

Schopenhauer's Altruistic Sentimentalism¹

1 Introduction

Some thinkers in the West, such as Hume, have argued that our common membership in the human species is grounds for moral sentiment: the ethical sentiments are those that promote our collective human interests, while the unethical ones are those that do not. Schopenhauer, truer to the Indian tradition, argues that the fundamental sentiments or morality are not species based, but will based, and have to do with our commonality as agents. Ethics then on his account is not merely about our fellowship with other humans, but our commonality with all willing things. To such things we owe respect and compassion on his account. This is to take a page out of many Indian philosophical traditions. This commonality is not a coincidence. Schopenhauer is one of the very few famous philosophers of the Western tradition, perhaps the only one, to take Indian philosophy seriously.

He is usually regarded as holding a position of *advaita* (monism) but has yet been influential on a diverse group of thinkers who are not known for being monists, including Nietzsche. Some have suggested that contemporary Indian understanding of its own, Hindu traditions relies heavily upon Schopenhauer's mediation. Schopenhauer is known for representing the *Upaniṣad's* formula *tat tvam asi* (you are that) as a basic principle of ethics. Moreover, this representation has been criticized as historically mistaken (cf. Hacker 1995). Yet, other sympathetic authors have argued that Schopenhauer's position may in may be closer to traditional Advaita accounts than usually supposed (Nicholson 2016; Berger 2010, 2007; Killingley 1998)—perhaps in part because the usual interpretation of Advaita thought in Hinduism is mediated not through a philosophy of ethics (such as Schopenhauer's). Indeed, some have even pointed out that the idea that an underlying unity forms the foundations of Ethics is not at all a new idea, and can be traced back to the *Upaniṣad's* themselves (Black 2013).

(1) In this lesson, we shall further review: (2) Schopenhauer's theory of the Will in contrast to Idea or Representation, and his theory of ethics. This sets the ground work for specifying Schopenhauer's ethical argument summed up in the idea that: (3) rejection of *māyā* (the appearance of plurality) leads to compassion. We shall then consider (4) some exegetical and philosophical objections to Schopenhauer's position. Some of these objections are very superficial and rest on the idea that Schopenhauer did not fully appreciate the philosophical resources he was relying upon. But these criticisms point to a deeper criticism that is substantive: Schopenhauer's ethics is inconsistent. Finally, we

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shall (5) conclude with some observations about Schopenhauer's place in the canon of Western philosophy.

2 Explication: Main Concepts

2.1 Theory of the Will and Idea or Representation

The concepts that we need to familiarize ourselves with in understanding Schopenhauer are those of the history of philosophy. From Plato, Schopenhauer draws many resources. One of the key contributions of Plato to philosophy is to distinguish between appearance and reality, and to moreover identify reality with what is super sensible, and appearance with the empirical. For Plato, it is not actual chairs that are real so much as the categories of chairs. Kant, following up on Plato, reformulates this distinction into one of the *phenomena* and the *noumena*. The phenomenal is the world of experience, on Kant's account, but one created by our own activity. The noumenal in contrast refers to the *thing in itself* beyond the phenomenal.

The idea of the will plays an important part in Kant's ethics. For Kant, when we reason ethically, we consider laws to constrain our own will. The will is good on Kant's account, when we will what is in conformity with our essence as human agents. He calls such maxims *categorical imperatives* (Kant 1998). It is noteworthy that Kant, for his part, was reacting to an earlier approach to ethics that we find in authors such as Hume. For them, it is our feeling or sentiment that provides the groundwork for morality: those feelings that are in the interests of humanity are the moral ones, while those that are not are the immoral ones. Kant for his part sought to save this insight by jettisoning the sentimentalism. He believes he accomplished this by a moral rationalism, that renders ethics a matter of reasoning about our will. As we shall see, Schopenhauer's response was in a return to sentimentalism, but one that transcends the boundaries of species.

From the Indian tradition, Schopenhauer draws liberally from the thought of Buddhist philosophers and so called "Hindu" sources, such as the Upanishads. Specifically, he draws on the formula "*tat tvam asi*" to elucidate his idea of the world as ultimately the will:

We see in them the manifold grades and modes of the manifestation of will, which in all beings of one and the same grade, wills always in the same way, which objectifies itself as life, as existence in such endless variety, and such different forms, which are all adaptations to the different external circumstances, and may be compared to many variations on the same theme. But if we had to communicate to the observer, for reflection; and in a word, the explanation of their inner nature, it would be best to make use of that Sanscrit formula which occurs so often in the sacred books of the Hindoos, and is called Mahavakya, i.e. the

great word : " Tat twam asi" which means, this living thing art thou."(Schopenhauer Accessed 2015, 284)

With this formula, Schopenhauer unites the Kantian account of the agent essence as will and creator of experiences, the Upaniṣad's tradition unity in diversity.

If we identify the will with desire, as Schopenhauer tends to, we see how he connects Buddhist philosophy with his project. According to the Four Noble Truths of early Buddhism, the cause of suffering is desire, and the proper response to this trouble is to renounce desire. If asceticism is the denial or rejection of desire, the Four Noble Truths is asceticism. But it is also explicitly what Schopenhauer affirms with respect to the will, which he suggests should be *mortified* (Schopenhauer Accessed 2015).

Finally, Schopenhauer is regarded and described as a *monist*. Monism is the idea that there is only one real thing: it is a thesis of metaphysics. Monists have to tell a story about how it is that we seem to recognize a diversity of objects. They have very little choice as to deny this appearance of diversity as anything other than an illusion. So we find that Schopenhauer identifies the *principle of individuation*—the function of the Will that creates the appearance of diversity—as "*māyā*", which is the Indic term for *illusion*.

According to Schopenhauer, what keeps this illusion alive is egoism, or selfishness. It allows for the compartmentalization of reality. Yet, he believes, when we embrace the difficulty of life, we are driven to see through illusion:

In one individual it appears powerfully, in another more weakly ; in one more subject to reason, and softened by the light of knowledge, in another less so, till at last, in some single case, this knowledge, purified and heightened by suffering itself, reaches the point at which the phenomenon, the veil of *Māyā*, no longer deceives it. It sees through the form of the phenomenon, the *principium individuationis*. The egoism which rests on this perishes with it, so that now the motives that were so powerful before have lost their might, and instead of them the complete knowledge of the nature of the world, which has a quieting effect on the will, produces resignation, the surrender not merely of life, but of the very will to live. Thus we see in tragedies the noblest men, after long conflict and suffering, at last renounce the ends they have so keenly followed, and all the pleasures of life forever, or else freely and joyfully surrender life itself. (Schopenhauer Accessed 2015, 327)

Life as such is a production of the will on Schopenhauer's account, but it is the dissatisfaction of the will, its insatiable appetite that points to its hidden desire for sympathy.

We pass from the felt pain, even when it is physical, to a mere idea of it, and then find our own state so deserving of sympathy that we are firmly and sincerely convinced that if another were the sufferer, we would be full of sympathy, and love to relieve him. But now we ourselves are the object of our own sympathy ; with the most benevolent disposition we are ourselves most in need of help ; we feel that we suffer more than we could see another suffer; and in this very complex frame of mind, in which the directly felt suffering only comes to perception by a doubly circuitous route, imagined as the suffering of another, sympathised with as such, and then suddenly perceived again as directly our own, — in this complex frame of mind, I say, Nature relieves itself through that remarkable physical conflict. (Schopenhauer Accessed 2015, 486)

Reality on Schopenhauer's account is an unintelligent pursuit of the will that conflicts with itself as it attempts to satisfy itself. But what it produces is not the object of its desires, but more representation of itself. This theme is captured in the title of his leading 1818 work: *World as Will and Representation* (or *World as Will and Idea*). The will on this account takes on the position of the thing-in-itself (cf. Cartwright 2010). What underlies phenomena is the will.

Some have noted Schopenhauer's similarity with Neo Platonism and Yogacara Buddhism, which both hold that there is an underlying practical reality underlying diversity (Wicks Fall 2014 Edition). But others have noted that this position is closer to classical Advaita Vedānta than usually supposed (Berger 2010). Śaṅkara, for instance, argues at the start of his commentary on the *Brahma Sūtra* that the idea of individuation comes about by the identification of the self with other. This is an agential explanation of diversity, but one that he criticizes as ignorance. As these theories identify the world as having two differing aspects, monism may not be the best description of the position.

Despite similarities. the theory is unique, notes the Schopenhauer scholar, Robert Wicks:

Despite its general precedents within the philosophical family of double-aspect theories, Schopenhauer's particular characterization of the world as Will, is nonetheless novel and daring. It is also frightening and pandemonic: he maintains that the world as it is in itself (again, sometimes adding “for us”) is an endless striving and blind impulse with no end in view, devoid of knowledge, lawless, absolutely free, entirely self-determining and almighty. (Wicks Fall 2014 Edition)

2.2 Theory of Ethics

Schopenhauer's views on ethics are articulated in a focussed manner in later 1840 work, *On the Basis of Morality*, which takes a critical view of Kant's ethics, and provides a positive account of ethics as well.

In essence, Kant's view is that moral choice is a species of rational choice, and reason is about self governance. When we choose morally, we choose a rule that is applicable to us by virtue of our membership in the human species, or an ideal kingdom of ends. Such a rule is one that we could will as a universal law of nature. What guides our choice in this matter is what we, as individuals, could assent to as a law by which we should be governed. Schopenhauer finds positive one of Kant's insights: that moral law should lead us to treat people not merely as a means but also an end.

To treat someone merely as a means would be to take no interest in their welfare past their usefulness to you. But to treat them also as an end requires that in calibrating our choices, we choose in a manner that is consistent with their well being. This is laudable on Kant's account. But for Kant, the only things that require this variety of concern are things capable of reciprocating the favour. This is because for Kant, two ideas of being an end itself are the same. One might be an end in oneself in so far as one is the kind of thing morality should be concerned with. One might be an end in oneself as a law giver. For Kant, one must be both in order to be the kind of agent to be taken seriously by ethics. Ethics is hence about being human, or something cognitively alike a human. Animals thought to be cognitively inferior do not count.

According to Kant, we ought to be kind to non human animals so that we do not allow ourselves to cultivate vices that lead us to be cruel to humans (Kant 1996, 6:443; 1974, 5:298-303). This entails that if we can find a way to be cruel to dogs while maintaining our compassion for humans, there would be nothing wrong with torturing dogs for fun (Wood 1998, 194-5). The reason we are special, according to Kantians, is that we can do something that other animals cannot. As David Gauthier writes in a Kantian spirit,

What distinguishes human beings from other animals, and provides the basis for rationality, is the capacity for semantic representation. You can, as your dog on the whole cannot, represent a state of affairs to yourself, and consider in particular whether or not it is the case, and whether or not you would want it to be the case. (Gauthier 2007, 623; cf. Korsgaard 1996, 93; cf. 2007)

This account of reason assumes that the content of semantic representation is somehow private to the human reasoner. If reality is a function of the will, as Schopenhauer theorizes, and if the output of the will is representation, then all willing things encounter representations. The ability to assess semantic representations of our preferences is hardly something that separates us from dogs, if representation is a function of the will.

Schopenhauer was writing some time ago when people did not talk about “semantic representation.” (He apparently did not explicitly affirm that animals as a rule are reasonable and describes them as half way there—cf. *WWI* p.29—and moreover, capable of compassion). David Cartwright notes:

It is likely that Schopenhauer’s claims about non-humans having compassion and jointly compassionate actions towards the generalized suffering of a group of persons are unique within the Western moral tradition. (Cartwright 1999, 280)

But nevertheless, he discussed a similar issue in ethical terms. Instead of semantic representation were one’s preferences are represented to oneself as the basis of reasoning, Schopenhauer spoke of egoism. For him, the problem with Kant can be found by following the threads: according to Kant, ethics is not about the will as such, but just the individual human’s will submitting itself to a law of its own drafting. It is this will that is both judge and jury of what could count as a categorical imperative (*BM* p.82). This is perhaps the location of the genius of Schopenhauer, that he turns Kant’s ethics on its head: it claims to be rational and not based on sentiments, and yet, it is to one’s own sentiments that Kantian ethics defers. The reason that ethics on the Kantian account is egoistic is that it treat’s oneself as an end in itself. It is from the privileged perspective of the self that Kant believes we should generate rules we are willing to put up with. Moral rules a la Kant are merely rules of the self. This is egocentrism on stilts, according to Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer does not opt for a thorough going rationalism. Rather, his view is that we must locate morality in sentiments, but it is the sentiment divorced from selfishness.

I mean the self-interested motives, using the word in its widest sense. Consequently the moral value of an act is lowered by the disclosure of an accessory selfish incentive; while it is entirely destroyed, if that incentive stood alone. The absence of all egoistic motives is thus the Criterion of an action of moral value. (Schopenhauer 1903, 164)

According to Schopenhauer, there are three only three motives that guide choice:

- a) Egoism: the desire for one’s own well-being.
- b) Malice: the desire for another’s woe.
- c) Compassion: the desire for another’s well-being.

These are psychological forces that are ubiquitous. Every human act is referable to one of these three motives (*ibid* 172). Notably, what is absent from this list is malice to oneself (Madigan 2005). The Schopenhauer scholar David Cartwright calls this the “unnamed incentive”: “he only mentions it in a footnote in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, ‘in the interest of systematic consistency’ (W2 607n./H. 3, 697n.).

He claims elsewhere, however, that it possesses ascetic rather than moral value” (Cartwright 1999, 268). But here we find why: compassion on Schopenhauer’s account entails a rejection of a desire for one’s own well-being. Compassion curiously is self-malice, or at least, self-neglect. It is the ascetic counterpart to the moral sentiment. To be compassionate on Schopenhauer’s account is about rejecting a desire for one’s own well-being, which he defines as egoism.

Curiously, Schopenhauer rejects suicide as an option (Jacquette 2000). The considerations adduced provide reasons for this stance. If will is fundamental, and if this will is what underlies appearance, death is an illusion—an event in appearance and not in reality. So we have to find a way to make sense of these competing tensions—between self neglect and the rejection of suicide—as a means of making sense of Schopenhauer. But the loose ends do not end here. Schopenhauer’s views on women, specified in his essay “On Women” are bizarre. Women, like animals, suffer from a lack of reason, we hear, but excel in sympathy for others. One would expect that this entails that women are superior to men according to his ethic. After all, he has shown himself to be no fan of the rationalism of Kantian ethics, and a decided sentimentalist. Yet, this is not at all how he depicts the matter in his 1851 essay “On Women”:

...women are decidedly more sober in their judgment than we are, so that they do not see more in things than is really there; while, if our passions are aroused, we are apt to see things in an exaggerated way, or imagine what does not exist. The weakness of their reasoning faculty also explains why it is that women show more sympathy for the unfortunate than men do, and so treat them with more kindness and interest; and why it is that, on the contrary, they are inferior to men in point of justice, and less honorable and conscientious. For it is just because their reasoning power is weak that present circumstances have such a hold over them, and those concrete things which lie directly before their eyes exercise a power which is seldom counteracted to any extent by abstract principles of thought, by fixed rules of conduct, firm resolutions, or, in general, by consideration for the past and the future, or regard for what is absent and remote. Accordingly, they possess the first and main elements that go to make a virtuous character, but they are deficient in those secondary qualities which are often a necessary instrument in the formation of it. (Schopenhauer 1902, 437)

This passage and essay depicts Schopenhauer as a synthesizer of diverse elements in his environment. We have seen his efforts to combined Indian philosophy and European thought. It seems that here, he is attempting to combine compassion and misogyny. Had this essay been written before *On the Basis of Morality*, it might easy to say that he was moving to a position that he defends consistently. This excuse is not available to us as it comes after *On the Basis of Morality*. Perhaps this error of amazing inconsistency was

the manifestation of senility. Or, perhaps, this is the precursor of a Nietzschean irony—a self deconstructive display of a bad argument.

A couple of points are worth noting before closing this expository section.

First, if it is always wrong to prefer one's own well being to another's, then it is preferable to care for another over one's own well being. This is compassion without egoism on Schopenhauer's account. Then universal martyrdom for the sake of others would be a good thing. It would result in a scenario enshrined in the story the *Gifts of the Magi* : where person A gives up self interest *a* to protect *b* (*b* is self-valued by B), and B gives up self-interest *b* to protect *a* (*a* is self-valued by A). No one is better off, and both parties are worse off.

Second, there is an important counterexample in the case of self-defense to this argument. In section 62 of *World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer argues that the grounds of our rights is the non interference in the interests of another (a point that resonates with Jain ethics) and moreover that each has a right of self-defense. Common evils are permissible in the context of self defense. We can hence harm our attacker, if we are harming them in self defense. Yet, his argument in *On the Basis of Morality* is inconsistent with this. Evil arises because of the preference for one's own well-being over that of another, he argues there. Morality is in turn the abdication of a self-interest. As this tract specifically on ethics comes after his *magnum opus* on the *Will and Representation/Idea*, then it seems that Schopenhauer's views became inconsistent with his earlier acceptance of self-defense. Yet, ethically there are numerous reasons to defend self-defence, and these would contradict the idea that the ground of evil is a preference for one's own well being.

3 Main Argument

What is Schopenhauer's view then? Let us assume that his disparaging views on women, which are not the subject of his continuous philosophical attention, are not essential to his argument. Let us moreover give some deference to the commonalities of *World as Will and Representation/Idea* (*WWI*), as well as *On the Basis of Morality* (*BM*). The commonality here is the idea of compassion as the center of ethics, and selfishness as immorality. The idea that identifying with others is important for ethics, but identification with oneself is vice. Moreover, let us rely upon widely appealed to theses in Schopenhauer's writings. With these constraints, we can critically abstract the following argument from his writing:

- Premise 1. Evil relies upon compartmentalizing the experiences of fortune and misfortune. (*WWI* Book IV, and p. 436)
- Premise 2. Compartmentalizing experiences relies upon the principle of individuation, or the appearance of plurality—*māyā*. (*WWI* p.471, and book IV)

- Premise 3. Removing this appearance of plurality results in the simultaneous experience of one's own fortune and the other's pain. (*Tat tvam asi*. cf. *BM*, p 169: "...I suffer with him, and feel his woe, exactly as in most cases I feel only mine, ... I must in some way or other be identified with him"; *WWI* Book IV)
- Premise 4. One cannot tolerate the experience of pain.(Psychological thesis)
- Premise 5. One is motivated to undermine the case of what one cannot tolerate. (Further psychological thesis)

Therefore. Undermining *māyā* results in compassion for suffering.

Premise 4 and 5 informs much of Schopenhauer's discussion of remorse, and moreover the incompatibility of knowledge of all experiences with one's own egocentric perspective. But as an example that substantiates these claims, he cites the case of people who were filled with remorse upon appreciating the sorrow that they caused, and that this remorse in turn caused a change in behavior or resolve (*BM* p.29). These two psychological theses appear to entail the first premise.

This is similar to another argument:

- Premise 6. Evil relies upon compartmentalizing the experiences of fortune and misfortune.
- Premise 7. Compartmentalizing experiences relies upon the principle of individuation, or the appearance of plurality—*māyā*.
- Premise 8. Rejecting the idea of the self provides no grounds for preferring oneself over another. (*Tat tvam asi*.)
- Premise 9. If one has no grounds for preferring oneself over another, one has no grounds for preferring one's own pleasure over another's pain.
- Premise 10. Pain is intrinsically unattractive. (Conceptual claim)
- Premise 11. Anything unattractive is something that motivates its removal. (Conceptual claim)

Therefore. Rejecting the idea of the self results in compassion for suffering.

Both arguments are valid, as far as I can see. Schopenhauer's argument is not based on rejecting the idea of the self—a strategy that Buddhist moralists draw on. Nāgārjuna, for instance, builds a moral system on the idea that everything is ultimately empty, which is to say, lacking a self. In contrast, Schopenhauer argues that we should abandon our

individual self to drive out evil, but we do this by caring about the welfare of other selves. It hence appears to be the first argument that is Schopenhauer's and not the second.

According to the first argument, we ought to understand ourselves in solidarity with those who suffer (cf. Cartwright 2008). But as formulated, it also entails not mere sympathy, but compassion for others.

One of the sources of this idea of standing in solidarity for others may be the Christian idea of sympathy for Jesus on the Cross. Indeed, Schopenhauer himself comments positively about Christianity, and his interpretation of the *tat tvam asi* formula as identifying with the other might be informed by a latent Christianity. But this may also provide some of the back drop for what makes the argument seem plausible. If you are the view, as many Christians are, that the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross was a tragedy but yet something important, you might be brought to the twin ideas that identifying with another's suffering is important, and that sacrificing one's own well-being (as God apparently did as Jesus on the Cross) is an example of moral action. So we find the Schopenhauer scholar, Wicks, note the importance of Christianity on his thought:

"Moral consciousness and virtue thus give way to the voluntary poverty and chastity of the ascetic. St. Francis of Assisi (*WWR*, Section 68) and Jesus (*WWR*, Section 70) emerge, accordingly, as Schopenhauer's prototypes for the most enlightened lifestyle, as do the ascetics from every religious tradition. (Wicks Fall 2014 Edition)

Schopenhauer's theory is a version of Sentimentalism, and Sentimentalism is a version of Virtue Theory. According to Virtue Theory, the good—the state of virtue—produces right action. The sentimentalists identify virtue with a set of sentiments. Schopenhauer's view is that the chief sentiment is altruism—unselfish concern for others.

4 Objections and Concerns

I shall divide the objections and concerns directed against Schopenhauer's ethics in two parts. The first are historical objections, that proceed from the idea that Schopenhauer gets the history of Indian philosophy wrong to the conclusion that he gets philosophy wrong. The second variety of objection focuses on his arguments.

4.1 Historical Objections

One kind of objection against Schopenhauer is not merely superficial, but logically invalid. It claims that Schopenhauer misrepresented the Vedic tradition—and the formula *tat tvam asi*. *Tat tvam asi* is not ethics but mysticism. Why? It is a formula of monism (the idea that there is only one thing) is inconsistent with ethics. Ergo, his ethics is mistaken (cf. Bhatawadekar 2013, 197-8). This argument is invalid. Even if the formula

was misinterpreted, it does not follow that his conclusions do not follow from *his* idea of what *tat tvam asi* is. It is the interpretation that forms the premise in his philosophy, not the historical quotation. Moreover, this formula in the works of Schopenhauer appear to undo monism altogether as the point of the formula on Schopenhauer's account is not to explicate the unity of everything, but the identity of one's interests with that of the other's. That is consistent with denying one's own interest. If I can affirm the interest of another while denying my own then it seems that our wills are different and there may be no one will underlying everything.

The philosophical aspect of the criticism is the deeper, dubious claim, that *tat tvam asi* as a mystical monism is *supra ethical* (Hacker 1995, 277; Schweitzer 1936, 43) and not ethical. Why is it supra-ethical? Because the ethical requires a diversity of agents, but the *tat tvam asi* formula entails metaphysical monism. This argument is not sound. If ethics is about the relative priority of the right and the good, then monists who believe that everything is one can have an ethic. They merely need a view on the priority of the right versus the good that consists of their monism to succeed. They could take the position that the good is reality and the right is the derivative rejection of plurality. This is the Neo Platonist view: the one ultimate reality is the Good, and everything derivative is a less than good illusion. Decrying evil — the privation of good—is tantamount to rejecting pluralism, which returns us to the Good (Plotinus 1969).

Certainly, this is not Śāṅkara's view.

Śāṅkara for instance holds that dharma is deontological, and hence to be interested in liberation from illusion requires giving up on one's mistaken sense of agency. Failure to do so is an evil for one interested in mokṣa (*Gītā Bhāṣya* 4:21). Mokṣa so understood is a good, but one that does not follow from dharma. Those who reject the moral significance of monism appear to be students of Śāṅkara. But Śāṅkara does not have a monopoly on monism.

One way to understand Rāmānuja's ethics of Qualified Monism is to understand it as a reconciliation of the underlying unity of everything—Brahman as Vishnu the preserver—with the diversity of perspectives—the individual *jīvas*. The resolution of this tension is to be found in the individual living beings governing their actions according to ethical considerations (dharma) that promote the collective good, understood as Vishnu. That is, as we participate in the moral life, individually doing our duty as suited to our station and position in society, we preserve our world. Dharma constitutes the reconciliation of the diversity and unity and affords the individual an opportunity to participate in the divine activity of preservation.

Without having to rely upon qualified monism, Brian Black has shown that there are plenty of examples of monism being reconciled with ethics in the Indian tradition (Black 2013).

Black reminds us that in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.23, Yājñavalkya ties the knowledge of 'all things as the self' with moral ways of acting in the world, such as 'becoming calm, restrained, withdrawn, patient, and composed'. He reminds us that

Sulabhā makes a more explicit argument in the *Mahābhārata*. In her debate with King Janaka she claims that the knowledge of 'all things as self' should lead to treating one's enemy, friend and neutral the same (12.308.128). Black also notes that surprisingly, we see a similar claim made by King Pasenadi to his wife Queen Mallikā in the Buddhist *Saṃyutta Nikāya*:

Having traversed all quarters with the mind, One finds none anywhere dearer than oneself. Likewise, each person holds himself most dear; Hence one who loves himself should not harm others. (SN 1.3 Bodhi 2005)

In short, the objections against Schopenhauer that try to set the record straight by deferring to the history of philosophy consist of two kinds of errors. First, they rely upon the logically invalid argument that because Schopenhauer's sources are not ethical, that his argument is not ethical. Secondly, they rely on the dubious claim that monists can't have views on ethics that are consistent with their metaphysics.

4.2 Philosophical Concerns

Schopenhauer's argument however is weak, and it is not so easy to defend. The first three premises, listed below, are a constant theme of his writings.

- Premise 1. Evil relies upon compartmentalizing the experiences of fortune and misfortune.
- Premise 2. Compartmentalizing experiences relies upon the principle of individuation, or the appearance of plurality—*māyā*.
- Premise 3. Removing this appearance of plurality results in the simultaneous experience of one's own fortune and the other's pain. (*Tat tvam asi.*)
- Premise 4. One cannot tolerate the experience of pain.(Psychological thesis)
- Premise 5. One is motivated to undermine the case of what one cannot tolerate. (Further psychological thesis)

Therefore. Undermining *māyā* results in compassion for suffering.

But to get the first three premises to do work, he needs to rely upon psychological premises (4-5). These are naïve. The first is the idea that pain is unattractive or intolerable. This assumes a certain psychology, which may not be shared by those who are morally confused or defective. The morally confused or defective might desire pain universally: not merely for others but for themselves too. They may be consistent sadists, who wish to inflict pain on themselves and others.

Schopenhauer's response is to argue that:

- P1. P (If someone prefers pain) then Q (egoism: a preference for one's wellbeing that prevents the experience of pain). (*Tat tvam asi.*)
- P2. We should hence reject Q (we should find a way to experience that pain for ourselves).
- Therefore Not P (we would not prefer the pain).

The problem is that this argument conflicts with malice being a separate source of evil. If it is a separate source of evil, then in rejecting egoism, we still might encounter evil. Yet he argues that "The absence of all egoistic motives is thus the Criterion of an action of moral value" (Schopenhauer 1903, 164).

- One may be devoid of egoistic motives and yet be motivated by malice to inflict pain, as perhaps terrorists are. The malice ridden terrorist might not be an egoist: they fancy themselves a *martyr*.

Perhaps Schopenhauer wants to help himself to the following argument:

- P1. Immorality is a matter of a failure of duty (to act non-egoistically).
- P2. Evil is a characteristic of outcomes, not actions.
- Therefore Evil is consistent with morality

So, he is not denying the evil of malice: only that it is immoral. But this is strange. Then it would seem that desiring the pain of another is moral, so long as it is not based on my own selfishness. Genocide is fine, as long as I kill myself too. Compassion would be one route to moral behavior, but so would being consistently belligerent against myself.

So in short, while the first argument noted in this section might be valid, it relies upon a dubious account of why it is that we tolerate pain that has no obvious, rational explanation that is consistent with the facts noted by Schopenhauer.

One important point that has been raised by philosophical commentators and has shown up in our explication, is that Schopenhauer does not appear to be a monist about the will. Indeed, his view seems to be that there is a plurality of willing. Yet, he believes that in our own case, we should mortify our will while we defer to another. This itself appears to be an act of the will. But:

...if I have renounced all willing then I must be as indifferent to the good or harm of another as I am to my own. If it really is true that all morality is based on compassion, then the cessation of willing must be accompanied by an indifference to moral considerations. (Magee 1997, 243)

It is perhaps for this reason that we find that Śaṅkara rejects the idea of ethics as part of the illusion. That is, if I have to reject my own agency in order to appreciate reality as it is, and not as I identify, then I should also give up on the idea that I am obliged to do anything at all. This is Śaṅkara's view (*Gītā Bhāṣya* 4:21)... Śaṅkara may be more consistent on this point than Schopenhauer if Magee is correct.

5 Conclusion

One peculiarity of Schopenhauer is that he is the only classical Western moralist to draw inspiration from Indian philosophy. Yet when we look at the details of his argument we find that he recommends that we give up on our self-interest or well-being and care about others. This would be a case of what critics of Indian thought (such as Schweitzer and Hacker) have depicted as the supra-ethical: in so far as I give up on my self-interest or well-being, I give up on my own life and the possibility of ethical interaction with you. I am committed to the negation of my life and the world defined with me as part of it. This is the position of *world and life negation* that Schweitzer railed against as definitive of Indian thought. Hacker in his criticism of Indian thought helps himself to this criticism.

Yet, when we look to classical Indian philosophers, no one holds Schopenhauer's view. Indian philosophers generally held that in the pursuit of our own freedom we figure out what is good and right for ourselves and others. Even Jains, who are known for their rigours of duty and for recommending ritual fasts to death, do not hold that we should give up on our self-interest or well-being: they merely disagree with the standard accounts of what self-interest or well-being is. They deny that it is bodily, but they assume self-interest as a starting point of rational inquiry into duty and freedom. The fruit of this is our own heroic freedom: our intrinsic virtue. This is freedom from karma---the consequence of past choices. Yet when we look to the Christian tradition, we find the idea of Jesus as God who willingly suffers on the cross (gives up his own well-being) for the sake of others. In Jesus we find God who shows his solidarity with those of us who suffer in contexts of trials and tribulations (cf. *Hebrews* 4:15, 5:1-14). And whereas Adam and Eve fail this test in the Garden of Eden and eat the forbidden fruit, Jesus succeeds in resisting the temptations of the Devil when he is in the desert after his baptism.² Why does he succeed? As he shows on the cross: he is not worried about his own well-being, and hence he is not worried about fulfilling natural desires to be free of suffering. Thus, he will not get tempted by forbidden fruit with its promise of ease. If this is true, Jesus exemplifies Schopenhauer's criterion of moral action: absence of egoism, or a concern for one's own well-being.

Here is the rub: if one is concerned with world and life affirmation, then one is concerned with one's own well being. (One's well being is one's life.) Jesus rejects a concern for his own well being. But, by Modus Tollens, it seems that he would have to reject world and

² I have Joshua Mugg to thank for pointing out the parallels here to me between Jesus on the one hand, and Adam and Eve on the other.

life affirmation too. We have arrived at a curious outcome: Christianity in its valorization of Jesus's selflessness, is the source of the ethic of world and life negation.

If this is true, then Schopenhauer is a Christian moralist who tries to understand his outlook via the resources of Indian philosophy. The result is a moral mysticism that holds that giving up on oneself in favour of another is virtue. The mysticism here derives from something originally non Indian: the idea that we should give up on our well-being and that is a good thing. The idea that Schopenhauer's self denial strikes a chord with Indian monists is implausible: their view is that we should identify with the stand point of the true self—*ātmā*—and that its wellbeing is ours (this is the point of Death's lecture to Nachiketa in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*). Similarly, Buddhists who reject the permanence of the self-do not recommend self-sacrifice, but responsible choice for future selves who inherit the past.

Yet, for the same reason, the ideas that we find in Schopenhauer, which are superimposed on Indian thought by its Christian critics (such as Hacker and Schweitzer) seems to be incorrectly identified with Indian thought. They were annoyed not at Indian thought but Schopenhauer—or perhaps their own Christian ethics re-expressed with Indian philosophical resources. This is very normal. Western critics of Indian thought assume some theory of ethics—their own—interpret Indian thought accordingly, and are disgusted with the results. It never occurs to them that the theory they are annoyed at is the one they used as the criterion of interpretation.

In response, Christian critics such as Hacker and Schweitzer might claim that what they were objecting to was Schopenhauer's (or anyone's) invocation of formulas such as "*tatvam asi*"—'that you are'—and "*maya*"—'illusion'—in service of ethics for this collapses the distinction between self and other, which Christians and many philosophers (East and West) usually treat as basic and required for their moral theory. Yet, in the work of Schopenhauer, such Indian philosophical resources are used to emphasize our solidarity with those who suffer. The monism at play in Schopenhauer's is ethical: it is solidarity. It is the underlying unity of the Will as a *sentimentalized* categorical imperative: to care for others and not oneself. It is the ethics of turning the other cheek. As many commentators have noted, the seeming monism of the Will in Schopenhauer's writing gives way to the reality of a plurality of willing. It is certainly a mistake to confuse Schopenhauer with a standard monist, but, also, with Indian thought—not because all Indian philosophers are monists (they are not), but because most Indian philosophers think that ethics is about not giving up on your well-being. For Schopenhauer, this is the criterion of moral action.

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