

Chapter 4:

Virtue & The Problem of Egoism in Schopenhauer's Moral Philosophy

Patrick Hassan

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Introduction

A central feature of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy is his claim that actions performed out of self-interest—those motivated by egoism [*Egoismus*]¹—are devoid of moral worth (e.g. *OBM*: §15: 197; §16; *passim*). In this broad respect, Schopenhauer is in agreement with Kantian deontology; an ethical position he otherwise takes to be “diametrically opposed” (*OBM*, §2: 122) to his own. Schopenhauer's disagreement with Kant is largely informed by the former's view that moral worth is derived solely from the incentive of compassion [*Mitleid*], the desire for the wellbeing of another: “Only in so far as an action has sprung from [compassion] does that action have moral worth: and every action that proceeds from any other motives whatever has none” (*OBM*, §16: 200). For Schopenhauer, it is precisely one's altruistic inclinations which are the ground of morality, and not, in contrast to Kant, the adherence to an impersonal sense of duty [*Pflicht*].¹

Nevertheless, it has previously been noted that Schopenhauer's account of how compassion is possible invites the charge of egoism, thus threatening the coherence of his ethical framework (Gardiner 1963: 276; Hamlyn 1980: 145; Jacquette 2005: 230; Young 2005: 182; Cartwright 2012: 262; Hassan, 2019: 27). Briefly, the objection runs as follows. Schopenhauer holds that each person is a manifestation of the same underlying Will to Life [*Wille zum Leben*]; their essence, which is the thing-in-itself. Time and space are the *principium individuationis* which characterise only the phenomenal world of appearances, making the notion of a plurality of individual selves merely an illusion. Compassion is made possible, according to Schopenhauer, when the agent gains the

metaphysical insight to pierce through this veil of illusion, recognising the essential unity of all things. He writes that “[t]he veil of *māyā* has become transparent for this person who is practiced in works of love, and the delusion of the *principium individuationis* has deserted him” (*WWR I*, §66: 400), and that “[a]ll genuine virtue proceeds from the immediate and intuitive knowledge of the metaphysical identity of all beings” (*WWR II*: 601). The phenomenology of *how* compassion occurs is important. Schopenhauer writes, when I witness the suffering of another...

I suffer as well in *him*, despite the fact that his skin does not enclose my nerves. Only in this way can *his* woe, *his* distress, become motive *for me*: apart from that only my own can ever do so (*OBM*, §18: 218).

Elsewhere in the same text, he writes that this process...

...requires that I be identified with him in some way, i.e. that the total distinction between me and the other, on which precisely my egoism rests, be removed at least to a certain degree. (*OBM*, §16: 200)

But here seemingly lies a problem: if I desire to alleviate the suffering of another because I do not distinguish between myself and that other, then it appears as if I really desire to alleviate *my own* suffering. While significant attention has been given to this objection, and reasonable responses offered to it, in this chapter I wish to explore a second, currently under-explored charge of egoism.

I have previously argued that Schopenhauer’s moral philosophy is best interpreted as a form of virtue ethics, though a distinctive form in many respects (Hassan, 2019). In *On the Basis of Morality*, as well as book four of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer advances a “morality of disposition [*Moralität der Gesinnung*]” (*WWR II*: 590) ultimately rooted in compassion, and its two cardinal virtues of justice [*Gerechtigkeit*] and love of humanity [*Menschenliebe*]. Schopenhauer is adamant that deontic moral commands are a hangover of Christian metaphysics that make little sense divorced from that conceptual framework.

Alternatively, the proper objects of moral admiration and worth are dispositions of character which are orientated towards compassion for others.

A traditional objection to virtue ethical approaches to morality broadly is that they are intrinsically egoistic (e.g. Hurka, 2001). This is because, it is argued, they are committed to holding the following three claims simultaneously:

- (a) Moral goodness is grounded in a virtuous disposition.
- (b) A virtuous disposition constitutes a benefit to its possessor.
- (c) That benefit is the ultimate justification for cultivating virtue.

By making the good life at least partly constituted by the moral life, it is thought that apparently altruistic actions are, for the virtue ethicist, in fact the prudential instrumentalisation of others for one's personal good.

In light of the proposed tension, my task here is to investigate the consistency of Schopenhauer's own moral philosophy. In doing so, I aim to draw out some normative distinctions along the way which I intend to be useful for not only for exegesis, but also for any analysis of moral worth and the conceptual resources available to an ethics of virtue. Let us begin by elucidating the objection in more detail, noting its different versions, before then exploring the extent to which Schopenhauer must confront it.

1. Why Be Virtuous? — Clarifying the Objection

The basis of the general charge that virtue ethics is objectionably egoistic is that the virtues benefit their possessors, and that this is the ultimate justification for developing them. Different traditions explain the first claim in various ways. Historically, the charge has primarily, but not exclusively, been levelled at eudaemonistic versions in the Aristotelian tradition. According to eudaemonism, an agent's reasons for all actions are ultimately derived from that agent's own

wellbeing or flourishing. On this view, the virtues are *necessary*—and, on some stronger versions, *sufficient*—for the final end of the flourishing or *eudaemonia* of *the possessor*. But if the virtues are valuable because they are constitutive of *my* flourishing and not another's, then it looks as if that what justifies procuring them is their contributing to my interests or personal good. For example, if being merciful is a disposition that it is valuable for me to have, then acquiring and exercising it will be justified in its ability to contribute to *my* good, with the object mercy is directed towards being a means to my good.

The objection is importantly ambiguous in more ways than one. It is necessary to first clarify how the term 'egoistic' is to be understood in this context, and how exactly it is thought to be problematic. As has been noticed (Toner, 2006), it has sometimes been the case in moral philosophising that a folk understanding of 'egoism' is presumed, without much of a felt need to distinguish it from the closely related but potentially different concepts of 'selfishness', 'self-interestedness' or 'self-centredness'. However, this is a mistake which has led to a muddying of the waters. As Bernard Williams clarifies, when it is objected that a particular position is 'egoistic', we usually have something specific in mind:

The trouble with the egoist is not that it is *desires* that he expresses, nor that they are *his* desires—the trouble is that all his desires are for things *for him* (Williams, 1973: 260)

Elsewhere Williams elucidates this point in more detail:

Ground projects do not have to be selfish, in the sense that they are just concerned with things for the agent. Nor do they have to be self-centred, in the sense that the creative projects of a Romantic artist could be considered self-centred (where it has to be *him*, but not *for him*)...A man devoted to the cause of curing injustice in a certain place, cannot just insist on his plan for doing that over others', if convinced that theirs will be as effective as his...For if he does insist on that, then we learn that his concern is not merely that injustice be removed, but that *he* remove it—not necessarily a dishonorable concern, but a different one (Williams, 1981: 13-14)

For purposes of clarity, I shall henceforth use the following terminology:

Egoism in the narrow sense (N-Egoism): the assigning of lexical priority to one's own wellbeing, where one's actions are determined according to what secures the goods identified by the accompanying theory of wellbeing (e.g. pleasure, knowledge, achievement) *for the agent*.²

Egoism in the broad sense (B-Egoism): the importance and value of all things—persons, organisations, causes, places, things, etc—have their source in relation to whatever projects or overriding life-goals one pursues (whether they concern promoting justice for others or not).

B-Egoism is what Williams is describing in the second passage. The person devoted to defeating injustice in a particular place, and having to *be the one that defeats it*, is a person whose ambition and project is egoistic in the broad sense insofar as it is agent-centred, even if it is not *selfish*, which I take to be represented by N-Egoism.

Now that this distinction has been elucidated, we can begin to unravel more precisely the form of the objection to eudaemonistic virtue ethics. As Hurka rightly notes, B-Egoism does not entail N-Egoism:

The resulting virtue-ethical theory need not be egoistic in its substantive claims about action; it can tell people to promote others' pleasure and knowledge even at the expense of their own. Nor need it be egoistic about motivation: it can say that to act virtuously, they must care about others' pleasure or knowledge for its own sake (Hurka, 2001: 232)

Just because a virtue-ethical theory holds that the reason for cultivating virtues is grounded in an agent's own flourishing, this does not mean that those virtues themselves cannot be directed at

other-regarding behaviour, or that the agent does not care about those others. If the latter was true and a concern for another's wellbeing was entirely absent from an agent's psychology, it would be very unclear whether that agent could be said to *genuinely* possess a virtue like compassion. But it is not difficult to see the motivation for attributing B-Egoism to eudaemonism. Hurka does think that eudaemonism will still be what he calls "foundationally egoistic"—to be read as B-Egoism in our terminology—insofar as it insists that the agent's "reasons to act and be motivated in these ways derive ultimately from their own flourishing" (Hurka, 2001: 232).

Defenders of Aristotle in particular hold that concerns of eudemonism being objectionably egoistic trade on an equivocation between N-Egoism and B-Egoism. They further hold that the latter is only a 'formal' feature of the theory in which the flourishing in question has little to do with 'happiness' in the traditional hedonic sense, and is thus not morally problematic. However, not all agree that B-Egoism is as morally unproblematic as presumed.

While B-Egoism is consistent with the virtues being directed at the wellbeing of others, it does not seem to recognise the wellbeing of those others as *intrinsically* good in its own right. Rather, the objection goes, the good of the other is recognised only insofar as it is constitutively related to *the agent's* flourishing. It is for this reason that H.A Pritchard complained that in broadly Aristotelian systems of ethics "our only business in life [is] self-improvement" (Pritchard, 1912: 34). Thomas Nagel similarly has claimed that eudaemonism—according to which "the test of moral principles will be their contribution, either instrumental or constitutive, to the good life as a whole" (Nagel, 1986: 195)—fails to account for the fact that genuine moral requirements "have their source in the claims of other persons" (Nagel, 1986: 197). The same concern has been raised by John Hare, who writes that...

...if another person's welfare is constitutive of my happiness, but my happiness is central, the commitment I have to that person's welfare is always conditional on its constituting my happiness.

This conditionality is built into the structure of eudaimonism, and it is this conditionality that is unacceptably self-regarding. (Hare, 2000: 38)

Some passages in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* have invited this criticism. For example, in book eight, Aristotle writes of the good of friendship that "in loving a friend they [the agent] are loving their own good" (Aristotle, 2004, 1157b, 34), which can be read as implying that what *makes* friendship a good is its contribution to that agent's own good. If this reading is plausible, the good of the other is only ever *extrinsic* (i.e. derived from their relation to *my* flourishing), as Nagel, Pritchard, Hare, and others have been concerned to show.

But the objection of egoism does not only threaten traditional Aristotelian versions of virtue ethics. A sentimentalist virtue ethic endorsed by the likes of Hume, for example, may also be susceptible to the charge. Hume's general position has two components: (a) virtue and vice are the primary normative concepts, shaping axiological judgements of character (from which our evaluations of actions are derived); and (b) virtue and vice are sense-based concepts that arise from their capacity to illicit feelings of pleasurable approval and painful disapproval. He explains that "personal merit consists altogether in the possession of mental qualities, *useful* or *agreeable* to the *person himself* or to *others*" (EPM, §9: 787). Later he is more explicit:

It is the nature, and, indeed, the definition of virtue, that it is a *quality of the mind agreeable to or approved of by every one who considers or contemplates it*. But some qualities produce pleasure, because they are useful to society, or useful or agreeable to the person himself. (EPM, §8: 781)

Section 6 of the *Enquiry* is dedicated to exploring the latter, and Hume (non-exhaustively) lists "discretion", "industry", "discernment", "temperance", "patience", "considerateness" as exactly the types of virtue whose "merit consists in their tendency to serve the person, possessed of them, without any magnificent claim to the public and social desert" (EPM, §6: 766). In contrast, he famously criticises the "monkish virtues" of religious moralities which typically exalt "[c]elibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude" in part because they do *not*

“advance a man’s fortune in the world” nor “increase his power of self-enjoyment” (*EPM*, §9: 788-789). These claims, which appear to define virtue at least partly in terms of its benefit to the possessor, look close to an endorsement of B-Egoism. They especially lend themselves to such a reading of Hume in light of the following claims he makes towards the end of the *Enquiry*:

Having explained the moral *approbation* attending merit or virtue, there remains nothing but briefly to consider our interested *obligation* to it, and to inquire whether every man, who has any regard to his own happiness and welfare, will not best find his account in the practice of every moral duty (*EPM*, §9: 795)

[W]hat theory of morals can ever serve any useful purpose, unless it can show, by a particular detail, that all the duties which it recommends, are also the true interest of each individual? (*EPM*, §9: 796)

My point here is not that Hume’s, or indeed Aristotle’s, positions are problematically egoistic. Rather, it is to motivate the thesis that the charge of egoism is potentially threatening to diverse virtue ethical views. I now wish to present reasons for thinking that the charge might justifiably be levelled at Schopenhauer, and to explore whether we must therefore accept that, given his claim that egoistic actions lack moral worth, his moral philosophy is inconsistent.

2. Schopenhauer’s Objection to Eudaemonism

Like Hume and Aristotle, Schopenhauer accords virtue and vice normative primacy, making the moral evaluation of actions derivable from the agent's motives, the stable orientation of which making up their character. For Schopenhauer, there are three of these motives:

- (1) Egoism [*Egoismus*]: a desire for one’s own well-being [*Wohlseyn*].
- (2) Compassion [*Mitleid*]: a desire for the well-being of another.
- (3) Malice [*Bosheit*]: a desire for the misfortune [*Wehe*] of another.

Schopenhauer's account of the moral worth of actions corresponds to this framework: actions performed from a compassionate motive possess moral worth [*moralischer Wert*]; actions performed from a malicious motive are morally reprehensible [*moralisch verwerflich*]; actions performed from an egoistic motive are morally indifferent [*moralisch indifferente*]. Schopenhauer postulates a fourth, unnamed motive—a desire for one's own misfortune—but considers it to have *ascetic* rather than *moral* value. The significance of this will become important shortly.

With this criterion of moral worth, Schopenhauer himself launches a version of the egoism objection under consideration against “eudaemonism”, by which he similarly understands as the view that virtue and well-being/happiness are identical, or at least coincidental. He attributes a eudaemonistic ethics to “the ancients” (*OBM*, §3: 123), including Aristotle, the Cynics and the Stoics.³ While Schopenhauer thinks these philosophers “laboured in vain to prove that virtue is enough to make life happy” (*WWR II*: 603), holding that experience demonstrates they come apart, his primary complaint is that the attempt at a conceptual link between virtue and well-being/happiness undercuts genuinely morally praiseworthy actions. This because Schopenhauer appears to share the concerns discussed in the previous section that if virtue is a benefit to the possessor then one's reasons for attaining it are—at least in the case of the ancients—precisely for that benefit, manifesting a form of egoism whereby others are simply means to a personal good. This line of reasoning can be seen in Schopenhauer's view of Kant, who although he credits with initiating the move away from eudaemonism, he thinks this was in essence “more in appearance than in reality” (*OBM*, §3: 123). This is because Kant's doctrine of the highest good, Schopenhauer argues, is “at bottom nothing other than the morals that issues in happiness and is *consequently* supported by self-interest, or eudaemonism” (*OBM*, §3: 128 - emphasis mine).⁴

But it is worth pausing here to unpack Schopenhauer's argument, considering exactly how it is that eudaemonism is supposed to be egoistic, and thus devoid of moral worth. Eudaemonia is sometimes translated as ‘happiness’, and this can have a hedonic connotation which is misleading.

Aristotle's conception of happiness as eudaemonia, for example, has little to do with simple pleasure. Schopenhauer's most often used terms for happiness are *Glück* and *Glücksäligkeit*, and he is explicit that they are to be equated with *Befriedigung*, or 'satisfaction', and sometimes *Wohlseyn*, or 'well-being': the will's "attainment of the goal...we call *satisfaction*, well-being, happiness" (*WWR I*, §56: 309). With this in mind, it is tempting to view the 'eudaemonism' that Schopenhauer attacks as a crude mis-characterisation of his opponents. This could be the case in one of two ways—Schopenhauer could hold that on eudaemonism:

- (a) *X* acts egoistically because *X* acts upon their desires.
- (b) *X* acts egoistically because *X* only acts in the interest of their own well-being.

The problem is that (a) is implausible as an account of what makes an action objectionably egoistic (as Williams pointed out in the quotation above). Moreover, Schopenhauer does not himself hold this view, since his account of *Mitleid* just is the *desire* that *X* has for the well-being of *Y*. The other's well-being "becoming *the ultimate end* of my will", Schopenhauer writes, is alone "what impresses on an action the stamp of *moral worth*" (*OBM*, §16: 199).⁵

Perhaps, then, the problem is that Schopenhauer's conception of eudaemonism reflects (b). To translate this point into the terminology outlined earlier in the chapter: Schopenhauer's criticism of eudaemonism as egoistic may invoke N-Egoism (i.e. that one ought to assign lexical priority to one's own wellbeing). The issue here, however, is that (b) only looks like an accurate representation of eudaemonism if eudaemonia were understood in terms of *Befriedigung*. But this is simply not what the 'ancient' eudaemonism of Aristotle or the Stoics takes happiness—better translated as 'flourishing'—to be. Moreover, as noted in the previous section in agreement with Hurka, it is perfectly consistent for Aristotle, say, to hold that the development of virtues is good for the possessor while those same virtues (e.g. compassion, mercy, etc) can be directed at the well-being

of others. For this reason, attributing (b) to his alleged opponents would look like a straw-man on Schopenhauer's part.

However, Schopenhauer's objection does not need to be read in either of these ways. It can also be read as an attribution of B-Egoism:

(c) *X* acts egoistically because the well-being of others for which *X* may act is wholly dependent upon *X*'s personal good, grounded in the virtues.

On this view, what is problematic about eudaemonism is that the well-being of others can only ever have extrinsic value as objects that *X*'s virtue—a benefit to *X*—manifest towards. Thus, the other's interests *as other* are ignored. Yet, the problem with this interpretation is that it appears to leave Schopenhauer vulnerable to the same accusation. Let us consider why this is the case.

3. Turning the Tables? Salvation & Egoism

In 1844, the politician and jurist Johann August Becker wrote a letter to Schopenhauer asking him to clarify the who the beneficiaries of moral behaviour are. Schopenhauer's response to Becker is intriguing:

You ask:... *for whom* moral actions have value?—For *him* that performs them. Hence...his satisfaction with himself and the approval of impartial witnesses....

Now as to what this value of moral action ultimately rests on—...the value that such actions have for the one who performs them himself is a transcendent value, inasmuch as it lies in their leading him towards the sole path of salvation, i.e. deliverance from this world of being born, suffering and dying.... So this contains the really *final elucidation* concerning the value [*Werth*] of morality, which value is not itself something absolutely final [*ein absolut Letztes*], but rather a step towards it. (*GB*, 1844: 220)

For the same philosopher to claim that “[t]he absence of all egoistic motivation is...*the criterion of an action of moral worth*” (*OBM*, §15: 197), Schopenhauer’s explanation to Becker may appear puzzling. The first part of this quote is a straightforwardly Humean point, and subjectivist in nature: virtue is pleasing to the possessor and impartial observers. But the second is distinctively Schopenhauerian and objectivist in nature insofar as it depends upon his metaphysics, which now requires some elaboration.

Schopenhauer gives *a priori* and *a posteriori* arguments for the thesis that human lives (and indeed the lives of all sentient creatures) qua manifestations of *Wille*—an insatiable striving [*Streben*]*—*are not worth living, and that non-existence is preferable to existence.⁶ He does, however, think that a select few individuals are capable of an ascetic resignation [*Resignation*] from, or renunciation [*Entsagung*] of, life as perpetual willing and suffering, thus achieving “deliverance from this world of being born, suffering and dying” (*GB*, 1844: 220). In the final sections of *WWR I*, Schopenhauer argues that “negation of the will” enables “[t]rue salvation, redemption from life and from suffering” (*WWR I*, §68: 424). Salvation [*Erlösung*] is taken to involve a radical transformation of consciousness; one in which the sense of a self amongst a plurality of individuals dissolves: one attains the metaphysical insight that all share the same essence as (and are similarly victims of) *Wille*.

Schopenhauer is clear—both in his letter to Becker, and in the published works—that moral behaviour has value derivatively—specifically *instrumentally*—in virtue of its relation the distinct state of salvation:

...moral virtues are a means of advancing self-renunciation, and accordingly of denying the will to life. For true righteousness, inviolable justice, that first and most important cardinal virtue, is so heavy a task, that whoever professes it unconditionally and from the bottom of his heart has to make sacrifices which soon deprive life of the sweetness required to make it enjoyable, and thereby turn

the will from it, and thus leads to resignation. Yet the very thing that makes righteousness venerable is the sacrifices it costs... (*WWR II*: 606)

He continues that the “moral virtues are not really the *ultimate end*, but *only a step towards* [salvation]” (*WWR II*: 608 - emphasis mine), and that “virtuous action is a *momentary passing through* the point, the permanent return to which is the denial of the will to life” (*W2*: 610 - emphasis mine). Salvation is inimical to happiness or well-being construed in terms of desire satisfaction [*Befriedigung*]. Rather, as the fourth and un-named motive for action given above—a desire for one’s own misfortune—suggests, it requires hardship through “forgoing what is pleasant and seeking out what is unpleasant, choosing a lifestyle of penitence and self-castigation for the constant mortification of the will” (*WWR I*, §68: 419). For the ascetic, “poverty, privations, and special sufferings of many kinds are produced by the most complete exercise of moral virtues” (*WWR II*: 607).⁷

Part of Schopenhauer’s justification for the view that moral virtue leads to ascetic resignation is that he takes them both to spring from the same epistemic source: metaphysical insight. He writes that “from the same source that gives rise to all goodness, love, virtue and nobility there ultimately emerges also what I call the negation of the will to life” (*WWR I*, §68: 405). The morally virtuous person who acts from compassion has seen through the ‘veil of Maya’ which gives the illusion that we are individuals, and the distinction between themselves and the other dissipates. This compassion is the experience of the other’s suffering as immediately as if it were one’s own, and this sensitivity to the suffering of all others is what provokes ascetic resignation, according to Schopenhauer. Of the Vedic phrase *Tat Tvam Asi* (Thou art that) which captures this dissolution of the distinction between self and other, Schopenhauer approvingly writes: “Anyone who, with clear cognition and firm inner conviction, is able to declare this to himself about every being he encounters is certain of all virtue and bliss, and is on the direct path to redemption.” (*WWR I*, §66:

401). Thus, he claims that “to be just, noble, and benevolent is nothing but to translate my metaphysics into actions” (*WWR II*: 600).

We are now in a better position to understand why it is that Schopenhauer could appear to hold inconsistent views, if his claim is that eudaemonism is egoistic—and thus without moral worth—because virtue brings a benefit to its possessor (labelled (c) above). Moral behaviour is a means to salvation, and there is little doubt that Schopenhauer holds salvation to be *good for* the empirical individual that attains it. He notes how those who have attained it “recognise [it’s] value”, and demonstrate an “anxious concern to hold on to this achieved salvation” (*WWR I*, §68: 419). Elsewhere he describes it as a condition that is “superior” [*überwiegend*] to all else (*WWR II*: 417), and contrasts its worth as explicitly more valuable than “other goods” (*WWR II*, 389) such as desire satisfaction. Throughout the later parts of book four of *WWR I*, Schopenhauer characterises salvation using a variety of positive psychological terms, such as bliss [*Seligkeit*], joyfulness [*Freudigkeit*], contentment [*Zufriedenheit*], and cheerfulness [*Heiterkeit*].⁸ He even describes the complete negation of the will which characterises salvation, albeit “figuratively”, as the *summum bonum* [highest good] (*WWR I*, §65: 389).⁹ If morality is a means to salvation, and Schopenhauer thinks that salvation is in the interests of the agent, it can seem that Schopenhauer is guilty of the same egoism he accuses ‘the Ancients’ of. On this ‘instrumental view’ of the value of morality, Christopher Janaway writes accordingly that “[m]y acting morally is...ultimately, and more importantly, good for me, in Schopenhauer’s view” (Janaway, 2020: 227).

This claim—that Schopenhauer is implicitly a kind of eudaemonist—is precisely the criticism that Kierkegaard makes of his account of salvation in 1854:

...if to exist is to suffer, then to exist in such a way that it is as if one did not exist...is clearly eudaemonism... If to exist is to suffer, eudaemonism of course cannot be sought in the direction of existing, it must be sought in the direction of not existing...(Kierkegaard, 1975: 3881, 3882)

In the following section, I will argue that Kierkegaard's interpretation is superficial, and that the apparent tension in Schopenhauer's moral philosophy can be resolved.

4. Motivation & Justification

To reconcile Schopenhauer's claims that (1) the value of moral virtue is derivative of the good of salvation; (2) salvation is a benefit to its receiver; (3) egoistic actions are devoid of moral worth, I propose to harness a now common distinction between the *motivation* for actions and the *justification* of those actions which, I shall seek to demonstrate, is implicit in his arguments. This strategy is not an uncommon defence of virtue ethical theories against the charge of egoism (e.g. Hursthouse, 1999: ch. 6; Slote, 2001: 42-47).¹⁰

The *justification* for an action is the considerations which make that action right, all things considered. There are a variety of competing criteria for moral justification. A Kantian holds that what justifies an action is that it fulfils a moral duty demanded by practical rationality. For the utilitarian, what justifies an action is that it maximises happiness. On a divine command theory, what justifies an action is the fact that it is God's expressed will. Schopenhauer strongly suggests in his letter to Becker, and in his account of salvation, that what justifies a moral action *in a non-derivative sense* is its contribution towards the agent transitioning to ascetic resignation; for the action "leading him towards the sole path of salvation" (*GB*, 1844: 220). The *motivation* for an action is the psychological state from which their aims arise. As we have seen, Schopenhauer holds there are only three motives relevant to moral evaluation: a desire for one's own well-being (egoism), a desire for another's wellbeing (compassion), and a desire for another's misfortune (malice).

It has been noted that the relationship between the motivation and justification of moral actions is highly precarious. Michael Stocker (1976) has famously argued that what justifies an action does not seem to be an appropriate motivation for it. In his well-known example, Stocker asks us to consider a friend who visits you in hospital. If upon thanking them for their visiting and asking what motivated them do so they answered “because it is my duty demanded by practical necessity”, or “because I ought to impartially maximise utility”, this would be very disappointing. A better answer, it would seem, is that the friend visits out of care and friendship, even if (on the above theories) what *justifies* the action is Kantian or utilitarian in nature.

The problem can be translated into Schopenhauerian terms. If the friend answers the motivation question with “I came to visit because acting compassionately is a step towards my salvation”, this is problematic in more ways than one. Firstly, given that it has been established that Schopenhauer believes salvation to be a benefit to the agent, stating this as a motivating reason looks like a manifestation of egoism, which lacks any moral worth on his own account. Secondly, there is a way in which their response fails to make sense. Offering the attainment of a future good as a motivating factor seems to undermine the instantiation of compassion as the genuine desire to alleviate the suffering of another, and instead seems to only offer the *appearance* of a compassion motive. For these reasons, it had better be the case that what motivates the virtuous agent to act is *not* what ultimately justifies it.

Once the bifurcation moral action into justification and motivation is established, it seems that Schopenhauer could consistently hold that while moral virtue is ultimately in the interests of the agent, this fact is not what motivates them to cultivate it. Rather, the agent’s motivation is the well-being of another for its own sake. Since Schopenhauer is adamant that moral worth is determined purely by motives, his framework would be rendered consistent. There are now two questions to be asked: (1) is this kind of distinction congruous with what Schopenhauer himself says?; (2) is this kind of distinction ultimately sustainable? Let us address each in turn.

The proposed distinction between motivation and justification is more complex with respect to Schopenhauer than it may appear, and is by no means uniformly accepted among commentators. Sandra Shapshay (2019: 154-162), for example, has offered compelling reasons for seeing the collapse of the distinction, citing that which she takes to be the moral lesson drawn from Schopenhauer's thought experiment of Titus and Caius.¹¹ As the case study goes, Titus and Caius each have separate romantic interests, but the subject of their interests also have others pursuing them. Titus and Caius initially decide to murder their romantic rivals, but eventually "desist after a struggle with themselves" (*OBM*, §19: 220). Schopenhauer is interested in what the "honest and clear account of the grounds" (*OBM*, §19: 220) are for their respective decisions, and how we would evaluate them. For Caius, Schopenhauer invites the reader to consider a range of justifications: Kantian; theological; perfectionist; Fichtean; and so on. He then asks the reader to honestly compare any of these justifications to that of Titus, who is simply moved by the suffering that would befall his rival, and refrains on those grounds. If we asked who is the better person, who we would trust with our own fate, and who has the "purer motive" (*OBM*, §19: 221), Schopenhauer thinks we would agree it would be Titus, establishing compassion as the real ground of morality. On Shapshay's reading, one of the conclusions drawn from the experiment is Schopenhauer's *equating* of motivation and justification: what makes the action morally good *just is* Titus' compassionate motivation to prevent the suffering of another. If this is the case, then it may be that the proposed distinction cannot be exploited to address the problem.

However, I think this picture is complicated by Schopenhauer's remarks, given in the previous section, that the value of morality is derived ultimately from salvation. I agree with Shapshay that Schopenhauer takes what justifies an act as morally good is a specific kind of motivation, namely: compassion. But Schopenhauer's repeated belief in the ultimately instrumental nature of morality—that salvation is "the really *final elucidation* concerning the value of morality", making that value

“not itself something absolutely final, but rather a step towards it” (*GB*, 1844: 220)—suggests that there is not one but *two* senses of ‘justification’ at work here:

- (a) the grounds for what makes something a morally worthy action;
- (b) the grounds for what makes morally worthy actions valuable.

The justification which Shapshay takes Schopenhauer to be equating with motivation concerns (a), and I agree with her about this. However, what makes it the case that *morality* is valuable—what justifies actions of that particular kind “ultimately”—Schopenhauer suggests, is its relation to salvation. This would put the problem back on the table, and the proposed distinction as a viable option: if what *ultimately* justifies moral actions is good for the agent, we better hope that their motive for action is not that justification.

Another way of making this conceptual point is the following. The claim that moral virtue has value ‘because of its instrumental relation to salvation’ is importantly ambiguous. It can be read as holding that moral virtue *only* has instrumental value, or it can be read as leaving open whether there are other types of value that moral virtue can possess.¹² The latter looks plausible as a reading of Schopenhauer: we have already seen that he believes moral virtue to involve genuine insight and metaphysical knowledge (a point to which I shall return in the final section), indicating there to be final *epistemic* value at stake. But we can now see that even this dichotomy between final and instrumental value does not tell the whole story. Given the different types of ‘justification’ outlined above, virtue can be taken to be good for its own sake *in moral terms*, but that same good is ultimately instrumental to the *non-moral* good of salvation.

To further appreciate this point, it is worth approaching the issue from the opposing direction, and consider what Schopenhauer has to say about those who have *achieved* salvation. Of the nature of these rare, saintly ascetics, he offers a rich description:

Such a person...remains as only a pure, cognizing being, as an untarnished mirror of the world. Nothing can worry him anymore, nothing more can excite him, because he has cut all the thousands of threads of willing that keep us bound to the world and which, in the form of desires, fears, envy and anger, drag us back and forth amid constant pain. He gazes back calmly and smiles at the phantasm of this world that was once able to move and torment his mind as well, but now stands before him as indifferently as chess pieces after the game is over, looking like discarded masks the morning after Carnival, although their forms taunted and disturbed us the night before (*WWR I*, §68: 417)

Crucially, it is not merely the repetitive egoistic willing for one's own wellbeing that the ascetic achieves freedom from, but willing *in toto*.¹³ Since the moral agent "wills someone else's wellbeing" (*OBM*, §16: 201), salvation undercuts the basis for moral virtue. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer writes that these rare, saintly individuals "already recognise the value of redemption" (*WWR I*, §68: 418-419), and it is precisely why they express "anxious concern to hold on to this achieved salvation" and "bend all of 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" (*WWR I*, §68: 418). The self-mortification and hardship they seek is "in order to subdue the will that always strives anew" (*WWR I*, §68: 418). Schopenhauer's suggestion is not just that those who attain salvation do in fact actively try to avoid the conditions required for the practice of moral virtue, but that they *should*. The metaphysical insight that morality affords the agent is what drives them to realise and express the true ethical meaning of existence as a whole (*PP II*, §109: 183-184): resignation—and thus, freedom—from the vanity or nothingness [*Nichtigkeit*] of the world of appearances. This is revealing, since the ascetic saints know "the value of redemption" (*WWR I*, §68: 418-419) and struggle to retain it *at the expense* of moral virtue, that 'final' or 'ultimate' value must be what makes morality good, at least for those capable of salvation. Schopenhauer himself does write that the moral virtues "are not really the *ultimate end*, but *only* a step towards [salvation]" (*WWR II*: 608 - emphasis mine); salvation being "the true goal [*den*

Wahren Zweck] of life” (*WWR II*: 651). His sense of exclusive instrumental value here must refer only to morality broadly (i.e. point (b) above), and not what *makes* an action moral (i.e. point (a) above). Again, if justification and motivation come apart in this way, the distinction can be used to avoid the problem of egoism.

There are strong textual grounds to support the claim that Schopenhauer takes the virtuous agent’s motivation to be distinct from what *ultimately* justifies the act as a step towards salvation. The clearest expression of this can be found in §18 of *OBM*, where Schopenhauer is explicit that “another’s distress, purely by itself, and no other consideration, must be my motive if my action is to have moral worth” (*OBM*, §18: 217). On the question of a benefit to the virtuous agent, Schopenhauer continues:

If someone who was giving alms were to ask me what he gets out of doing so, my conscientious answer would be: “Just that that poor man’s fate has been alleviated by so much; but apart from that nothing at all. If that is no use to you and really does not matter to you, then you did not really want to give alms, but rather to make a purchase: then you have been swindled out of your money. But if it did matter to you that that man who is oppressed by want should suffer less, then you have indeed achieved your end, you get out of it the fact that he suffers less, and you see precisely how much your gift rewards itself (*OBM*, §18: 217-218)

This indicates a commitment to the view that one cannot be said to possess the virtue of compassion if one is motivated by one’s own personal good when acting, and this includes the ultimate end of salvation from which the value of morality is derived. As Schopenhauer approvingly references the Vedas: “he who desires any reward from his works is still confined to the way of darkness and not yet ripe for redemption [*Erlösung*]” (*OBM*, §18: 217).

Further evidence for a distinction between motivation and justification can be adduced from Schopenhauer’s texts. If we consider the paradigmatic cases of moral virtue Schopenhauer offers—the “character that has reached the highest goodness and the most perfect magnanimity” (*WWR I*,

§67: 402)—our admiration for them, he claims, lies in how they “will sacrifice his life completely for the good of many others” (*WWR I*, §67: 402). The examples he himself gives are not of those that reach (or perhaps even desire to reach) salvation, but those who perish for the sake of others: Leonidas, Regulus, Publius Decius Mus, and the Swiss hero Arnold von Winkelried.

Drawing the proposed distinction here should be unsurprising in light of Schopenhauer’s explicit denial in the same letter to Becker that the fourth unnamed motive for action—the desiring for one’s own misfortune—has any *moral* value, instead holding it to be *ascetic* (*GB*, 1844: 220). This is because, like egoism, this fourth motive concerns the self, and *moral* value only concerns one’s motives towards another.

The significance of distinguishing between motivation and justification is now apparent: the virtuous agent does not desire the well-being of the other because they believe it will bring them closer to salvation. This would be egoistic and thus devoid of moral worth. Rather, the virtuous agent desires the well-being of another for its own sake, while at the same time what *justifies* this action in a *non-derivative sense* is its status as “a means of advancing self-renunciation” (*WWR II*: 606). Here I agree with Janaway, who similarly claims that:

In Schopenhauer’s own account, my acting morally has value for the other whose suffering I aim to remove or whose well-being I aim to promote, and it has value for its own sake. It is not that I act out of compassion in order to facilitate the will’s ultimate self-negation in myself. My motivation, and the end of my action, must be nothing but the removal of the other’s suffering (Janaway, 2016: 660)¹⁴

It seems that Schopenhauer, therefore, has the resources to avoid the objection of egoism. However, before being satisfied that the structural integrity of his moral framework is sustainable, there is a question to be asked about the implications of pulling apart an action’s motivation and justification in the suggested manner.

5. The Self-Effacing Problem

The previous section discussed Michael Stocker's claim that what justifies an action does not seem to be an appropriate motivation for it. This distinction was then exploited to show that Schopenhauer's virtuous agent is not motivated by egoistic concerns, even if what ultimately justifies their behaviour is that it, in the end, benefits them. But there is a flip side to this coin that Stocker also raises concern about. If *X* is not moved to act by what justifies the action, then what is the relation between our reasons and our motives? Surely whatever it is that justifies our actions is deeply important to us, but if so then why should it not inspire us to act? To deny this would seem to lead to the view that *X*'s reflection upon what makes an act right would cause *X* to act in a way which that theory does not endorse. There would appear to be a psychological disunity here and, as Stocker puts it: "[a]t the very least, we should be moved by our major values and we should value what our major motives seek...[S]uch harmony is the mark of a good life" (Stocker, 1976: 66). Hence, Stocker claims there is a kind of "schizophrenia" inherent in much contemporary moral theorising insofar as making either commitment to the relationship between motivation and justification for action is highly precarious.

While Stocker's claims are directed against consequentialist and deontological positions, others have argued that it is applicable to broadly virtue ethical theories too, which I interpret Schopenhauer to endorse here. Hurka, for instance, holds that if the virtuous agent is motivated by the *well-being of another*, and not by the fact that *the action would have a virtuous quality* (i.e. what *justifies* the action), then our moral theory becomes 'self-effacing': it tells agents "not to be motivated by or even to think of their claims about the source of their reasons" (Hurka, 2001: 246; cf. Keller, 2007). Put another way, the theory would recommend that agents not be motivated by what it is that makes their actions right. Hurka holds this view because, as we have seen, he thinks

that the alternative for virtue ethicists is that they must claim that ‘X acts because they believe it to be conducive to their own flourishing’, and this is objectionably egoistic.

There is disagreement about why self-effacement is a problematic feature of a moral theory, if it is at all.¹⁵ Possible reasons for its functioning as an objection might include (but are not limited to¹⁶):

- (1) **A self-effacing moral theory cannot be action-guiding:** at least one essential feature of a good moral theory is its ability to answer the “what ought I to do?” question. Moral theories calibrate the salient features of the situation and offer a course of action. But if an agent should not be motivated by that theory when they act, then it will not be action guiding.
- (2) **A self-effacing moral theory rules out a significant part of good life:** the psychological unity to be found when there is “harmony between one’s motives and one’s reasons, values, justifications” (Stocker, 1976: 453). Not to be moved by these things, Stocker writes, “bespeaks a malady of the spirit” (Stocker, 1976: 454).
- (3) **A self-effacing moral theory is incomplete:** if it is the case that what ought to motivate us to ϕ does not constitute a theory’s justification for ϕ ’ing, then that theory owes an explanation as to how exactly our motives are associated with what that theory identifies as important or valuable.
- (4) **A self-effacing moral theory disassociates virtue and what is morally important:** many hold that moral virtue would seem to involve insight or knowledge into what really matters. Moreover, the virtuous agent ought to be guided, at least in part, by such important matters. But if a moral theory says that the virtuous agent ought not do this, perhaps that theory has an inappropriate or incomplete account of virtue.

Point (1) is a common assumption about moral theory, but it is not an assumption that Schopenhauer shares. Schopenhauer denies that it is the job of ethics to be *prescriptive* and to issue moral commands. Moreover, because of his theory that character is *innate* and *fixed*, he vehemently rejects the view that the study of ethical principles and moral philosophy will alter moral character and its resulting behaviour (*OBM*, §20: 235, 240; *WWR I*, §55). Rather, ethics is properly a *descriptive* endeavour which seeks to explain what has moral worth and why. He writes:

I set ethics the task of clarifying and explaining ways of acting among human beings that are extremely morally diverse, and tracing them back to their ultimate ground. So there remains no other path to the discovery of the foundation of ethics than the empirical one, namely investigating whether there are any actions at all to which we must assign genuine moral worth (*OBM*, §13: 189)

As we have seen, Schopenhauer holds that such actions will be those which manifest justice [*Gerechtigkeit*] or the love of humanity [*Menschenliebe*]*—*both rooted in compassion [*Mitleid*]. These, he says, “are to be regarded as a given phenomenon that we have to explain correctly” (*OBM*, §13: 189). This *explanation*, and only this, he claims is “the modest path to which I direct ethics” (*OBM*, §13: 189). Because for Schopenhauer a person’s moral goodness is not a function of their identifying and adhering to a rule or principle, a moral theory is not *supposed* to be action-guiding in the sense described in (1).

While point (2) is a plausible basis for what makes a self-effacing moral theory objectionable, I take it to be conditional upon the truth of independent (and controversial) premises concerning what constitutes well-being. Instead, here I wish to focus upon the broader objection captured by (4). For Schopenhauer, this would amount to the concern that while he may avoid the charge of egoism by denying the virtuous agent acts from their desire for salvation, he may as a result be pushed into endorsing the view that the virtuous agent lacks knowledge of, and is not motivated by, what is genuinely important and valuable*—*but surely acting morally involves a comprehension of the

relevant features of the situation which make it right to act in that way. If a response can be given to *this* problem of self-effacement, we would thereby have also answered (3).

We first need to make plain what (4) means by ‘what really matters’, and why a self-effacing theory allegedly disassociates knowledge of those matters from moral virtue. At present, this claim is ambiguous between two possible meanings. The first is that, on a self-effacing theory, moral virtue does not essentially (and indeed, *cannot*) constitutively involve knowledge of the morally salient (i.e. reason-giving) features of a situation. Rather, desire (e.g. to alleviate the suffering of another) is sufficient for moral virtue. The problematic nature of a view which disconnects knowledge and virtue in such a way has been well stated by Michael Brady:

The virtuous person is one who acts for the right reason, and the mere fact that one has a desire will never be the right reason for virtuous action. If desires are to play a part in virtuous motivation, they must themselves be responsive to reasons, and hence to considerations which indicate that acting is in some way valuable. Nor, for similar reasons, can mere ungrounded feelings or affective attitudes suffice for virtuous motivation. In order for an act to be genuinely courageous, for instance, it is not enough for it to be motivated by the feeling typically associated with courageous action; it must in addition involve various grounding beliefs. In the case of courage, these will involve (something like) the belief that one’s situation is genuinely dangerous, and the belief that this danger must nonetheless be faced for the sake of some (greater) good (Brady, 2005: 89-90)

The second possible meaning is that, on a self-effacing theory, moral virtue does not essentially (and indeed, *cannot*) constitutively involve knowledge of the *ultimate* justificatory reasons for action. This amounts to a rejection of what Sarah Broadie has called a ‘Grand End’ theory, according to which a “blueprint of the good guides its possessor in all his deliberations, and in terms of it his rational choices can be explained and justified” (Broadie, 1991: 198; cf. Hursthouse, 1999: 187-188).

It has sometimes suggested that virtue theorists can avoid the general self-effacing problem by allowing that people can consider their justifying reasons for action when they are not in situations

which demand them—a ‘cool hour’ of reflection—so long as these reflections are not in mind when they do act (Hurka, 2001: 247).¹⁷ While this might be plausible, I submit that there are good reasons to think Schopenhauer has an interestingly different and unique kind of response to the charge; one open to him due to his idiosyncratic metaphysics. Let us consider each of the above in turn.

If the objection is that by avoiding the charge of egoism in the manner suggested, Schopenhauer ends up with a self-effacing theory because it disassociates moral virtue and knowledge of morally salient features of a situation, then the objection misfires. Schopenhauer does not deny that such knowledge is intrinsically linked to virtue. In fact, he emphatically asserts it. The key here is to understand *how* it is that for Schopenhauer moral virtue and acetic resignation both spring from the same source (*WWR I*, §68: 405); the metaphysical knowledge that everything shares the same essence. Schopenhauer is clear that “virtue does indeed come from cognition”—that is: identification of the empirical self and the other—but, he continues, it is “not from abstract cognition that can be communicated through words” (*WWR I*, §66: 395). Rather, Schopenhauer holds that the phenomenology of virtue involves an *immediate* acquaintance with this truth:

a truly good disposition, disinterested virtue, and nobility of mind do not begin with abstract cognition, but do nonetheless begin with cognition – namely, an immediate and intuitive cognition that cannot be reasoned for or reasoned away, a cognition that cannot be communicated precisely because it is not abstract. This cognition must come from each person, and thus is not truly and adequately expressed in words, but only in deeds, in actions, in the course of a person’s life (*WWR I*, §66: 397)

And again in *OBM*, he explains:

...for awakening compassion, which has been proved as the *sole source of disinterested actions and consequently as the true basis of morality*, no abstract cognition was required, but only intuitive cognition [*anschauenden Erkenntniß*], the simple grasp of the concrete instance, to which compassion responds at once [*Sogleich*] without further mediation of thought [*Gedankenvermittlung*] (*OBM*, §19: 232)

So it would be a mistake to hold that Schopenhauer disassociates virtue and knowledge of morally salient and reason-giving features of a situation. Compassionate action involves *beliefs*—e.g. of the existence of an empirical other, of their suffering, of a means of alleviating it, of a common essence—but these beliefs are not the product of abstract theorising. This immediate knowledge is why Schopenhauer claims that “to be just, noble, and benevolent is nothing but to translate my metaphysics into actions” (*WWR II*: 600).¹⁸

To help illuminate the alleged moral psychology at work in virtuous agents, and why his account of virtue does not eject knowledge of salient matters, let us consider what Schopenhauer has to say about ‘moral dogmas’, that is: normative principles and rational justifications for moral behaviour. He is clear that “principles and abstract cognition” are “in no way the original source or prime basis of all morals” (*OBM*, §17: 205), and we have already seen above how he denies that ethics is in the business of offering prescriptive moral commands and principles. However, Schopenhauer does take them to be useful auxiliary tools in systematising and making moral behaviour more effortless in the face of our powerful egoistic motives (*OBM*, §17: 205–206). What is relevant to the current investigation is how he thinks moral dogmas distinctively function for *non-philosophers* in particular. In a telling passage, Schopenhauer writes:

When someone appeals to dogmas in doing good deeds, we must distinguish whether these dogmas are the true motives or whether...they are nothing more than an ostensible account that the person uses to try to satisfy his own reason concerning a deed that emanates from a completely different source. He does the deed because he is good, but does not know how to explain it properly because he is no philosopher; still, he would like to have something to think. (*WWR I*, §66: 396)

Here Schopenhauer claims that non-philosophers who lack the conceptual apparatus to adequately describe their moral behaviour invent a “mostly fictitious” (*WWR I*, §66: 395) account of it by way of moral dogmas. Schopenhauer clearly thinks that while such morally praiseworthy persons do not possess *abstract* knowledge of the real reasons for their behaviour which can be

explained, they do possess metaphysical insight *immediately* when acting. If so, it cannot be that Schopenhauer's moral theory is self-effacing because it makes desire sufficient for virtue. As we have seen, even the 'morally admirable imbecile' still possesses *immediate* knowledge or "intuitive cognition [*anschauenden Erkenntniß*]" (*OBM*, §19: 232) which enables their unegoistic desires.

This is not to say that such morally admirable persons have *all* of the same kinds of knowledge, or in the same degree; they may lack forms of non-abstract metaphysical knowledge the philosopher or sage possesses, without undermining their moral admirability. For instance, Schopenhauer often suggests that resignation is brought about by the recognition of the *inevitability* of suffering. The saint possesses "consciousness of the nothingness of all goods and the suffering of all life," (*WWR I*, §68: 423). Their awareness of suffering is at the universal level, not merely the particular. In this case, "the whole of life, seen essentially as suffering, brings him to the point of resignation." (*WWR I*, §68: 423). But knowledge of the inevitability of suffering, as a result of the essence of the world as conflict, does not seem required in all—or even ordinary—cases of compassionate motivation. The person that gives alms to the stranger on the street, and is moved by their particular suffering, still seems worthy of moral admiration even though their knowledge of suffering is localised, possibly even believing (mistakenly) that life as a whole includes more happiness than suffering.

Nevertheless, these examples suggest that Schopenhauer does not endorse the 'Grand End' theory, whereby virtuous agents are guided in their actions by a sophisticated understanding of the *ultimate* justification for moral behaviour—salvation in ascetic resignation. While virtuous actions are in part constituted by (immediate) knowledge, this knowledge is not of the prudential value of salvation. Instead, it is of the features of a situation which are morally salient: the suffering of another and one's common essence with them beyond the veil of Maya. This indicates that the second way of understanding the self-effacing objection as disassociating virtue and knowledge of important matters (i.e. ultimate justification) likewise misfires: it is true that salvation does not enter the mind of the virtuous as a motivator when they act morally, but this is also unproblematic for

Schopenhauer. He is explicit that while salvation through resignation is what ultimately *justifies* moral behaviour, the *motive* for one's own misfortune—the mark of resignation—possesses only *ascetic* value. To attribute *moral* value, according to Schopenhauer's framework, would be a category mistake. The relevance of this is that since the ultimate justification for virtue is non-moral, it does not figure into the 'knowledge of what morally matters' which drives the self-effacing objection as formulated in (4). Consequently, it seems that the self-effacing objection can be uniquely met by Schopenhauer, rendering the proposed route out of the egoism objection viable.

Conclusion

We are left with some interesting results. First, by exploiting the distinction between an action's motivation and justification, which I have argued Schopenhauer implicitly recognises, his moral framework is absolved of the charge of egoism, and thus of inconsistency. Nevertheless, a consequence of this conceptual manoeuvre is that it is likewise available to (the most charitable interpretation of) the eudaemonism of 'the ancients' whom Schopenhauer criticises. Thus, Schopenhauer's way out of the egoism objection, if endorsed, would also be a *prima facie* exoneration of some of his most proclaimed opponents.

A second point that can be drawn from the discussion of this chapter is that as a result of his idiosyncratic metaphysics, Schopenhauer appears to have an interesting and unique response to the self-effacing counter-argument. Since moral virtue and ascetic resignation both spring from the same source—metaphysical knowledge—and since this knowledge can be explicitly gained 'immediately' as opposed to abstractly, Schopenhauer can claim to occupy an attractive middle-ground with respect to the virtuous agents frame of mind when deciding to act, avoiding the accusation of endorsing a self-effacing theory.

An interesting point of contention with the argument offered here rests on the notion of ‘ultimate justification’ and the link between morality and prudential value. I suspect that there are further, alternative ways of meeting the challenge of egoism which offer a different account of this link than the one endorsed here. At the very least, this article highlights the issue as deserving of closer treatment in the secondary literature. But it is fair to conclude that Schopenhauer’s discussion of the connection between virtue, happiness and egoism has much to offer moral philosophers; not just for historical comparison with figures already receiving significant critical attention, but for contemporary investigations in moral psychology and axiology broadly.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Schopenhauer is adamant that, amongst a host of conceptual problems, the Kantian view “outrages genuine moral feeling”, and is the “apotheosis of unkindness [*Lieblosigkeit*]” (*OBM*: §6: 137).
- ² This definition is, I believe, closest to how the word ‘selfish’ is ordinarily used.
- ³ Only Plato is listed as the exception among ancient philosophers.
- ⁴ For critical attention to Schopenhauer’s critique of Kantian deontology on these grounds, see Stephen Puryear’s contribution to this volume, as well as David Cartwright (1999), and Hassan, (2019: §1).
- ⁵ This point is made clear in the formal argument given in *OBM*, §16, in which Schopenhauer commits to the views that (a) no action can occur without a sufficient motive; (b) every motive concerns well-being and woe; (c) receptiveness to actions directed at well-being and woe is either the agent themselves or an other.
- ⁶ See Hassan (2021) for an analysis of Schopenhauer’s primary argument for this view.
- ⁷ For an interesting defence of the view that there is, in fact, an undiagnosed *tension* between morality and renunciation in Schopenhauer’s philosophy, see Shapshay (2019).
- ⁸ It is crucial to note that these terms do *not* correspond to happiness as the *satisfaction of desires* [*Befriedigung*], but rather to a distinct kind of pleasure as detachment from the push-and-pull of having desires at all. This is better captured by some of the other terms Schopenhauer associates with salvation: peace [*Friede*], rest or calm [*Ruhe*], tranquility or composure [*Gelassenheit*], and elevation [*Erhabenheit*].

⁹ See Janaway (2016) for attention to the challenges of understanding Schopenhauer on the *summum bonum* here.

¹⁰ For distinct responses to the charge of egoism in virtue theories, see Annas (1993: 127-128); Swanton, (2003); and Solomon (1988).

¹¹ See Colin Marshall's contribution to this volume for sustained attention to this argument.

¹² I am very grateful to Colin Marshall and Sandra Shapshay for a helpful discussion on this issue, and pressing me to say more about the nature of 'justification' in play here.

¹³ Schopenhauer describes the state of salvation as "true absence of the will [*wahre Willenlosigkeit*]" (*WWR I*, §65: 389).

¹⁴ Janaway has a slightly different approach to reaching this conclusion than the one I have offered here. Janaway (2016) argues that the key to resolving any inconsistency about the relation between moral behaviour and negation of the will lies in distinguishing between what has *final value* (i.e. good 'for its own sake') and what he calls *complete* or *terminal value*, which is a non-regenerative good. While the satisfaction of my desires for the well-being of another may be good for its own sake, the striving for it is a never-ending cycle as long as I affirm the will. Ascetic resignation, however, is the *cessation* of desires and of willing, and hence has *terminal value*. This distinction, Janaway argues, helps toward clarifying the relation between moral behaviour and salvation. My own view defended here is not inconsistent with Janaway's, but I instead think the solution to the problem can be drawn using a different and more traditional conceptual distinction.

¹⁵ For those that agree that virtue ethical theories are in some way self-effacing but deny that it is a problem, see Annas (2007; 212); Slote (2001: 42-47).

¹⁶ See Pettigrove, (2011: 192-193) for complimentary accounts of these reasons, as well as others I will not address here.

¹⁷ For other virtue-ethical responses to the self-effacing problem see Martinez (2011) and Pettigrove (2011).

¹⁸ There is a question, however, about how much of a role cognition plays in Schopenhauer's account of moral behaviour. Colin Marshall has recently asked whether feeling or cognition is primary in Schopenhauer's account of compassion, settling for the former (Marshall, *forthcoming*).