Schopenhauer on Spinoza: Animals, Jews, and Evil (05.04.22)

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To Pandora and Rico, my barking friends

> "As a result of the Kantian critique of all speculative theology, German philosophizers have almost all thrown themselves back on *Spinoza* so that the whole, well-known series of failed attempts that go by the name of post-Kantian philosophy is simply and tastelessly dressed up *Spinozism*, hidden under all sorts of incomprehensible language and distorted in other ways as well." (*WWR* 1:661)[1]

Introduction

Schopenhauer's attitude toward Spinoza is anything but simple. On the one hand, in numerous passages in his writings, Schopenhauer expresses clear admiration both of Spinoza, the person,

[1] Unless otherwise marked, all references to Spinoza's works and letters are to Curley's translation (1985/2016). I rely on Gebhardt's critical edition (*Spinoza Opera*, 1925)) for the Latin text of Spinoza, and cite the texts in this edition by volume/page/line numbers. I use the following standard abbreviations for Spinoza's works: **TP** –*Political Treatise* [*Tractatus Politicus*], **TTP** –*Theological-Political Treatise* [*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*] **Ep.** – *Letters*. Passages in the *Ethics* will be referred to by means of the following abbreviations: a(-xiom), c(-orollary), p(-roposition), s(-cholium) and app(-endix); 'd' stands for either 'definition' (when it appears immediately to the right of the part of the book), or 'demonstration' (in all other cases). Hence, E1d3 is the third definition of part 1 and E1p16d is the demonstration of proposition 16 of part 1. I would like to thank Zach Gartenberg, Mor Segev, Tim Stoll and Jason Yonover for their most astute comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

and of his philosophy.[2] Schopenhauer does not hesitate to associate himself with the '*hen kai pan*' slogan of German Spinozism: "The 'One and All', i.e., the fact that the inner essence in all things is absolutely one and the same, has already been grasped and understood by my age, after the Eleatics, Scotus Erigena, Giordano Bruno, and Spinoza has taught it in detail" (*WWR* 1, 659). Schopenhauer's endorsement of key Spinozistic doctrines, such as monism and perhaps also the critique of free will, have led some scholars to describe Schopenhauer's monism of the will as nothing but a "transformation of Spinoza's abstract monism,"[4] while others have argued that "there is more Spinozism than Kantianism in Schopenhauer's system."[5]

According to Samuel Rappaport, Schopenhauer's sympathy to Spinoza led him to stress some bizarre biographical coincidences, such as the fact that Spinoza died on February 21st (1677), while Schopenhauer was born on February 22nd (1788).[6] But there were also genuine biographical similarities between the two. Both Schopenhauer and Spinoza were sons of wealthy merchants and were expected to replace their fathers in the family business.[7] Both

[2] Thus, for example, he describes Spinoza as "a great mind" (*Parerga and Paralipomena* [=*PP*] 1, 68) and "a very great man" (*WWR* 1,662), and notes: "Spinoza's *Ethics* is throughout a mixture of the false and the true, the admirable and the bad" (*PP* 1, 68).

[4] Clemens 1899: p. 69. Such transformations are not rare among the German Idealists. In Melamed 2020, I show that significant parts of Schelling's 1801 *Darstellung meiner System der Philosophie* consist of quotes from Spinoza's *Ethics* in which '*Deus*' is replaced by '*Vernuft*.'

[5] Brann 1972: p. 196.

[6] Rappaport 1899: p. 117.

[7] Wicks 2021: §1.

had deep interest in medicine.[8] Schopenhauer's family was of Dutch origin. If we add to all this the fact that in Berlin Schopenhauer studied under Fichte and Schleiermacher,[9] both of whom had deep interest, perhaps even admiration, for Spinoza, we can better understand Schopenhauer's close attachment to Spinoza.

But on the other hand, many of Schopenhauer's notes on Spinoza smack of deep and gross racist hatred; in the marginalia on Spinoza's books in Schopenhauer's personal library, we find frequently the note: "*Ecce Judaeus*,"[10] and when Schopenhauer argues that Spinoza could not break from the Jews, he adds: "a vessel retains the smell of what used to fill it" (*WWR* 2, 662. We will shortly return to the issue of smell).

Schopenhauer's philosophical engagement with Spinoza spreads over many fronts, and an adequate – not to say, complete – treatment of the topic, should cover at least the following issues: Schopenhauer's critique (and misunderstanding) of Spinoza's pivotal concept of *causa sui*;[16] Schopenhauer's claim that Spinoza confused reason [*ratio*] and cause [*causa*];[17] the

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[8] Schopenhauer completed medical school, while Spinoza's circle of friends contained numerous physicians.

[9] Wicks 2021: §1.

[10] See Brann 1972: p. 195.

[16] "The true emblem of *causa sui* is Baron Münchausen, who, clamping his legs around his horse as it sinks into the water pulls the pigtail up over his head and raises himself and the horse into the heights; under this emblem, put: *causa sui*." (*Fourfold Root* [=*FR*], 20 (§8). Cf. Moreau and Laerke 2022: p. 430. For Schopenhauer's misreading of Spinoza's *causa sui* as merely a "cognitive ground" rather than an efficient cause, see Schopenhauer, *FR*, 18 (§8). On Spinoza's definition of *causa sui*, see Melamed 2021:

[17] See, for example, Schopenhauer, *FR*, 17-18 (§8).

relationship between Schopenhauer's and Spinoza's monisms;[18] the eminent role that both philosophers assign to causality;[19] and finally, Schopenhauer's view of the world as a macroanthropos, as opposed to Spinoza's attack on anthropomorphic thinking.[21] An attempt to reconstruct a genuine philosophical dialogue between Schopenhauer and Spinoza should begin by setting the record straight and clarifying the former's mis-readings of the latter (and there are quite a few of this kind[22]). We could also benefit from comparing Schopenhauer's reception of Spinoza's with that of Schopenhauer's German contemporaries.[23] Regrettably our

[18] For a helpful discussion of this issue, see Segev, "Schopenhauer's Critique of Spinoza," 557-8.

[19] For a helpful discussion of Schopenhauer's claim that all the Kantian categories are reducible to causality, see Wicks 2021: §3. In Spinoza, causality is co-extensive with conception and is more extensive than the *in alio* relation. Thus, in principle, both conception and inherence could be reduced to causation (see Melamed 2013: Ch. 3). Whether Spinoza actually carried out such a reduction is a topic I cannot discuss adequately here.

[21] Schopenhauer, *WWR* 2, 659. In this context, Schopenhauer writes: "it is clearly more accurate to teach understanding of the world from human beings rather than human beings from the world" (*WWR* 2, 659). For Schopenhauer, the human will is given to us directly, and we should therefore understand the world in terms of the will which is most directly given to us. For Spinoza's systematic attack on anthropomorphism, see the appendix to Part One of the *Ethics*. Cf. Melamed 2010: pp. 155-61.

[22] See, for example, Schopenhauer's frequent reference to the Spinoza's *attributes* of extension and thought, as "accidents" (*FR*, 155, n. 22) or "modes" (*PP* 1, 68).

[23] Like the German Idealists, Schopenhauer frequently claims that Spinoza revived the philosophy of the Eleatics (see, for example, *PP* 1, 67 and *WWR* 2, 659. Cf. Hegel 1995*:* vol. 3, pp. 257-8). Like Hegel (see, for example, Hegel 1995: vol. 3, pp. 252-3), Schopenhauer claimed that Spinoza did not belong

space here is limited and so if we wish to treat any of the issues in any depth, we must restrict the scope of the current chapter. For this reason, I have decided to concentrate on two central issues: animal rights (Part I) and evil (Part II). These issues are, clearly, at least as important as the others listed above.

Part I: The Dog, the Jew, and the Absent Spider

Schopenhauer was a dog-lover. His two French poodles, Butz and Atman, provided him with affectionate company in the lonesome last twenty years of his life. Regrettably, his attitude toward other living beings was somewhat less generous.

In his major work, *The World as Will and as Representation*, Schopenhauer charges Spinoza with contempt for animals:

> Spinoza's contempt for animals which he declares *to be without rights*, mere things for us to use, is entirely Jewish and, at the same time, in conjunction with pantheism, absurd and repulsive: *Ethics* IV, Appendix, ch. 27.[24]

As we shall shortly see, Spinoza never "declared" that animals are without rights. In fact, the very opposite is the case. To see this, we will look closely at §27 of the Appendix to Part IV of the *Ethics*. But before we do that, we need to clarify why Spinoza's contempt for animals

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to his century. However, unlike Hegel (and the rest of the German Idealists), Schopenhauer argued that Spinoza's proper home was in Hinduism. See Brann 1972: 183.

[24] Schopenhauer, *WWR* 2, 662. Italics added. The view of animals as mere things is Kant's, not Spinoza's. See the opening to Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Ak. 7:127: "[A human being] is an entirely different being from *things*, such is irrational animals, with which one can do as one likes" (Kant 2007). Spinoza assigns a significant degree of rationality to animals, thus rejecting Kant's bifurcation between persons and things.

would be alleged as "entirely Jewish." The following passage from Schopenhauer's *Parerga and Paralipomena* might not ultimately provide us with a satisfying answer to the last question, but it definitely teaches us a thing or two about contempt *simpliciter*.

> [I]n his unworthy as well as false propositions regarding animals (*Ethics* IV, appendix, ch. 26, and in the same part, prop. 37, scholium.), *Spinoza speaks the way a Jew understands it, in accordance with chs. 1 and 9 of Genesis, so that we others, who are accustomed to more pure and worthy doctrines, are overpowered by the 'Jewish stench'* [*foetor judaicus*]. Dogs he does not seem to have known at all. The shocking sentence with which ch. 26 begins: 'Besides men, we know of no particular thing in nature in whose mind we may rejoice, and whom we can associate with ourselves in friendship or any sort of fellowship', is best answered by a Spanish man of letters of our day (Larra, pseudonym Figaro, in *El doncel*, ch. 33): 'El que no ha tenido un perro, no sabe lo que es querer y ser querido.' (He who has never kept a dog does not know what it is to love and be loved.)[25]

What are the horrific "Jewish" views of animals stated in Genesis Ch. 1 and Ch. 9? According to Mor Segev's sensible suggestion,[26] what Schopenhauer had in mind is Gen. 1:28-29 [27] and

[25] Schopenhauer, *PP* 1, 68-9. Italics added.

[26] Segev 2021: p. 565.

[27] "28: And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion [ורדו] over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. 29: And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for nourishment [לאכלה]." I have used the King James translation, but corrected the misleading last word of verse 29.

Gen. 9:3.[28] In these two verses, God blesses Adam and Eve, grants them dominion over the other animals, but *restricts* their nourishment to fruits and vegetable only (Gen. 1:30 restricts the nourishment of the other animals to vegetables and plants as well). In the latter verse (i.e., Gen. 9:3), God tells Noah, after the flood, that from now on, he is allowed to consume animal flesh (but under some restrictions, see Gen. 9:4). Gen. 9:3 clearly refers back to Gen. 1:29-30: while in the earlier verses, both humans (i.e., Adam and Eve) and the other animals are told that they may consume only "ירק עשב [green herbs]", the later verses tell Noah, that henceforth, the flesh of other animals, is permitted for human consumption, just like the "ירק עשב [green herbs]."

The conclusion an *intelligent* reader should have from comparing Gen. 1:28-29 with Gen. 9:3 is that, from the point of view of the Biblical narrator, human beings were not originally permitted to consume meat, and that only after the flood, as God realized the imperfection of his creatures (both humans and animals, see Gen. 6: 6-7 and 12), God made a compromise and allowed human beings to consume meat (with some restrictions against cruel killing. See Gen. 9:4).[29]

How far this is from contempt or cruelty toward animals I shall let the readers judge for themselves. (In passing, let me note that despite his ample talk against cruelty toward

[28] "3: Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things."

[29] The view that humanity was originally prohibited to kill animals for nourishment has been endorsed by numerous rabbinic authorities. See, for example, *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Sanhendrin,59b.

animals, Schopenhauer was not vegetarian.[30]) Does this mean that Schopenhauer was not an intelligent reader? Not necessarily. Prejudices and racist hatred have their own psychological dynamics, and if anyone has any doubt about Schopenhauer's antisemitism, let us have a look at another passage, where Schopenhauer shares with us some further words of wisdom about "Jewish stench."

> The good Lord, foreseeing in his wisdom that his chosen people would be dispersed throughout the world, gave to its members a specific odor whereby he could everywhere recognize and discover them, namely the *foetor Judaicus*.[31]

I very much doubt Schopenhauer's accusation that "in Judaism" animals have no rights deserves anything other than ridicule and disgust, but to set the record straight, let me note that "צער בעלי חיים [the command to relieve the distress and pain of animals]" is a severe religious obligation which, according to most rabbinic authorities, not only permits (in many circumstances) desecration of the Sabbath in order to help an animal, but also implies a prohibition on hunting, the fattening of geese, and any harm to animals which is not immediately required for the sustenance of human lives.[32]

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[30] Schopenhauer justifies a carnivorous diet for health reasons, arguing that humans are originally and naturally herbivorous, but became dependent on meat upon migrating to colder regions (*PP* II, V: "A Few Words on Pantheism", section 92). I am indebted to Mor Segev for pointing out this source to me.

[31] Schopenhauer, MR 4, 392, quoted in Wicks 2017: p. 349, n. 24.

[32] The Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Baba Metzia, 32b) debates whether the obligation to assist animals in distress is Biblical (and thus, most severe), or merely a rabbinic enactment (in which case, the

Let's turn now to Spinoza, and see whether Schopenhauer's words are justified in his case. Sections 26 and 27 of the Appendix to Part IV of the *Ethics* – the passages mentioned by Schopenhauer in the quotes above – read:

> §26. Apart from men we know no singular thing in nature whose Mind we can enjoy, and which we can join to ourselves in friendship, or some kind of association. And so whatever there is in nature apart from men, the principle of seeking our own advantage does not demand that we preserve it. Instead, it teaches us to preserve or destroy it according to its use, or to adapt it to our use in any way whatever.
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> §27. The principal advantage [*utilitas*] which we derive from things outside us—apart from the experience and knowledge we acquire from observing them and changing them from one form into another—lies in the preservation of our body. That is why those things are most useful to us which can feed and maintain it, so that all its parts can perform their function properly…[33]

Sections 26 and 27 of the Appendix rework and explain Spinoza's claims about vegetarianism which appear earlier in Part IV of the *Ethics*, and it would be helpful to have these claims as well before our eyes.

> [T]he law against killing animals [*legem illam de non mactandis brutis*] is based more on empty superstitions and unmanly compassion [*muliebri misericordia*] than sound reason. The rational principle of seeking our own advantage teaches us the necessity of joining with men, but not with the lower animals [*brutis*], or with things whose nature is different from human nature. *We have the same right against them as they have against us.*

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obligation would have been less strict). Eventually, it rules that the obligation is strictly Biblical (Tractate Shabbat, 128b).

[33] E4App§§26-27.

> Indeed, because the right of each other is defined by his virtue, or [*seu*] power, men have a greater right against the lower animals than they have against men. Not that I deny that the lower animals have sensations [*Nec tamen nego bruta sentire*]. But I do deny that we are therefore not permitted to consider our own advantage, use them at our pleasure, and treat them as is most convenient for us. For they do not agree [*conveniunt*] in nature with us, and their affects are different in nature from human affects (see IIIp57s).[34]

There is something peculiar in Spinoza's talk about a *law* [*lex*] against killing animals. I am not aware of any seventeenth-century Dutch civil law which prohibited the consumption of meat. The fact that Spinoza describes this law as *superstitio vana* seems to indicate that he has in mind a practice of one of the established religions. Given the fact that Kabbalism was quite common in early modern Jewish Amsterdam, and that vegetarianism was quite common among the Kabbalists,[35] I suspect that Spinoza's words here refer to this Kabbalist tradition (as well as the severe restrictions on the consumption of meat placed by the laws of Kashrut).

No matter what was the precise historical target of Spinoza's criticism of vegetarianism, the gist of his argument is pretty clear. At bottom, Spinoza assumes that on the metaphysical level animals are not that different from human beings: they "have sensations"

[34] E4p37s1| II/236/34-237/10. Italics added.

[35] Isaac Luria, perhaps the greatest Kabbalist of all time, is said to have avoided killing *any* animals, mosquitos and lice included (Vital 2020: Haqdama 38). On a personal level, I can attest that my father's grandfather (after whom I am named) was a Kabbalist and a vegetarian.

and mental life;[36] and in another text, Spinoza seems to express a reservation about the common view of animals as irrational.[37] Human beings might enjoy a higher degree of rationality, and a greater complexity of mental life,[38] but unlike Descartes and Kant,[39] Spinoza does not think that human beings are distinguished by rank from the other animals, or that there is an abyss between humanity and the rest of nature. Just like us, the lower animals have mental lives, and *rights*.

Still, claims Spinoza, human beings have more rights than the lower animals, because rights are just reflections of power relations,[40] and usually – but not always[41] – human beings

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[36] See E2p13s| II/96/26-97/16. In Ep. 32 (IV/171/11-12) Spinoza ascribes reasoning to a worm. For further discussion of this issue, see Melamed 2023: Part 1.

[37] See E3p57s| II/187/5, where Spinoza discusses "animals that are *called* irrational [*quae irrationalia dicuntur*]." My italics.

[38] See E2p13s| II/97/8-14. Cf. E2p14.

[39] For Kant's view of humanity as being by "rank [*Rang*] and dignity entirely different from other *things*, such as irrational animals," see Anthropology, §1 (Ak. 7:127). Notice that, unlike the views of Kant, Descartes, and other humanists, Spinoza's argument for the impossibility of friendship with animals due to our heterogenic nature need not assume that our nature is in any sense *better* than other animals. I am not useful as a friend to my spider, just as she is not useful as a friend to me.

[40] See, for example, TTP Ch. 16 (III/189/24) and Ep. 50 (IV/240/20-24). Spinoza's understanding of rights reflects the medieval and early modern view of rights as *privileges*. Against this background developed the much more recent notion of *universal* civil or human rights.

[41] A lion which devours a human being or a bull which kills the matador prove themselves to be more powerful than the relevant human being, and, to that extent, to have more right.

have more power than other animals. So far, I find Spinoza's argument quite reasonable (though I do not necessarily share his understanding of rights).

Now comes the issue of friendship. For Spinoza, the greatest benefit I can have from another entity is friendship (and Schopenhauer seems to think highly of friendship as well). According to §26 of the Appendix to *Ethics* IV, the essential features of friendship are (i) the ability to enjoy the mind of another being, and (ii) empowerment by forming a new and stronger individual comprised of the two friends.[42] Spinoza thinks that I cannot become a friend of a wolf (nor can the wolf consider me a friend) because we do not have the same affects (i.e., emotions). I do not have the same affects as the wolf because the affects (and the emotional life) of every animal are at least partly determined by the essence of that animal. To the extent my essence is different from the essence of the wolf, our affects must be different as well,[43] and, as a result, claims Spinoza, we can neither enjoy the mental lives of other animals nor can we form a new and empowered individual by bonding with animals.

The counterexamples to this line of reasoning are pretty obvious. A blind person is clearly empowered by bonding with a Labrador, and for all I can tell, Spinoza's considered view should be that it is absolutely irrational for the blind person to use his dog for any other

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[42] "[If], for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one" (E4p18s).

[43] "Both the horse and the man are driven by a Lust to procreate; but the one is driven by an equine Lust, the other by a human Lust. So also the Lusts and Appetites of insects, fish, and birds must vary. Therefore, though each individual lives content with his own nature, by which he is constituted, and is glad of it, nevertheless that life with which each one is content, and that gladness, are nothing but the idea, or soul, of the individual. *And so the gladness of the one differs in nature from the gladness of the other as much as the essence of the one differs from the essence of the other*" (E3p57s. Italics mine).

purpose. Can we become friends with Labradors? Here I think the real question is what do we understand by friendship? Can we enjoy the minds of other animals? Here too the question is what do we mean by this notion ('enjoy the minds')? If enjoying the mind of another being requires linguistic communication, our ability to enjoy the mind of wolves and dogs is limited. But if enjoying their minds is just the communication of affections, Schopenhauer may well be right to observe that dogs may be our best friends. Of course, Spinoza would most likely ridicule the notion of friendship with a being whose thoughts you do not really understand. (Or, perhaps, the last thing you need from a friend is for them to burden you with their thoughts? If so, dogs are indeed your ideal friends).

Spinoza's claim that we cannot become friends of other animals because we do not share the same essence (or nature) also faces a significant challenge from *within* his system. A major unresolved problem in Spinoza's philosophy is the question whether two (or more) particulars can share the very same essence.[44] Spinoza's claims about animals in E4p37s1 seem to indicate that he thinks that human beings share at least a significant part of their essence with each other (for otherwise, their affects will not be similar and they could not form friendship). But if partial overlap of essence (and the resulting partial overlap of emotions) suffice to secure friendship, why not assume that even a somewhat more restricted overlap of essence (and emotions) should also suffice to secure a certain degree of friendship with animals?

[44] For texts supporting the view that essences are not sharable, see E2d2, E2p37d, and E3p6. For texts supporting the view that essences are sharable, see E1p9s2, E1p17s (II/63/20), and E4p18s (II/223).

From a different angle, we might raise doubts about Spinoza's commitment to the claim that "all men share the same common nature."[45] In the *Theological Political Treatise*, Spinoza mocks the view that there are different species of men (presciently denouncing the basis of various forms of modern racism);[46] yet, in the *Ethics*, immediately following his explanation of the difference in affects between humans and lower animals, Spinoza notes: "Finally, from P57 it follows that there is no small difference between the gladness by which a drunk is led and the gladness a Philosopher possesses. I wished to mention this in passing" (E3p57s). E3p57, to which the last quote refers, states: "Each affect of each individual differs from the affect of another as much as the essence of the one differs from the essence of the other." Spinoza's appeal to E3p57 in order to explain the difference between the gladness of the drunk and that of the philosopher clearly implies that he considers the essence, or nature, of the two types of people to be distinct as well. Obviously, the difference in nature between the philosopher and the drunk may well be more modest than the difference in nature between the drunk person and his dog. Yet, these differences seem to be a matter of degree rather than a clear-cut dichotomy between human and non-human animals.[47] If, on some occasions, a drunk person may benefit from the friendship of a philosopher (in spite of the fact that the

[45] TP Ch. 7| III/319.

[46] TTP Ch. 3| III/47/2.

[47] Who then would be most useful to the drunk person? If usefulness is determined merely by having very similar essence, it would seem that another drunk person would be more useful to the original drunkard than a philosopher. On the other hand, in several other passages Spinoza asserts that no one is more useful to a human being than a *rational* human being (E4App§9).

two do not share the very same essence), why can't the drunk person form some sort friendship with the dog (despite the difference in essence between the two)?

Part 2: Evil and Pantheism

Schopenhauer's most substantial criticism of Spinoza lies in the claim that pantheism[48] necessarily leads to the denial of the abundant presence of evil in the world, and to the affirmation of life and its joys.

> The fact that Spinoza everywhere explicitly and emphatically praises joyfulness and stipulates it as condition and sign of every praiseworthy act, but completely dismisses all sorrow… all this he does only out of love for consistency. For if this world is a god, then it is an end in itself and must rejoice in its existence and praise it, so 'Jump, Marquise! Always merry, never sad!' *Pantheism is essentially and necessarily optimism.* (*PP* 1, 68. Italics added)

Strictly speaking, we can conceive of a pantheism that is not that optimistic. If all things are in God, but God is anxious and depressed,[50] pantheism would lead to deep pessimism. Obviously, the view of God as a perfect being would normally exclude the idea that God could be depressed. Thus, it would be fair to say that on the common perception of God as perfect, pantheism is likely to lead to the affirmation of this world as it is.

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[48] In this paper I do not distinguish between pantheism and panentheism, because this distinction will have hardly any effect on my claims. For a detailed discussion of the distinction, see Melamed 2018.

[50] On can find an example of such dark pantheism in the 1920s poetry of Uri Zvi Greenberg, a giant of Hebrew poetry. For a brief discussion of his expression of this anxious and depressed pantheism, see Stahl 2020: pp. 67-9.

Since one's *modus ponens* is another's *modus tollens*, Schopenhauer argues that the abundance of evil in the world suffices to refute pantheism:

> Any pantheism must ultimately founder on the unavoidable demands of ethics, and then on the evils and sufferings of the world. If the world is theophany then everything that human beings (and in fact even animals) do is both divine and excellent; there can be nothing to complain about and nothing to praise more than anything else; and thus no ethics…Pantheism is completely unviable in the face of the world's terrible aspect… If we go into the interior [of the world] and include its *subjective* and *moral* aspects, with their preponderance of need, suffering and misery, of dissention, evil, insanity, and perversity; then we will sooon become horribly aware that we have anything but a theophany before us.[51]

Spinoza's view of the world as "both divine and excellent" has very concrete historical sources, claims Schopenhauer; it is only because Spinoza began with Judaism that he ended up with his fanciful optimistic pantheism. Had he begun "impartially" with the true nature of things, he would have reached a very different conclusion.[52]

> For Spinoza his eternal substance, the inner essence of the world, which he himself calls *Deus*, has even in its moral character and its value, nothing other than Jehovah, the creator-God who applauds his creation and finds that everything has turned out very well, that 'everything was very good.' Spinoza did no more than remove his personality. For Spinoza too, the world and everything in it is entirely excellent and as it should be, and people have nothing more to do than "live act, and preserve their

[51] Schopenhauer, *WWR* 1, 605-6.

[52] Schopenhauer, PP 1, 65-6.

> existence, in accordance with the principle of seeking their own advantage' (E4p67)… they should enjoy their lives, as long as they last… In short, it is optimism.[53]

Just as in the case of animal rights, Schopenhauer presents virtually the very same criticism against both Spinoza and "Judaism." Both perceive the world as "entirely excellent," and as a result both leave no room for any *ethics*, i.e., for any attempt to improve the world.[54]

Why does Schopenhauer think that Judaism is so optimistic? Schopenhauer claims that Judaism provides an "optimistic creation story,"[55] repeatedly citing Gen. 1:31 "and everything was very good."[56] At no point in his discussion does Schopenhauer pause to ask whether it makes any sense to reduce the complexity of a literary tradition spanning two and a half millennia to a simple championing of one chapter from the Bible (important as it is). Were Schopenhauer to do so (and had he any access to this vast literature), he would have observed that there is no shortage of pessimistic sources within Judaism. We could begin with a brief midrash by Rabbi Meir, the main voice of the Mishna, who expounded Gen. 1:31 by rendering "והנה טוב מאוד [and everything was very good]" by "והנה טוב מוות [and death was good/better]."[57] We would then proceed to the unresolved Talmudic dispute over whether "it is better for a human being to be created, rather than not to be created."[58] Then we may turn

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[53] Schopenhauer, *WWR* 2, 661.

[54] Cf. Segev 2021: pp. 559-61

[55] Schopenhauer, *WWR* 1 635.

[56] See, for example, WWR 1 638, 640, and 661.

[57] *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis IX, 5. Rabbi Meir's exposition is based apparently on the graphic similarity between the Hebrew words 'מאוד' and 'מוות' ('very' and 'death' respectively).

[58] *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Eruvin, 14b.

to the pretty common rabbinic attitude toward theodicy, i.e., that divine justice *should* rule the world though it is hard to square with our experience.[59] The discussion of these and numerous other sources is likely to result in a much more complicated picture, but it is pointless to preach the need for a nuanced and serious observation to someone, like Schopenhauer, whose main analytic tool – at least in the study of Judaism – is a blunt axe.

Overall, I find Schopenhauer's understanding of Spinoza's attitude toward "evil" quite correct. Spinoza has little patience for this notion. Cognition of evil, claims Spinoza, is inadequate cognition (E4p64), and "if the human mind had only adequate ideas, it would form no notion of evil [*notionem mali*]" (E4p64c).

For Spinoza, evil is a mutilated human construct. "Whatever seems immoral, dreadful, unjust, and dishonorable, arises from the fact that [one] conceives the things themselves in a way which is distorted, mutilated and confused" (E4p73s).[60] In the Appendix to the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza includes "good and evil" [*Bonus et Malus*] in the list of notions that are *entia, non rationis, sed imaginationis*.[61] Spinoza provides a fascinating cognitive genealogy of evil that is based on his nominalism. We conceive things as evil by comparing them with things we consider similar and then judging how much better things could have been. When making this comparison, we rely on universals. For example, when we think of Dostoevski's Raskolnikov murdering his landlady, we compare him with other men by using the universal

[59] "אין לנו לא משלוות הרשעים ולא מיסורי הצדיקים [We can make sense neither of the serenity of the wicked nor of the torments of the righteous]" *Mishnah*, Tractate Avot, Ch. IV, 15.

[60] Cf. TTP Ch. 16| III/191. The next page is mostly adapted from Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics,* 36-7.

[61] E1app| II/81/30, 82/17, and 83/15.

'human being.' We observe that most particulars that fall under this universal are capable of mercy and do not kill old ladies. Thus, we conclude that Raskolnikov's act is evil, insofar as it is less perfect (i.e., deprived of a perfection that naturally belongs to it) than our notion of 'human being' (the universal itself being merely an abstraction from the particulars we encounter). In a similar way, we conclude that the earthquake in Lisbon was evil, because in other areas the Earth's crust does not cause such devastation. Now, for Spinoza, all this is just illusionary thinking resulting from a self-centered anthropomorphism. When we attribute to God the belief that something is evil, we err even further in thinking that God, "*like his creatures*, had sympathy with some things and an antipathy for others" (Ep. 19| IV/90/30; emphasis added). From the objective and true perspective of God, there is no evil. God knows every entity in its particularity, not through universals. "God does not know things abstractly, and does not make such general definitions" (Ep. 19| IV/92/1). There was no evil in the occurrence of the earthquake in Lisbon because this piece of land was not deprived of any perfection with which God, or nature, could have endowed it. It was as perfect as any other event on earth. From Schopenhauer's point of view, Spinoza's "solution" to the problem of evil may seem quite astonishing, even devastating, but this is a direct result of one of the main lines of Spinoza's thought: his battle against anthropomorphism and the demand that the "proper order of philosophizing" is to contemplate first the divine nature, and only then try to understand particular things from that perspective (E2p10s2 |II/93).[62] From the divine and objective perspective, there is nothing imperfect or evil.

Spinoza's counterfactual "if the human mind had only adequate ideas, it would form no notion of evil" (E4p64c), seems to concede that in reality we do not have only adequate

[62] Cf. Melamed 2013: pp. xv-xvii.

ideas (cf. E2p40s and E3p1), and to that extent, we do form notions of evil. Evil is what prevents us from having some good (E4d2). This notion changes according to what we take to be the good. For the drunkard, preventing him the whisky bottle is evil. For the philosopher, evil is what prevents her from "approaching nearer and nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves" (E4pref| II/208/20). Here, however, there is an interesting paradox. The greatest good of those who seek virtue is knowledge (E4p36d), and so the model the philosopher attempts to achieve through the process of gradually increasing her knowledge is one in which all her ideas *are* adequate. What prevents us from having only adequate ideas is – for the philosopher – "evil." But per E4p64c, we can certainly know that a person who has the notion of evil does not *not* have only adequate ideas. Thus, it would seem that having the notion of evil *is* evil.

Undoubtedly, there were many things which prevented Schopenhauer from achieving his goals and which undermined what he took to be the good and just state of things: diseases (minor and major), earthquakes, the fact that he would not live for three thousand years (not to say eternity), and even a certain, nasty, G.W. F. Hegel who stole the philosophical glory Schopenhauer deserved. If it helps you, Spinoza would tell Schopenhauer, please feel free to call each and every one of them 'evil.' However, Spinoza would continue, *you* should have long ago realized that the world does not exist for your sake (or for anyone's sake). From Spinoza's perspective, Schopenhauer got rid of the mythical belief in divine creation, but he was still stuck in the anthropocentric belief that the world – for some mysterious reason – was supposed to fit his desires. "It doesn't; grow-up," Spinoza would conclude.

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