sense; but only that we are restricted to a wholly negative cognition of it, due very probably to the restrictions of our standpoint. – But this is precisely where the mystic proceeds positively; from this point onwards, nothing remains but mysticism. At the same time, anyone who wants this kind of supplement to the negative cognition that is all that philosophy can provide, will find it at its richest and most beautiful in the *Oupnek’hat*.

WWR II:627

What then does the Upanishads say as supplement to this ‘negative cognition’? Below are a selection of passages Schopenhauer himself refers to from his source, the *Upanek’hat*:

‘I am all these creations taken together, and there is no other being besides me’

WWR I:204

‘And blissfulness, which is a sort of joy, is called the highest *ātman* because everywhere that joy might be, this is a part of its joy.’

WWR II:474

‘As hungry children press around their mother in this world, all beings await the holy sacrifice.’

WWR I:407

7.5 Conclusion

Schopenhauer really was a pessimist. This claim remains beyond dispute and I do not wish to challenge it. Schopenhauer really did believe that the world as manifested will-to-life was a place about which we, as willing subjects, should despair. It is my contention, however, that not nearly enough attention has been brought to the consideration that the world as manifested will-to-life is not the entire story for Schopenhauer. That there is an existence which is ‘beyond’ or ‘outside’ willing represents a profound source of hope for us as beings who will live for the following reasons. Firstly, it is a potential source of redemption from our current existence, one that has the potential to give it meaning and to justify it in the same way as Christianity, Buddhism and ‘Brahmanism’ do which, incidentally, are rarely defined only in terms of their pessimism. Secondly will-lessness is a state in which the mechanisms that necessitate suffering are absent and it is, therefore, not an existence about which one should be pessimistic. Finally, from the perspective of one who is will-

less, the terms ‘pessimism’ and ‘optimism’ would appear totally misjudged based as they are upon the valuations of a willing subject.

My argument has, therefore, been that Schopenhauer is a pessimist about much if not most of the world, however, he is not just a pessimist. That this position has been largely overlooked I put down to the fact that the salient features of his soteriology have been consistently misunderstood. Salvation for Schopenhauer is not a negation of the world, it is a negation of the world in one of its forms only (the will-to-life) and an embrace of it in another (will-lessness). In fact, the aim of this entire project has been to demonstrate that the centrality of the pessimism claim can be traced not only back to difficulties in understanding Schopenhauer’s soteriology, but difficulties in understanding Schopenhauer’s very metaphysics. If the will does not constitute ultimate reality stripped of all its veils, then a denial of the will is not a denial of the world but a denial of the world only in one of its guises. The key to understanding this distinction is Schopenhauer’s insistence that the state of will-lessness is not an ‘absolute’ but a ‘relative nothingness’. Thus, both the world and the place of ascetic will-lessness within it, will be seen pessimistically relative to willing subjects and this will be a correct judgement – the world of willing life really is a place about which we ought to be pessimistic and the world of will-lessness will likewise appear as nothing more than a negation of such a world. In this sense Schopenhauer was right to judge the world of willing pessimistically, not least because this is the only world most of us will ever know. However ubiquitous though, the world as manifested will-to-life is simply not the entire story in Schopenhauer’s thought and there is, therefore, room to argue that with the will-less saint there is the conceptual space for new valuations of the world. It is, however, the end of the story for philosophy. In order to proceed into positive knowledge of the world outside willing, we would have to as Schopenhauer states, abandon philosophy and embrace mysticism (WWR II:627).

Conclusion: Can Schopenhauer's soteriology be saved?

The main aim of this project has been to unravel some issues in Schopenhauer's theory of salvation and to illustrate ways in which Schopenhauer's soteriology could work. Although I have at all times relied on a very close textual reading of Schopenhauer's works, parts of the project have necessarily remained partially reconstructive in so far as I have brought some of Schopenhauer's assertions to the foreground at the expense of others. My aim has been to show that we are able to provide a much more cohesive and satisfying reading of Schopenhauer's philosophical project if we let go of some of the more orthodox assumptions in the Schopenhauer scholarship – chief among these being that Schopenhauer is committed to the view that the will constitutes ultimate reality. While this reading is a departure from the vast majority of the traditional readings of Schopenhauer's philosophy, I believe it has the twin advantages of both aligning Schopenhauer's thought much closer with the eastern traditions he believes his work is in sympathy with, and ultimately, providing a new platform from which to assess the 'traditional' reading of Schopenhauer's thought as 'hopelessly pessimistic'. It is my contention that, while Schopenhauer was a pessimist about the world as manifested will, it is the perceived difficulties of his philosophy of salvation that have provided the most significant road block preventing critics from seeing that there are dimensions to Schopenhauer's thought that cannot so easily be labelled as either pessimistic or optimistic.

I began in chapter I with the question – why do we need saving? I argued that the will-to-life which appears to be constitutive of our very nature manifests creatures such as we are who are structurally incapable of true fulfilment and for this reason we require a deliverance from the will-to-life. I argued that Schopenhauer provides two ways in which we can be in the world with each corresponding to either more or less pain and suffering. The first is to be one who affirms the will-to-life and the second is to be one in whom the will has come to negate itself. In chapter II, I attempted to argue that the will should not be seen as ultimate reality and that this is both closer to the account which Schopenhauer himself was inclining towards later in his writings as well as a necessary sacrifice in order to save Schopenhauer from more problematic inconsistencies. In chapter III, I attempted to solve inconsistencies in Schopenhauer's account of personal identity by arguing that there can only be a denial of the will-to-life if there is more to our identity than willing and that

the subject who has denied the will-to-life is a subject only in a very special sense of the term. In chapter IV, I examined the possibility of a denial of the will-to-life at all arguing both that there are serious difficulties inherent in Schopenhauer's account of denying the will and that there are possible ways of resolving this if we suggest that there is more to our nature than willing. In chapter V, I argued that, contrary to Sandra Shapshay and Tristan Ferrell, it is possible to be one in whom the will has come to deny itself while remaining one who wills ethically and this can be the case if we focus our attention on what Schopenhauer may truly mean by a compassionate will to help others. Alongside this I argued that there may be other ways in which ethical behavior may be conducted including via allowing the worst excesses of the will-to-life to be felt in order to prepare initiates for renunciation. In chapter VI, I discussed Schopenhauer's meta-ethics and suggested that the 'good' of will-lessness may be good in ways in which we as willing subjects simply cannot comprehend. Finally, in chapter VII, I critically interpreted Schopenhauer's pessimism and attempted to introduce a new reading of Schopenhauer's project based upon my reformed reading of Schopenhauer's soteriology; one that introduces new ways of assessing the world, as well as the place of Schopenhauer's philosophical system within it.

It has been the working contention of this project that a significant factor in Schopenhauer's reception as the philosopher of pessimism *par excellence* comes from the largely underwhelming reception given to his soteriology. For after all if there were a viable, workable theory of salvation, then this would act as a counterbalance to Schopenhauer's gloomier assertions. This project has aimed to smooth out some of the difficulties in Schopenhauer's soteriology so as to show ways in which it could be reconstructed and rehabilitated. However there still remain many unresolved difficulties including:

1. If Salvation is not something we can choose for ourselves or achieve through our own efforts, then what, in the end, is the point of Schopenhauer's account?
2. How can there be ethical conduct at the same time as salvation if the saint no longer wills and is therefore not capable of doing anything? We can perhaps solve this by accepting Christopher Janaway's 'different kinds of willing' (Janaway, 2023), however, were we to do this then we would have to question the 'purity' of the state of will-lessness.

3. How can we tell apart those who are capable of a denial of the will from those who never will be – so as to not inadvertently cause unnecessary suffering?
4. In what sense has this project re-evaluated Schopenhauer's pessimism? If salvation remains incredibly rare – in what sense is Schopenhauer not still a pessimist about the lives and experiences of the vast majority of people?

It has been the contention of this project that we ought to view the state of will-lessness as more than just a negative turning away from the world. In understanding this approach, it is useful to remember that Schopenhauer greatly admired the Quietist tradition. Schopenhauer mentions Quietism seven times in Volume II of *The World as Will and Representation* alone for instance (WWR II:508, 588, 628, 629, 630, 688, 693). This Christian tradition maintains that salvation comes not only through a denial of the world but by allowing room for new transcendent states to enter one's consciousness. Robert Wicks states – 'Quietism thus advocates the denial-of-the-will for the sake of allowing infinite and sacred content to enter freely into one's awareness. It compares well to any view that regards self-conscious willing and the awareness of oneself as an individual as standing in the way of attaining metaphysical knowledge' (Wicks, 2008, p134). This is not simply a 'nay-saying' to the world as will, but a 'yay-saying' to the world as it exists beyond its expression as the will. The alternative account, and the one that I believe has come to dominate much of the scholarly reception of Schopenhauer, is an account of the denial of the will as a negative diminishing of the will as the only metaphysical reality – a 'nay-saying' only. Wicks believes that the tension between these two interpretations represents a tension between salvation as – 'Upanishadically-revelatory' or 'Buddhistically-empty' (Wicks, 2008, p138). While this dichotomy may be an oversimplistic generalisation, not least because, as we have shown in the previous chapter, there may be a positive dimension to Nirvana other than just 'extinguishment', the distinction between the two readings of the state of will-lessness is nonetheless useful. I have argued consistently in this project that the former account, that will-lessness represents more than just an extinguishing of the will, affords us a much more satisfying reading of Schopenhauer's philosophy. Many, including Wicks will of course continue to believe that it does not, not least because, as Wicks may argue, my reading diminishes Schopenhauer's account of the all-pervasive violence of the will as the only fundamental

metaphysical reality. However, I believe that this is simply not the case. The world as manifested will-to-life need not be seen as any less evil and perniciousness were we to argue that the will is not the ultimate metaphysical reality. In fact, in so far as the will separates us from such spiritual insights, it could be seen as all the more insidious.

In summary then, I have argued that there is more to will-lessness than simply denial of the world for the following reasons:

1. Schopenhauer repeatedly and consistently suggests that there is more to the world than will and representation – there is an unconceptualizable, in-effable 'something else'.
2. There are real and insurmountable difficulties in attempting to maintain that the will could be ultimate reality, not least because the will is in time and is an object for a knowing subject.
3. Schopenhauer describes the state of will-lessness as a *nihil privativum* rather than a *nihil negativum*, describing it as a state which appears as nothing only in a relative sense – that is, to a willing subject.
4. Schopenhauer repeatedly states that will-lessness is unknowable and 'nothing' to us and yet, if will-lessness were a negation of willing alone (a *nihil negativum*) then will-lessness would be knowable to us as willing creatures because the cessation of willing alone is something we can experience in aesthetic contemplation and in ordinary will-fulfillment where the will is temporarily satiated and quietened.
5. There are serious difficulties with proposing that the will can deny itself and simultaneously that there can be a continued identity after willing without invoking an account of personal identity that is not reducible to the will.
6. There are serious problems with suggesting that something can deny itself without invoking an account of motivation that is not reducible to the will.
7. It is difficult to see how will-lessness can be preferable to non-existence and be 'good' unless there are other aspects to will-lessness other than simply a straightforward absence of the world as will only.

8. Schopenhauer does not label his system 'pessimistic' and even aligns his theories with religious traditions that have positive salvatory dimensions beyond simply an abhorrence of the world – the clearest examples being the Advaita Vedanta tradition and Buddhism where salvation can be seen as more than just a negative reaction to the world.
9. Schopenhauer does not advocate for suicide despite it arguably achieving a permanent state of will-lessness. Given the difficulties his account of suicide has faced, one way we can make sense of its condemnation is to propose that will-lessness is more than just an ending to willing and that the suicide would subsequently miss out on this.
10. Schopenhauer argues that the state of will-lessness is beyond ordinary comprehension and therefore, presumably it is a state that is beyond the dualities of pain/pleasure, bad/good, pessimism/optimism.

At the beginning of this project we pointed out that attempts at re-habilitating Schopenhauer's philosophy invariably involve deciding which pieces of the jigsaw to keep and which to lose. Two of the most awkward and incompatible pieces are the will as 'thing-in-itself' and the non-inevitability of pessimism. This is because, if we view the will as ultimate reality, and to will is to suffer, then there appears to be no possibility of holding anything other than a pessimistic view towards the world. Consequently, I have argued that we can lose one piece of the Jigsaw and gain the other but not keep both – it is our choice which we choose and I have chosen to jettison the former in favour of the later.

Having said this, in the end there may be no totally satisfying reading of Schopenhauer's soteriology and, what is more, we may question whether we should really expect one at all. This is because the denial of the will-to-life simply should not make perfect sense to philosophy because philosophy has a limit. As Schopenhauer states:

I have never been rash enough to claim that my philosophy leaves no questions unanswered. Philosophy in this sense is really impossible: it would be a doctrine of omniscience. But 'it is right to go to the limit if there is no further path': and there is a limit; reflection presses on to it, and can illuminate the night of our existence this far,

even though the horizon always remains dark. I reach this limit with my doctrine of the will to life that affirms or negates itself in its own appearance. But to want to go further than this is, in my view, like wanting to fly out of the atmosphere. We must stay within the atmosphere, although new problems arise from ones that have been solved. We must moreover refer to the fact that the validity of the principle of sufficient reason is restricted to appearance.

WWR II:606-7

The most satisfying feature of Schopenhauer's soteriology may in the end, paradoxically, be that it is not philosophically satisfying. If this were to be our conclusion, then it would fit very neatly with Philaethes' contention in Schopenhauer's diversionary dialogue, that – 'Answering transcendent questions in the language created for immanent cognition can indeed lead to contradictions' (PP II:251). Mathjis Peters puts this well when he argues that – 'solving these contradictions and conflicts in a completely satisfying manner might be impossible...and perhaps this is Schopenhauer's own way of negating our thirst for knowledge; our will to cognition' (Peters, 2023, p323). Indeed, Schopenhauer is in good company here because it has always been a staple of eastern thought that transcendent states are beyond ordinary comprehension.

It is, therefore, my conclusion that while there remain ways in which we can make Schopenhauer's soteriology make more sense and, indeed, make sense in ways that positively ignite a debate surrounding his legacy as a pessimist, fundamentally, we should not expect his soteriology to make perfect sense and, indeed, were it to, we would have to admit that we ourselves have not understood it.

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