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Kant and Schopenhauer on Self-Interest and Other-Regard

Valtteri Viljanen

Discussing Kant and Schopenhauer in connection with each other shows us how two modern thinkers, despite being quite close to each other both philosophically and historically – and thereby sharing some crucial starting points – end up developing ethical positions in which self-interest and other-regard figure in instructively different ways.

Kant

Kant takes it as given that we are, basically and primitively, knowers, agents, and feelers. Each of these fundamental aspects of being human has its corresponding basic faculty: faculty of cognition (*Erkenntnisvermögen*), faculty of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*), and feeling of pleasure and pain (*Gefühl der Lust und Unlust*)

So the faculty of action is what Kant calls the faculty of desire. The key definition presented in the second *Critique* reads: "The faculty of desire is a being's *faculty to be by means of* [durch] *its representations the cause of the reality of the objects of these representations*." (*KpV* 5:9n.)[1] In other words, we can be, in virtue of our faculty of desire, the causes of represented objects. Thus – and this is very important – reduced to its very basics, *to act is simply to be causally efficacious* in this way. Even morality is fundamentally about this kind of causal efficacy: "the concepts of good and evil [...] are [...] *modi* of a single category, namely that of causality" (*KpV* 5:65). Thus, and I think this is completely uncontroversial, the motor of human action – moral or not – is the faculty of desire.

So to discern the nature of human agency we must find out the inner workings of the faculty of desire. Kant is nowhere as clear and explicit about this as one might

[1] The volume and page number refer to *AA*. The definition is basically reiterated in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (6:211).

wish. But the view that emerges from his lectures and notes is as follows.[2] A faculty is causal efficacy or power (of a certain kind) in a state of potentiality, not by itself capable of anything – raw or brute power does not amount to much, for that it needs what Kant calls a determining ground (*Bestimmungsgrund*). In fact, and we really should pause to appreciate this, the fate of our moral lives is fixed by the way in which our faculty of desire comes to be *determined*. Once a faculty is determined, it becomes *a power striving* to produce a certain *effect*; if opposing powers hinder it from that production (not from striving), the power is dead; if not, it is living. This view is part and parcel of the Leibnizian variant of the traditional metaphysics of powers; in essence, the view that had established itself through centuries is that when there is (1) *something intrinsically causally efficacious* (broadly speaking, a power or faculty) coupled with (2) *a principle of determination*, (3) *an operation* (striving to act in a certain way) results that (4) produces *an effect* if nothing impedes. Power-determination-operation-effect can be characterized as a deeply entrenched way of thinking about the metaphysics of causality, and despite some terminological differences, the faculty-determination-striving-effect scheme matches it seamlessly, expressing the basic form of the Kantian architecture of action.

All this holds for non-rational animals, too, whose (1) faculty of desire comes to be (2) determined by the feelings of pleasure or pain, which leads to (3) striving to behave in a certain way (to desire or aversion) (4) and thereby to producing the effect that satisfies a need and is thereby conducive to self-preservation. The case of such rational animals as human beings is more complicated. Kant (*KpV* 5:22) makes a (completely traditional) distinction *within* the human faculty of desire: it has two aspects or expressions,[3] namely the lower and the higher. The *former* is the human counterpart of the animal faculty of desire; it is mere desire,[4] externally and therefore mainly passively determined by the agreeableness of objects to bring about pleasurable objects and avoid painful ones; more on this later. The *latter* is the famous Kanti-

[2] See *Met*., 140n; *V-Met-L*$_2$ 28:565; *V-Met/Mron* 29:823–4.

[3] Here *KrV* A649–50/B677–8 provides the crucial clue: "[T]he more appearances of this power and that power are found to be identical, the more probable it becomes that they are nothing but various expressions [*Äußerungen*] of one and the same power, which can be called (comparatively) their fundamental power [*Grundkraft*]."

[4] "[A] mere [*bloß*] faculty of desire" (*GMS* 4:459); "*desire* [*Begierde*] in the narrow sense" (*MS* 6:212).

an will: in itself active, rational, and pure, "a faculty of determining itself to action as an intelligence" (*GMS* 4:459), a desire of practical reason – our access to the noumenal, rational, and normative world beyond sense experience, making human action qualitatively different from animal behavior. The determination principle of the lower aspect of the faculty of desire is that of happiness, of gratifying one's inclinations; but what is the determination principle of the higher aspect? This is what Kant sets out to find out. To put a long story short, Kant's strategy is to latch onto what it is to be a universal law or principle of any domain, whether phenomenal or noumenal, which leads him to the famous categorical imperative, "*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*" (*GMS* 4:421). It is, in fact, a meta-principle for testing our maxims, or subjective principles of action. Here we can, perhaps mercifully, leave aside many of the elements involved in determining whether or not we in the end act on a test-passing maxim. Instead, we can just proceed from what is beyond all doubt – that the purely moral Kantian agent only acts on maxims that pass the universalizability test – and turn to our main topic, namely to discerning how Kant sees self-interest and other-regard to figure in the formation of our maxims and in finding those maxims on which it is our duty to act.

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Let us begin by introducing three maxims Kant himself gives: "never give a false promise," "increase [your own] wealth by every safe means," and "let no insult pass unavenged."[5] Even leaving questions concerning universalizability aside for the moment, these maxims admittedly have a different feel to them. Especially the final one clearly has to do with our passionate side, or, to use Kant's umbrella term, with our inclinations (*Neigungen*). But what are they? Here Kant's position is at least quasi-teleological. We are animate and natural beings, endowed with vital force (*Lebenskraft*). Kant lists a number of natural ends that come with this: through "impulses of nature [...] nature aims at a) his [the human being's] self-preservation, b) the preservation of the species, and c) the preservation of his capacity to enjoy life" (*MS* 6:420) "or the social drive" (*RGV* 6:26). On the whole, this is "the predisposi-

[5] Interestingly, only the latter two are, as far as I know, something Kant himself formulates, word for word (*KpV* 5:19, 27).

tion to animality" that consists in what Kant dubs "physical or merely *mechanical* self-love, i.e. a love for which reason is not required" (*RGV* 6:26). Thus, as animate beings, we are essentially self-interested creatures. This makes us responsive to affections relevant to our psychophysical well-being – in the faculty terminology, our faculty of desire is sensitive to pleasure and pain. This gives rise to the inclination to go for what we perceive as pleasurable and avoid what we perceive as painful. Should we succeed in this so that our inclinations are entirely satisfied (*GMS* 4:405), we would reach the state Kant calls, rather strikingly, happiness (*Glückseligkeit*).

At the arguably basic level of animate nature, then, the determination principle of our faculty of desire is that of self-interested happiness, pleasure and pain operating as our guide. They give rise to inclinations constantly operating in us. Should we be merely natural beings, we would simply do what the strongest inclination determines our faculty of desire to do. But we are also rational beings. However, it is uncontroversial that our reason is not radically cut off from inclinations: it can take inclinations as reasons for acting, or incorporate them into its maxims. This is what has happened with the two latter maxims: for instance the maxim of increasing one's wealth is a prudential maxim of reason aiming at our happiness. Regardless of whether we become overrun by irrational inclinations or choose to adopt a prudential maxim satisfying inclinations, *the greatest threat to morality is always posed by our fundamental self-interestedness*. Thus, as far as the formation of maxims is concerned, the very idea of Kantian morality is to rise above this myopically selfish stance and find those maxims that are properly universal, such as the first one concerning truthfulness.

However, even given the aforesaid, we should not think that all kinds of self-regard is out of the purview of Kant's practical philosophy; it is not an ethics of exclusive other-regard and radical self-neglect. *The Metaphysics of Morals* is particularly explicit about this.[6] In it, Kant tells us what the ends, or objects, are that maxims of pure practical reason promote; it is our duty to make it so that those maxims determine our faculty of desire to produce their respective objects, no matter what obstacles we encounter or whether we like it or not. These ends are twofold: not only to preserve ourselves but *to increase our perfection* and not only to respect others but to

[6] This is arguably because its Doctrine of Virtue concerns not only that what is formal in ethics but also that what is material in it, namely the concrete ends we should pursue (*MS* 6:394–5).

further their happiness.[7] The question is, what kind of self- and other-regard do these ends involve?

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Increasing one's own perfection equals cultivating one's faculties and is again twofold. First, it means raising whatever capacities we are endowed with from the state of animality to that of humanity – here Kant seems to have in mind primarily our epistemic capacities such as understanding and reason.[8] Second, it means not only protecting our moral integrity but also cultivation of our morality so that our actions really proceed from maxims that comply with the moral law.[9] Both of these aspects are, of course, at the heart of Kant's ethical project, for they are required for there ever to be something like a Kantian moral agent; moreover, Kant puts his case in impersonal terms, saying that we are dealing with "the perfection belonging to a human being as such (properly speaking, to humanity)" (*MS* 6:386), arguably to distance himself from the idea that he would be encouraging us to promote anything even remotely resembling egoistical interests.

So is self-interest banished from the kingdom of Kantian ethics? Not necessarily, for here I would raise a number of caveats. First, although furthering our own happiness is not a duty – according to Kant, it is debarred from being one already for the reason that a duty is a constraint and as such it cannot be something "everyone already wants unavoidably, of his own accord" (*MS* 6:386) – there can still be an *indirect* duty to oneself to further such happiness-inducing things as prosperity. This is allowable because for instance poverty can be "a great temptation to vice"; thus, the ethical marching order is not violated: we are just concerned with our "moral integrity" when we see that our basic needs are taken care of.[10]

Second, having acted from duty comes with a specific type of pleasure:

[7] The rationale behind this seems to be that they represent making "oneself and others one's end" (*MS* 6:410), whereby they are basic ways to relate to human beings as ends in themselves.

[8] See *MS* 6:387, 421–31. *MS* 6:445–6 is more liberal in this respect.

[9] See *MS* 6:386–7, 391–3, 428–37, 446.

[10] *MS* 6:388; see also *KpV* 5:93. In the same vein, Kant holds that we should not be beneficent to the extent that we "come to need the beneficence of others" (*MS* 6:454) and condemns being miserly to the extent that "one's own true needs" are left unsatisfied (*MS* 6:432).

> [T]here is a subjective principle of ethical reward [...]: the reward, namely, of a moral pleasure [*Lust*] that goes beyond mere contentment with oneself [...] and which is celebrated in the saying that, through consciousness of this pleasure, virtue is its own reward. (*MS* 6:391; see also *KpV* 5:117.)

However, Kant is at pains to emphasize that the "state of contentment and peace of soul [*Seelenruhe und Zufriedenheit*] in which virtue is its own reward" (*MS* 6:377) *can never* be the motive for us to do our duty, for this would destroy it at its very root by making it dependent on pleasure, resulting in "the *euthanasia* (easy death) of all morals" (*MS* 6:378). Again, the message is clear: we should keep our ethically relevant priorities straight.

Third, Kant holds that our own happiness is on a par with that of any other person: "a maxim of promoting others' happiness at the sacrifice of one's own happiness, one's true needs, would *conflict with itself* if it were made a universal law" (*MS* 6:384, emphasis added). Consistently enough, universalizability does not imply self-neglect, it only commands *impartiality*.

Finally, Kant recommends a kind of ethical self-defense: "[*S*]*elf-esteem* is a duty of the human being to himself. [...] Do not let others tread with impunity on your rights." (*MS* 6:436–7.) These proclamations are arguably still in keeping with the point concerning impartiality, but in his 1784–85 lectures on ethics Kant's words are harsher, attitude stiffer. He scolds his philosophical predecessors "that no part of morals has been more defectively treated than this of the duties to oneself," even though in fact they "are the most important [duties] of all," for "he who violates duties towards himself, throws away his humanity, and is no longer in a position to perform duties to other" and "has no inner worth" (*V-Mo/Collins* 27:340–1):

> The self-regarding duties are the supreme condition and principium of all morality, for the worth of the person constitutes moral worth; the worth of skill relates only to one's circumstances. [...] Under this worth of humanity alone can we perform our other duties. It is the basis for all the rest. He who

> has no inner worth has thrown away his person and can no longer perform any other duty. (*V-Mo/Collins* 27:344.)[11]

In fact, at one point in his 1793 lectures he recommends – even it is a bit difficult to tell how serious he is about it – good old-fashioned self-sufficiency or *autarkeia*, stating that we have a duty to "[s]eek independence from all things of nature, as needs, and likewise from other people" (*V-Mo/Vigil* 27:651). At any rate, these caveats show that Kant's ethical thought is not without a rather strong regard for oneself.

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I'll be much more brief about other-regard, for it is clear that Kantian universalizability test has other-regard built into its very core. In fact, I would like to draw attention to something one might not expect to encounter when Kant applies it. It is namely his contention at least ever since the *Groundwork* of 1785 (4:423) that we have a duty not only to respect and not harm others but also positively help them, be *beneficent* to them. This is of course the other main type of end we have encountered, that of furthering the happiness of others. Here Kant's argument is so interesting that it merits to be quoted in full:

> To be beneficent, that is, to promote according to one's means the happiness of others in need, without hoping for something in return, is everyone's duty.
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> For everyone who finds himself in need wishes to be helped by others. But if he lets his maxim of being unwilling to assist others in turn when they are in need become public, that is, makes this a universal permissive law, then everyone would likewise deny him assistance when he himself is in need, or at least would be authorized to deny it. *Hence the maxim of self-interest would conflict with itself* [widerstreitet sich die eigennützige Maxime selbst] *if it were made a universal law*, that is, it is contrary to duty. Consequently the maxim of common interest, of beneficence toward those in need, is a

[11] Cf. "To let oneself be insulted without reprisal is already a diminution of one's own worth." (*V-Mo/Vigilantius* 27:606.)

> universal duty of human beings, just because they are to be considered fellow human beings, that is, rational beings with needs, united by nature in one dwelling place so that they can help one another. (*MS* 6:453, emphasis added.)

Thus, Kant invokes self-interestedness while arguing for beneficence. However, evaluating the rather convoluted argument – especially whether this invocation is problematic – would take us too far afield.

Schopenhauer

Schopenhauer's most elaborate treatment of the basics of human agency is not to be found in his *magnum opus*, *The World as Will and Representation*, but in a prize essay On the Freedom of the Human Will of 1839, which forms the first part of *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics* of 1841 (second edition appeared in 1860). It reveals that Schopenhauer fully endorses the above presented power-determination-operation-effect scheme. Also the other prize essay, *On the Basis of Morals*, is quite helpful, for it attempts to keep references to its author's ontology minimal while explaining his moral position.

In inanimate nature, *natural force* comes to be determined by mechanical, physical, or chemical *causes*. In plants, *life force* comes to be determined by *stimuli* such as warmth and nourishment. Animals have a *will* that comes to be determined by representationally mediated *motives*; these motives can be either *intuitive* or *abstract*, and only humans can have the latter kind of, i.e. conceptual, motives. (*FW* 4:29–34, 46.)[12] In each case, there is a fundamental power that comes to be determined by its type of determinator, from which operating and bringing about certain effect follow.

The bulk of Schopenhauer's essay is devoted to developing a view of human agency, which is, in its essentials, rather straightforward. A motive "is an object for the cognitive faculty" towards which "the act of will is directed" or "aims at some alteration in it, or reacts to it" (*FW* 4:14). Each human being has her unique, original, and unchangeable constitution (*Beschaffenheit*) of the will Schopenhauer calls

[12] The volume and page number refer to *SW*.

character (*Gesinnung*);[13] "it lies at the basis of all the effects that motives call forth" (*FW* 4:48) and we get to know it only through experience. As a result, Schopenhauer endorses an unabashedly strong determinist essentialism:

> Just as every effect in lifeless nature is a necessary product of two factors, namely the universal *natural force* that here manifests itself, and the particular *cause* that here calls that manifestation forth, in the same way each deed of a human being is the necessary product of his *character* and of the *motive* that occurs. If these two are given, then it follows inevitably. In order for another deed to arise, either another motive or another character would have to be posited. And every deed would be able to be predicted with certainty, calculated even, if, for one thing, the character were not so difficult to discover and, for another, the motive were not often concealed and always exposed to the counter-effect of other motives, which reside only in the human being's sphere of thoughts, inaccessible to others. (*FW* 4:56; see also *W1*, § 55; 2:339.)
>
> [E]very thing that is must have a nature which is essential and peculiar to it, through which it is what it is, which it always asserts, whose manifestations are called forth with necessity by causes[.] (*FW* 4:57.)[14]

Indeed, "*[e]verything that happens, from the greatest to the smallest, happens necessarily*" (*FW* 4:60), given the essences and determinators. Consistently enough, Schopenhauer emphatically denies free will in the sense of *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*.

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[13] Our character is also in a rather robust sense inexplicable; Schopenhauer poetically writes about "the dark depths of our insides" (*FW* 4:18) and "the night of" the "interior" of our consciousness (*FW* 4:22).

[14] See also *W1*, §55. Schopenhauer even compares this necessity, in a truly Spinozistic fashion, to the necessity with which "the angles of a triangle add up to two right angles" (2:341). Schopenhauer also says that "the relation between desire and deed has completely accidental but nonetheless exact analogy in the relation between electrical accumulation and electrical discharge" (*W1*, §55; 2:354).

But how do human characters and motives come to be posited? Is there any kind of freedom left to us? To take the latter, namely the question concerning motives, first, they stem from the will as the thing itself. Conflicting motives battle each other until, just as "we see a body that is brought out of equilibrium wobble for a time alternately to one side and the other, until it is decided where its centre of gravity lies and it falls down towards it" (*FW* 4:40), "the most powerful of them [the motives] tips the balance and sets the human being in motion" (*FW* 4:45). In other words, we have here a very explicit and straightforward conflict of forces.[15] Here we can find what may be called a weak conception of freedom: Schopenhauer acknowledges that we do deliberate and are "*relatively free*, that is, free from the immediate compulsion of objects *present in intuition*" (*FW* 4:35); sometimes, however, we do not exercise this intellectual freedom but go with the rash emotion only to realize afterwards what happened:

> Now reality brings the opposing motives before the intellect as consequences of the deed which have already taken place, and the intellect then knows that they would have been the stronger, if only it had properly contemplated and carefully weighed them. The man, therefore, becomes aware of having done what was not really in accordance with his will; this knowledge is repentance. For he has not acted with full intellectual freedom, since not all the motives attained to effectiveness. What excluded the motives opposed to the deed was, in the case of the hasty deed, the emotion, and in the case of the deliberate deed, the passion. (*W2*, § 47, 593; 3:681; see also *W1*, §55; 2:349 and *FW* 4:100.)

Thus, in a way reminiscent of the Lockean suspension of judgment,[16] intellectual freedom consists of careful consideration of different motives so that they all have the chance to attain their efficacy. However, this does not take away strict determinism: whether or not we have intellectual freedom is obviously determined by the

[15] *W1*, §55 confirms this; see esp. 2:351.

[16] "[W]e have a power to *suspend* the prosecution of this or that desire, as everyone daily may experiment in himself. This seems to me the source of all liberty: in this seems to consists that which is (as I think improperly) called *free will*." (*EHU* II.xxi.47.)

strength of our emotions, and even to the extent we have intellectual freedom, the strongest motive still necessarily wins out.[17]

The positing of our character and the freedom pertaining to it raise much more difficult issues. His determinism notwithstanding, Schopenhauer thinks that we feel for good reason *responsible for our character*, the source of everything we do. Here the philosophical narrative is as follows. The familiar phenomenal world of cause and effect is under strict rule of a form of principle of sufficient reason Schopenhauer calls the law of causality, but for a Kantian like Schopenhauer, there is of course also the noumenal realm, the foundation of the phenomenal world and one in which the principle of sufficient reason does not hold. Despite extensively criticizing Kant's moral philosophy, Schopenhauer estimates the Kantian doctrine of the intelligible and the empirical character, which allows "the co-existence of freedom and necessity," as no less than "Kant's greatest and most brilliant service to the ethics" (*GM,* §9; 4:174). So Schopenhauer seeks freedom in the strong sense from the noumenal realm, which is just as expectable given his Kantianism as what he claims to find there is elusive: "the intelligible character of each human being can be regarded as an extra-temporal and thus indivisible and unchanging act of will" (*W1*, §55; 2:341); "the innermost essence of the man himself [...] has been chosen *by* him (as Plato would have it)" (*W1*, §53; 2:319).[18] Even though a choice like this would certainly involve an extremely robust sense of freedom, it seems to lie decidedly beyond philosophical thought.[19]

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How, given his basic view of human agency, does Schopenhauer see self-interest and other-regard? There is no shortage of material for answering this question: self-interest and other-regard figure in the very hard core of Schopenhauer's moral phi-

[17] See e.g. *W1*, §55; 2:355.

[18] On this aspect of Platonism, see *FW* 4:179. Cf.: "The *will*, we might say, people have given themselves[.]" (*P1* 5:491n).

[19] It should be noted that Schopenhauer does very little to illustrate this choice and closes the freedom essay by quoting "Malebranche's saying *la liberté est un mystère*" (*FW* 4:98). Moreover, already Kant talks about "an intelligible deed, cognizable through reason alone apart from any temporal condition" (*RGV* 6:31) through which we can commit ourselves to the original propensity to evil.

losophy. For human beings, three types of motives can determine our actions: "1) one's own well being, 2) another's woe, 3) another's well-being" (*GM*, §18; 4:227). The first one, the self-interested motive, is usually the dominant one; the second, the malicious motive, in fact largely derives from it; the third, the compassionate motive, is the moral one. The way in which the conflict between them turns out depends not only on their relative intensities but also, consistently enough, on the specific character of the human being – some of us are more receptive to self-interested, others to other-regarding motives.[20] However, it is self-interest that usually holds the upper hand; here is how Schopenhauer defines it:

> The chief and fundamental incentive in a human being, as in an animal, is *egoism*, i.e. the urge to existence and well-being. [...] The word *Eigennutz*, self-interest, designates egoism in so far as it stands under the guidance of reason, which enables it, through reflection, to pursue its ends *according to a plan*; thus, although one can call animals egoistic, one cannot call them self-interested. So I wish to retain the word *egoism* for the more universal concept. (*GM*, §14; 4:196.)

The root of egoism is twofold: first, we all are expressions of the fundamental, hungry, and blind will to life,[21] and, second, "each is given to himself *immediately*, while the others are given only *mediately*, by way of representation"; each of us is a kind of "microcosm, of which the macrocosm, or his whole world, appears as the mere modification or accident" (*GM*, §14; 4:197).[22] As ill-will (or malice) "arises in large measure from the unavoidable collision of egoism that occur at every step" (*GM*, §14; 4:199), it is understandable that Schopenhauer focuses on egoism and claims that "[t]he absence of all egoistic motivation is therefore *the criterion of an action of moral worth*" (*GM*, §15; 4:204). Thus far, despite the somewhat different ontological starting points, Schopenhauer is in complete agreement with Kant: self-interestedness is our default position and the main opponent of morality.

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[20] See *GM*, §20; 4:253–4.

[21] See e.g. *W1*, §54; 2:323–4.

[22] This essentially restates what Schopenhauer says in *W1*, §61; 2:392.

There are two ways to deal with the situation: the *official and esoteric* way and the *popular and exoteric* one. Let us take the official one first, and at greater length. For Schopenhauer, morality is not about rationality but about feelings already for the reason that he does not think that any purely rational and aprioristic principle can offer us a motive that has the required power to counter the non-moral motives.[23] Schopenhauer recommends taking an *a posteriori* route instead and invokes something he deems as quotidian as it is mysterious: "the everyday phenomenon of *compassion* [Mitleid]," being immediately motivated by another human being's well-being and woe so that "I directly suffer along with him, feel *his* woe as otherwise I feel only mine," which "requires that I *be identified with him* in some way, i.e. that that total *distinction* between me and the other, on which precisely my egoism rests, be removed at least to a certain degree" (*GM*, §16; 4:208). From this rather dramatically strong form of other-regard flow the two cardinal virtues: justice and loving kindness (*Menschenliebe*), whereby we not harm others and even help them.

Despite what Schopenhauer takes to be its undeniable power, this phenomenon is so difficult to explain that to do so he sees no choice but to turn to his metaphysics of ethics, which is most fully explained in the final book of his masterpiece. To express a relatively long story short, morality starts to grow in a person when the principle of individuation begins to lose its grip on him so that "he recognizes [...] that the in-itself of his own appearance is the in-itself of other people's too" so that "[h]e recognizes himself, his will, in every being, and so in suffering beings as well" (*W1*, §66; 2:440–1). Once "we see through" the principle of individuation (i.e. time and space) that applies only to the phenomenal realm, we can understand that we are all fundamentally one, in ourselves the same will, "everything is equally close to" us (*W1*, §68; 2:448) and we can – so Schopenhauer argues – directly feel others' pain. This transformative experience leads to virtues and, if need be, to sacrificing oneself for others.[24] The other-regard constitutive of Schopenhauer's virtue ethics of compassion thus stems from the dissolution of the very distinction between oneself and others; his path to universality is very different from the one taken by Kant.

This, as is well known, is however not the end, or the highest point, of Schopenhauer's official ethics: ultimately, he will settle for nothing short of uncompromising

[23] See *GM*, §19; 4:233.

[24] See e.g. *W1*, §68; 2:447.

self-effacement. Not all the compassion in the world can change the fact that, for Schopenhauer, "[t]his world is the battle-ground of tormented and agonized beings who continue to exist only by each devouring the other" (*W2*, §46; 581; 3:667). Our "life swings back and forth like a pendulum between pain and boredom [...] out of which it is ultimately composed" (*W1*, §57; 2:368) so that the world as a whole "is constantly passing away, caught up in vain strivings, inner conflict, and perpetual suffering" (*W1*, §68; 2:448). Given this, there is, according to Schopenhauer, only one way out: complete self-renunciation. In fact, the way for it is already paved for the morally virtuous, of whom the principle of individuation has started to lose its grip:

> [A]ll pure and true love, and indeed all free justice, comes from seeing through the *principium individuationis*; and when this is achieved with full clarity, it leads to perfect sanctification and redemption, the phenomenon of which is the state of resignation[.] (*W1*, §68; 2:471; see also *W2*, §48, 606; 3:696.)

This "altered mode of cognition" can amount not only to depriving "*motives* of their effectiveness" but more radically, and even more mystically, to "a complete abolition of the character" (*W1*, §70; 2:477–8) itself – to stop the hurting, one must shut down the very motor that keeps us going, to become will-*less*. This is the only thing that can give us "profound tranquility, imperturbable confidence and cheerfulness" (*W1*, §71; 2:486) of "a genius in the ethical sense" (*W1*, §68; 2:468). In plainer terms, the lesson can perhaps be said to be that everything is futile; so *just give up and you feel better*. If we succeed in this, we have "only empty nothing before us" (*W1*, §71; 2:487), "[n]o will: no representation, no world" (*W1*, §71; 2:486), which is why Schopenhauer does not hesitate to recommend asceticism of such an extreme form that it leaves the one who practices it only with "the feeble remnant that appeared as the vitality of [the] body" (*W1*, §68; 2:452). If all this seems uncanny, enigmatic, and even horrifying to us, Schopenhauer would be quick to point out – and I think not without reason – that what he is offering is merely the philosophical, that is abstract and discursive, description of what not only countless Christian saints but especially

Hindus and Buddhists have practiced and taught for millennia.[25] Schopenhauer acknowledges that "I too have been highly conscious of the paradoxical nature that this metaphysical interpretation of the fundamental ethical phenomenon must have for those occidental educated people who are used to quite other groundings of ethics, but," he adds, "I cannot do violence to the truth" (*GM*, §22; 4:274). He did, after all, consider it one of the greatest advantages his century had over the ones preceding it that oriental wisdom had finally begun to be available in the Western world.

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Surprising as it may sound, proclaiming the kind of comforting wisdoms just explained was not the reason why Schopenhauer became something of an intellectual superstar in the Germany during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Instead, his breakthrough was signaled by the 1851 two-volume collection of essays discussing a wide range of topics and entitled *Parerga and Paralipomena*. Interestingly, "Aphorisms on the wisdom of life" of the first volume presents what Schopenhauer calls his eudaemonology or "instructions to a happy existence" whose "value can only be a conditional one" "insofar as it retains the ordinary, empirical standpoint and adheres to its error" (5:333–4). Here we have, then, what I would call Schopenhauer's popular and exoteric ethics. I would like to finish by giving a brief summary of it, for it forms an interesting point of contrast to Schopenhauer's defiantly world-denying official stance.

The aphorisms celebrate what amounts to in many ways completely traditional intellectualist eudaimonism according to which "[h]appiness belongs to those who are sufficient in themselves" (*P1* 5:354; see also 5:446), quiet, solitary, and modest life of the intellect and its pleasures being the path to such a condition (*P1* 5:350, 354, 358, 447). Strikingly, there is said to be even "a region where pain is essentially alien, [...] the atmosphere of the lightly living gods" (*P1* 5:358), intellectual life "completing itself [...] like a slowly maturing work of art" (*P1* 5:359). The renowned pessimist even goes so far as saying that "we should always appreciate the present by accepting it cheerfully" (*P1* 5:443). Although the aphorisms contain darker passages, it must be admitted that if Schopenhauer is here playing the devil's – or, perhaps better, the angel's – advocate, he is doing so with considerable panache. Moreover,

[25] See e.g. *W1*, §68; 2:452–60 and *W2*, §48, 603–33; 3:692–729.

the exoteric ethics does not come completely out of thin air; already the first 1818 edition of Schopenhauer's masterpiece contains a strain, a weak one but nevertheless, that pulls to the same direction, and directly to what Nietzsche would later come to elaborate. Schopenhauer entertains the possibility of "someone who is satisfied with life, who affirms it in every way" (*W1*, §54; 2:330), adding slightly later:

> [S]omeone, rather, who is perfectly happy and content with life and who, after calm reflection, could wish that his life as he has experienced it so far would be of endless duration, or of perpetually new recurrence, and whose thirst for life is so great that he would gladly and willingly take on all the pain and hardships that life is subject to in return for its pleasures; such a person would stand "with firm, strong bones on the well-grounded, enduring earth,"[26] and would have nothing to fear[.] (*W1*, §54; 2:334–5; see also 2:382, 390.)

So, perhaps despite his better judgment, Schopenhauer seems to let moments of lightness into his masterpiece. In any case, as the aphorisms show, he is not oblivious of the fact that what he offers to the world might be too much doom and gloom to be received favorably if at all, so he is willing to go through the trouble of offering a happier alternative.

Concluding remarks

In this paper I have attempted to establish the following five main points concerning the topic of the workshop. First, both Kant and Schopenhauer consider it an anthropological constant that as animate creatures we are self-interested beings, by default primarily interested in our own well-being and happiness. Second, both think that this is the fundamental obstacle and threat to morality. Third, although they both look for ways to transcend the self-centered point of view and to move to a more universal perspective, their approaches are markedly different: while Kant develops a rationalistic universalism that takes all human beings impartially into account, Schopenhauer emphasizes the emotional union he thinks we can achieve with others as the only genuine form of other-regard. Fourth, Kant tries to strike a balance between

[26] The quotation is from Goethe's *Grenzen der Mensschheit*.

self- and other-regard, going at times surprisingly far in emphasizing the duty we have to protect our inner worth. Fifth, although Schopenhauer thinks that traditional eudaemonism is the best of those ethical positions people are likely to find palatable, he does not hesitate to push to its extreme the tenet on which his virtue ethics of compassion is based so that not only the distinction between ourselves and others but the whole world familiar to us is revealed to be ultimately nothing at all.

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