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Leiden
The Netherlands

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Peters, M.A.; Bather Woods, D.; Stoll, T.

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WAYS TO SALVATION

On Schopenhauer's Theory of Self-negation and Salvation

Mathijs Peters

22.1 A Single Thought

Schopenhauer famously opens the Preface to the first edition of *The World as Will and Representation* with the claim that his *magnum opus* ‘aims to convey a single thought’ (SW 2:VII/WWR 1:5; see also SW 4:142/WN 442; Janaway 2010, xii–xiii). He explains this idea as follows: ‘A *single thought*, [...], however comprehensive it might be, must preserve the most perfect unity. If it is divided up in order to be communicated, the various parts must still be organically coherent ...’ (SW 2:VIII/WWR 1:5).

This chapter concerns one of the most intriguing ‘parts’ into which Schopenhauer’s ‘single thought’ has been divided up: his soteriology, which revolves around two so-called ‘ways to salvation’ (SW 3:729/WWR 2:650). Together with his moral philosophy, Schopenhauer discusses this part in the last of the four books that make up *The World as Will and Representation*, characterizing this book as ‘the most important’ and ‘most serious’ (SW 3:529/WWR 2:480) of the four. Many scholars have noted, however, that this part contradicts various key arguments on which Schopenhauer’s philosophy rests as a whole, which would undermine the claim that he develops ‘a single thought’ (see for example Cartwright 1999, 253; Janaway 1987, 284–5). After a discussion of the various ways to salvation that Schopenhauer describes, as well as of this state itself, I focus in this chapter on these problematic aspects and end with my own reading of his soteriology.

22.2 Complete Will-less-ness

It is impossible to understand Schopenhauer’s discussion of ways of salvation without embedding these ways in his metaphysical system and his pessimism. As outlined in other chapters in this collection, the former revolves around a fundamental difference between an ‘ideal’ empirical reality that Schopenhauer calls the world-as-representation, and a metaphysical world ‘beyond’ or ‘beneath’ this reality that he names the world-as-will. As manifestations of this will, he observes, our lives are filled with experiences of unsatisfied longings and cravings and therefore, in his view, with suffering and pain (SW 3:664/WWR 2:594 ff.). This idea, in turn, forms one of the pillars of his pessimism, which is discussed

in more detail in other chapters as well. Let me therefore summarize his pessimism with three of his characteristic claims. The first is the following: ‘There is only *one* innate error, and it is that we exist to be happy. It is innate in us because it coincides with our existence itself ...’ (SW 3:729/WWR 2:650). The second is his statement that the human individual is ‘something that should not at all exist’ and is ‘wrong’ (SW 6:322/PP 2:274). The third goes as follows: ‘Life is deeply submerged in suffering and cannot escape it: we enter into life in tears, its course is basically always tragic, and the exit from it, even more so’ (SW 3:732/WWR 2:651–2).

These three claims seem to indicate that, according to Schopenhauer, it is impossible for human beings to constitute any kind of long-lasting relief. After all, they suggest that we are thrown, to use an existentialist phrase, into an existence plagued by inescapable and endless desiring and suffering – in fact, he writes that ‘distress’ is ‘essential to life’ (SW 6:309/PP 2:309). However, it is precisely in light of these deeply pessimistic observations that Schopenhauer develops his soteriology. Below, I will discuss the two ‘ways to salvation’ that he describes in this context, but first I want to provide a general idea of what salvation, according to Schopenhauer, entails.

It is important to note firstly that his characterization of humans as manifestations of an endless and overpowering form of striving that cannot be satisfied and that causes suffering, suggests that these ways to salvation, in some way or another, need to result in a situation in which the will ‘inside’ of us is *quietened*, *denied* or even *overcome*. Indeed, at several places Schopenhauer describes salvation as revolving around a state of ‘complete will-lessness’ (SW 2:448/WWR 1:406) and emphasizes the radical character of the process leading up to this state as follows: ‘we need a complete reconfiguration of our meaning and essence, i.e. a rebirth that results in redemption’ (SW 3:693/WWR 2:619). And somewhere else: ‘salvation is something entirely alien to our person, and it points to the fact that salvation requires us to negate and abolish precisely this person’ (SW 2:482/WWR 1:435).

That this ‘complete reconfiguration’ revolves around a *denial* of the will is made even clearer by Schopenhauer’s rejection of suicide: even though the decision to kill oneself would *seem* to present us with a way of escaping a life of misery and suffering, he argues that someone who wants to commit suicide still ‘wills life’ and therefore still *affirms* the will as manifested in themselves (SW 2:471–2/WWR 1:425–6). A suicidal person, this means, is ‘just’ not happy with the specific conditions under which they live, and would have wanted to continue living if these conditions had been different and if they had therefore been able to satisfy their desires. Such a person, in other words, still lives *with* and *in* the illusion that happiness can be found (SW 6:328–9/PP 2:279).

This latter observation brings me to a second aspect of Schopenhauer’s soteriology: salvation is also related to the development of a form of *cognition*, *awareness* or *recognition* of the fact that we are mere individual manifestations of a more essential metaphysical will, and that it is this condition that causes our suffering. In this context, he refers several times to various theories, worldviews and religions that, according to him, emphasize the idea that we need to open our eyes to an essential truth, obscured by the illusory reality in which we live as individuals. Schopenhauer frequently praises Plato, for example (SW 2:496/WWR 1:445–6; SW 6:332/PP 2:282), for substantiating his own claim that ‘nature is only the image, the shadow of our will’ (SW 3:694/WWR 2:605).¹ He also finds helpful observations in the *Upanishads*, often citing rather mystical formulations to describe the idea that the world we take for reality is, in fact, a mere illusion (SW 2:496/WWR 1:446). In this context, Schopenhauer frequently employs the phrase ‘veil of maya’ (SW 2:299/WWR

1:280) to refer to our earthly existence and furthermore praises, among others, forms of Buddhism, Brahmanism, Sufism and the esoteric writings of Meister Eckhart (see for example SW 3:693–4/WWR 2:619–20).

22.3 Two Ways to Salvation

Let me now focus on the two ways that Schopenhauer describes as resulting in this state of ‘complete will-lessness’. The first overlaps with his moral philosophy, which, as discussed in other chapters in this volume, revolves around the idea that incentives that he characterizes as ‘moral’ are categorically opposed to those that are ‘egotist’. The latter flow from the, in his view, false and illusory belief that every individual is a separate being and solely responsible for their own well-being: they flow, in other words, from a perception of the world that is ruled by the *principium individuationis*, and they contribute to human beings making this world a ‘hell’ for each other (SW 6:319/PP 2:270).² On the other hand, the experience of *Mitleid*, which refers to ‘mit-leiden’ or ‘suffering with’ (see Constâncio 2017, 430) and is sometimes translated as ‘compassion’ and sometimes as ‘sympathy’,³ relates to the world ‘beyond’ the *principium individuationis*. This is the case, in his view, because it is based on the experience of a ‘oneness’ with other suffering creatures – both human and animal (see SW 2:440/WWR 1:399) – that is possible because, essentially, we all *are* manifestations of the same, essentially undivided will. Schopenhauer writes: ‘*sympathy* is to be defined as the empirical emergence of metaphysical identity of the will through the physical multiplicity of its appearances’ (SW 3:691–2/WWR 2:617). *Mitleid*, in other words, to some extent *transcends* the boundaries that exist ‘in’ the world-as-representation between individual beings, making the will burst through our individuation and making it possible for one individual to feel ‘with’ the suffering of another individual (SW 4:211/BM 203).

This is where the above-mentioned cognition comes into play: since the world-as-representation is an *illusion* or a ‘veil’, according to Schopenhauer, the experience of *Mitleid* presents us with a moment during which we, to some extent, pierce through this illusion and are provided with a glimpse of the *true* nature of the world. *Mitleid* might therefore result in the development of *awareness* or *cognition* of this illusory nature. Indeed, he even characterizes virtue as ‘practical mysticism’ because ‘it springs in the end from the same knowledge that makes up the essence of all true mysticism and is truly explicable in no other manner’ (SW 4:273/BM 255; see also Came 2012, 245). This ‘recognition of the whole, of the essence of things in themselves’, he goes on, may then become ‘the *tranquilizer* of all and every willing’ (SW 2:448/WWR 1:405) and eventually result in will-less-ness.

This ‘tranquilizer’ may take different forms: an important part of Schopenhauer’s discussion of the first way to salvation concern *asceticism*, which he links to practices revolving around ‘complete chastity’ (SW 2:459/WWR 1:415), ‘voluntary and intentional poverty’ (SW 2:451/WWR 1:408), and even the welcoming of ‘every bit of suffering that comes to [one] from the outside’ (SW 2:451/WWR 1:408). Again, this way to salvation concerns a *denial* of will, because it directly thwarts this will as it is manifested in the body. In Schopenhauer’s own words: ‘As he mortifies the will itself, he also mortifies its manifestation, its objecthood, the body’ (SW 2:451/WWR 1:409). Again, furthermore, Schopenhauer frequently refers to religious saints and mystics found in Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions and traditions to illustrate this aspect of the first way to salvation (SW 2:452/WWR 1:409).

At several places, he indicates that asceticism often *follows* the experience of *Mitleid*: those who have, through *Mitleid*, taken up the suffering of the world as their own, he suggests, will gradually work towards a state of salvation by voluntarily and actively inflicting suffering on their own bodies. He describes the relation between these ways as the ‘transition from virtue to *asceticism*’ (SW 2:449/WWR 1:407) and writes about the practitioner of asceticism: ‘he is no longer satisfied with loving others as himself and doing as much for them as for himself [...]. Accordingly, he renounces the essence that appears in himself and is already expressed through his body’ (SW 2:449/WWR 1:407).

Suffering also plays a crucial role in the second way to salvation, or ‘δεύτερος πλους’ (‘second voyage’, see SW 3:724/WWR 2:645 n.), described by Schopenhauer. This time, however, it concerns suffering that is directly and personally experienced, caused by our existence as manifestations of will. Characterizing suffering together with knowledge, as a ‘school’ (SW 6:340/PP 2:289), he writes in this context: ‘suffering is in fact the cleansing process through which alone, in most cases, a human being is saved, i.e. led back from the false path of the will to life’ (SW 3:731/WWR 2:652). This reference to ‘most cases’ is crucial, since it indicates a normative distinction between the first and the second ways to salvation. As Schopenhauer states after descriptions of individual suffering in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*:

All these considerations provide a more precise explanation for what [...] was designated with the phrase ‘second way’, i.e. cleansing, turning of the will, and redemption brought about by the suffering of life. This is without a doubt the most frequent path. For it is the path of the sinner, and that is what we all are. The other path reaches the same destination by cognition alone and hence by making the suffering of the whole world one’s own; it is the narrow road of the elect, the saints, and should therefore be seen as a rare exception.

(SW 3:734/WWR 2:654)

Both ways to salvation that Schopenhauer describes, in other words, revolve around suffering. The first one revolves around a form of awareness brought about by the suffering of others, sometimes even leading to the suffering of oneself as caused by the practice of asceticism. The second way also consists of personal suffering, but this time it is not instigated by ‘cognition alone’ but it is the result of one’s existence as a manifestation of will.

22.4 Denial and Affirmation

Now that I have described the two ways to salvation that can be discerned in the fourth book of *The World as Will and Representation*, I want to explore Schopenhauer’s references to the state of salvation *itself* in more detail. This also brings me to the above-mentioned contradictions, since it is in the different descriptions of the state of salvation that, according to many commentators, we find claims and arguments that conflict not only with each other but also with the other ‘parts’ that would together shape Schopenhauer’s ‘single thought’. These conflicts mainly concern two interrelated issues: the role of will and the role of cognition.

Let me first focus on the issue of will by dividing it into three ‘sub-problems’. These problems all revolve around the observation that there seems to be no way ‘around’ will as the metaphysical kernel of the universe, problematizing Schopenhauer’s references to ‘com-

plete will-less-ness'. The first is caused by the observation that Schopenhauer, as we have seen above, seems to suggest that the state of salvation is reached once one has completely *denied* the will. In the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, we indeed find the following characterization of a 'he' who has reached salvation: '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' (SW 2:462/WWR 1:417). A question that immediately rises in the attentive reader of these passages, of course, is how one can turn against or even disconnect oneself from something that, Schopenhauer also states throughout his works, makes up anything and everything that exists.

The second, slightly different but related sub-problem concerns the 'voluntarily' and 'deliberate' aspects of asceticism: how can one will *not* to will if our minds are determined by the same will that would be denied? As Bryan Magee puts this in his study of Schopenhauer's life and work: 'there is simply no way in which we can be the decisive agents in the denial of our own willing' (1997, 242; see also Came 2012, 245–6; Jacquette 1999, 312). The only way in which Schopenhauer seems to be able to claim that one can will not to will seems to be (1) by postulating that there is some 'part' of will that remains and that, in some way or another, *wills* its own denial or, at least, the denial of a large part of itself; and/or (2) by postulating that the denial of the will is not based on an act of volition.

The latter idea seems to be suggested by the many passages in which Schopenhauer describes self-denial as something that is beyond the control of the subject, since it revolves around the will denying *itself*. He writes, for example, in a passage on grace:

[T]he *self-abolition* of the will begins with cognition, but cognition and insight as such are independent of free choice; consequently, that negation of the will, that entrance into freedom cannot be forced by any intention or resolution, but rather emerges from the innermost relation of cognition to willing in human beings, and thus arrives suddenly, as if flying in from outside.

(SW 2:478–9/WWR 1:432)⁴

A passage like this seems to indicate that it is not a person, individual or self that turns against the will because this person has autonomously decided to do so, but that it is the will itself denying its own nature 'in' this person, individual or self. These descriptions would, to some extent, explain why self-denial 'happens' to people without their own involvement, but they still leave the question unanswered of how the will can will *not* to will.

A third sub-problem is discussed by Janaway (2016), in which he observes that, at several places, Schopenhauer refers to salvation as the *summum bonum* – the highest good. This is a problem, Janaway writes, since Schopenhauer also argues, as described somewhere else in this volume, that 'goodness' refers to that which lies in line with will and 'badness' to that which thwarts it (2016, 650, 654). This suggests, Janaway observes, that salvation can only be characterized as the *summum bonum* if it, in some way or another, *affirms* the will instead of denying it (2016, 663). Again, there seems to be no way around will.

22.5 Forms of Cognition

The second confusing aspect of Schopenhauer's descriptions of salvation concerns the role played by forms of cognition, which I want to split up into two sub-problems. The first

arises because Schopenhauer at some places seems to indicate that cognition mainly plays an instrumental role on the path to salvation, but at other places also suggests that salvation consists of a state of ‘cognizing’ *itself*. This does not have to be a problem, since the two do not necessarily exclude each other, but it does become problematic once we link this first sub-problem to the second one. But let me first discuss the different ways in which Schopenhauer refers to cognition as both instrument and goal.

In the passage on *Mitleid* that I cited above, he refers to recognition ‘of the inner nature of the thing-in-itself’ as becoming ‘the *tranquilizer* of all and every willing’. This could imply that the state of salvation is different from this recognition, which means that recognition itself is merely part of the *process* of quieting the will; of the way *to* salvation. At the same time, certain passages in Schopenhauer’s works *also* suggest that cognition *itself* constitutes the state of salvation, or that a form of cognition or awareness at least accompanies this state. In the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, for example, he writes the following about the condition of someone who has denied the will: ‘Only cognition remains; the will has vanished’ (SW 2:486/WWR 1:439). This, of course, raises several questions, related to the first two above-mentioned ‘sub-problems’ concerning will: how can cognition ‘disconnect’ itself from will if Schopenhauer also claims that it is a mere tool or ‘organ’ of will (SW 6:332/PP 2:282; SW 3:267–8/WWR 2:249; see also Mannion 2003, 272)? And what or who ‘has’ this cognition – *cognizes* – once the will has ‘vanished’?

An indication can be found in the third book of *The World as Will and Representation*, in which Schopenhauer discusses aesthetic experience. The details of his aesthetic theory, which revolves around his own interpretation of Platonic Ideas, have been explained in other chapters in this volume and I will therefore not repeat them here. What is important for my analysis, is that Schopenhauer understands the experience of beautiful works of art as consisting of a *brief* and *momentary* form of will-less-ness that is accompanied by a cognition of the pure Ideas represented, according to him, by works of art. When we ‘view’ these Ideas, which do not stir the will ‘inside’ of us or are related to it, Schopenhauer argues, we come to experience a form of will-less-ness (see Janaway 1989, 298). This experience, therefore, forms a model, as it were, of long-lasting salvation.

Indeed, Schopenhauer describes the links between aesthetic experience and the two above-discussed ways of salvation as follows, again emphasizing the important role that cognition plays not in reaching this state but in this state *itself*:

We may recall from the Third Book that the aesthetic pleasure in the beautiful largely consists in the fact that we have entered into a state of pure contemplation, momentarily suppressing all willing, i.e. all desires and concerns. [...] We can gather from this how blissful life must be for someone whose will is not merely momentarily placated, as it is in the pleasure of the beautiful, but calmed forever, indeed extinguished entirely [...]. Such a person who, after many bitter struggles with his own nature, has ultimately prevailed completely, remains as only a pure, cognizing being, as an untarnished mirror of the world.

(SW 2:461–2/WWR 1:417)

In this state, Schopenhauer writes on the same page, the subject becomes the ‘eternal subject of cognition’, and observes: ‘Life and its forms merely glide before him, like a fleeting appearance’ (SW 2:462/WWR 1:417). If we understand this experience as a ‘model’ for sal-

vation, then Schopenhauer again seems to suggest that some form of cognition forms part of the experience of salvation, and is not (only) a way of *reaching* salvation.

The unclarity of the relation between cognition and salvation rises as well because of the second sub-problem that I want to discuss in this context. This problem is caused by the idea, which we can also find in Schopenhauer's works, that it is impossible to grasp what salvation entails because it lies *beyond* the conditions under which we can develop cognition at all. In a footnote, for example, he observes that since 'normally' cognition is in service of the will, the 'mystics of every religion' describe conditions in which 'all and every *cognition* comes to a complete halt, together with its basic *subject-object* form' (SW 3:703/WWR 2:626). Somewhere else, he argues that after its denial the will does not 'produce' intellect anymore, which again suggests that we cannot know (let alone describe) what happens after this denial (SW 6:332/PP 2:282).

At these places, he therefore claims that this state can only be alluded to *negatively*, as a 'transition into an empty nothing' (SW 2:484/WWR 1:409). Schopenhauer links this idea to observations on the limits of our intellect as a 'mere tool of the will' that keeps 'bumping up against unsolvable problems as against the walls of our prison' (SW 3:737–8/WWR 2: 658).⁵ He concludes: 'when my teaching reaches its highest point, it assumes a *negative* character, and thus ends with a negation,' adding: 'this is precisely where the mystic proceeds positively; from this point onwards, nothing remains but mysticism' (SW 3:703/WWR 2:626–7).

22.6 Two Forms of Will

The two previous sections, I hope, indicate that Schopenhauer seems to fragment his 'single thought' into several contradicting claims that make it difficult to understand them as 'organically' forming one whole. He does this by suggesting that, on the one hand, salvation forms a *summum bonum* and that we cannot escape our essence as will, and on the other hand by stating that it is formed by one's denial of will, the latter of which would imply that it is possible for the will – which makes up everything that exists – *not* to will. Furthermore, he also does this by claiming that, on the one hand, cognition is an instrument on the path to salvation and, on the other, that it constitutes salvation *itself*. Lastly, at some places he indicates that salvation cannot be grasped or described at all, since the cognizing subject ceases to exist once it has reached true salvation.

It is not entirely clear to what extent Schopenhauer is aware of these contradictions. His references to a 'single thought', after all, suggest that his soteriology would form one organic part of this thought as well. Indeed, he writes that the different ways to salvation that he describes, including ones that revolve around a form of cognition about the nature of the universe, are so closely related that they eventually come to be entwined, whether the person following these ways wants this or not:

Quietism (i.e., the cessation of all willing), asceticism, (i.e. the intentional extirpation [*ertödtung*] of one's own will) and mysticism (i.e., consciousness of the identity of one's own inner being with that of all things, or the kernel of the world) stand in the closest of connections, so that someone professing one of them will gradually be led to adopt the other as well, even against his principles.

(SW 3:704/WWR 2:628)⁶

At other places, however, Schopenhauer clearly indicates that his philosophy contains contradictions, but justifies this by linking them to his above-mentioned observations on the

limits of philosophical thought. He writes, for example, in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*:

I have never been rash enough to claim that my philosophy leaves no questions unanswered. Philosophy in this sense is really impossible: it would be a doctrine of omniscience. But ‘it is right to go to the limit if there is no further path’ [*est quadam prodire tenus, si non datur ultra*]: and there is a limit; reflection presses on to it, and can illuminate the night of our existence *this far*, even though the horizon always remains dark. I reach this limit with my doctrine of the will to life that affirms or negates itself in its own appearance. But to want to go further than this is, in my view, like wanting to fly out of the atmosphere. We must stay within the atmosphere, although new problems arise from ones that have been solved.

(SW 3:679/WWR 2:606–7)

Schopenhauer, in other words, seems to acknowledge here that there are problems with his soteriology, but at the same time suggests that this will happen to any philosophy that tries to solve the riddle of existence. Perhaps, it could therefore even be argued that Schopenhauer’s many references to examples of saints and mystics denying the will and reaching salvation should be understood as driven by the deliberate attempt to confront his *theory* with a *praxis* that refuses to completely bow down to this same theory, preserving the riddle of existence and forcing theoretical reflection to acknowledge its limitations.

However, this idea still does not solve the question of how, precisely, we should understand the tension between Schopenhauer’s references to denying and being will, or the issue of how and why a denial of will can be and is characterized as the *summum bonum*. Of course, it could be argued that Schopenhauer ‘simply’ presents us with different understandings of salvation that cannot be unified into one theory, or even that his understanding of salvation contains so many contradictions that this part of his thought, as Magee suggests for example, should be ‘given up’ (1997, 242–3). In the following, however, I want to focus on interpretations that take the idea seriously that Schopenhauer’s philosophy *does* present one organic whole.

I believe that the most convincing of these interpretations revolve around the idea that Schopenhauer, in some way or another, has to postulate the existence of two metaphysical ‘levels’ or ‘dimensions’ beyond the world-as-representation. Several authors have defended versions of this interpretation,⁷ but I will only focus on the one developed by Christopher Janaway, since I find it the most consistent. In the above-mentioned article on the riddle presented by Schopenhauer’s characterization of salvation as the *summum bonum*, Janaway argues that we should understand Schopenhauer as referring to two ‘kinds of willing’ (2016, 662): the first is in some way related to the individual and results in the suffering we experience as *individual* embodied beings, and the second concerns a desire that turns against this individual form of willing; a desire to escape from suffering. Following the way to salvation, we come to deny the former in the name of the latter, this suggests, and it is with the help of the latter, which Janaway characterizes as a ‘counter-will’ (2016, 664), that this denial can be characterized as the *summum bonum*. In his introduction to the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Janaway observes that Schopenhauer himself suggests this as well by stating that his observations on the limits of philosophical thought make it possible to ask the following question: ‘What would I be if I were not the will to life?’ (SW 3:737/WWR 2: 658). Janaway writes: ‘what he has called negation may be

another form of will, but we cannot provide an account, limited as we are by our existence as finite individual beings' (2018, xxxvi).

Janaway (2016) observes, however, that even though Schopenhauer's employment of the phrase '*summum bonum*' forces us to postulate these two forms of will, this interpretation still threatens a 'contradiction at the heart of [Schopenhauer's] metaphysics' (2016, 665). This contradiction rises, he writes, because the idea that Schopenhauer would refer to two 'forms' of will still conflicts with his rejection of suicide for *affirming* will (Janaway 2016, 667–8). Furthermore, it still cannot explain, he writes, how and why the metaphysical core of what one is – the individual will – could turn against itself and result in a form of salvation (2016, 665–6).

Janaway observes that this issue could, perhaps, be solved by referring to the form of *cognition* that, as discussed above, Schopenhauer describes at several places.⁸ This suggestion would revolve around the idea that salvation, for Schopenhauer, eventually comes down to the idea that the person who has denied the will becomes an 'empty' onlooker to, or 'consciousness' of the universe, comparable to Kant's 'unity of apperception' (see also Janaway 1989, 296). This suggestion lies in line with Janaway's observation, made in *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, that in his early works Schopenhauer continuously refers to a 'better consciousness' that would be antithetical to our 'ordinary empirical consciousness'. Whereas the latter refers to knowledge of a changing spatiotemporal world, the former would come close to a Platonic notion of the soul, and revolve around insight into the kernel of the universe. Even though he does not use this term in his later works, Janaway argues, it continued to play a pivotal role in Schopenhauer's philosophy, returning in his references to a 'pure subject of knowledge' (see Janaway 1989, 273–4). However, as Janaway observes as well, this interpretation again sparks the question how salvation can be the *summum bonum*, since this 'consciousness' or 'pure subject of knowledge' would still be removed from will.

It seems, therefore, that interpretations of Schopenhauer's references to salvation either end up in a defense of a will-less form of consciousness or cognition, or in some sort of postulation of a dimension of 'will' that is different from the willing that we deny on the path to salvation. Both positions, however, contradict each other.

22.7 A Last Glowing Spark

In this last section, I want to substantiate the suggestion, made in different ways by Janaway and others, that in order to make sense of Schopenhauer's conflicting references to salvation we need to postulate that the German philosopher refers to two 'kinds' of will. In addition to Janaway's approach, which highlights the idea of a disembodied 'better consciousness' or 'pure subject of knowledge', and which does not explicitly discuss the relationship between corporeality and the coming about of a 'counter-will', I want to do this by foregrounding several specific references that Schopenhauer makes to *embodiment*. The aim of this reading is therefore not to present a new interpretation or to solve the problems discussed above. Instead, my main goal is to foreground the important role that the body plays in Schopenhauer's philosophy. His descriptions of human beings as *embodied subjects*, after all, form one of the most intriguing aspects of his thought, making him an intellectual forerunner of the fields of existential phenomenology, embodied cognition and evolutionary biology.

A highlighting of Schopenhauer's references to embodiment, I believe, results in the idea that ways to salvation consist of the following three steps. The *first* step goes as fol-

lows: the will, objectified in an individual human body (Schopenhauer defines the body as the will's 'objecthood', see SW 2:451/WWR 1:409), reaches consciousness 'in' or 'through' this human individual and develops cognition of the fact that it is *imprisoned* 'as' or 'in' an object. This cognition is not abstract in nature but should be understood as a 'waking up' of the will, which suddenly 'sees' its real situation and realizes that its individual existence is an 'error' or 'dream' that causes suffering. Often (but not always), this goes hand in hand with *Mitleid*, which makes the will aware of the universal nature of suffering, caused by this 'error' and, again, of the actual one-ness of its essence 'beyond' the world-as-representation.

The step can be substantiated with the help of several passages in which Schopenhauer reflects on the difference between human and non-human animals, observing that whereas both are individual *embodied* objectifications of will, only the latter has developed a capacity that enables them to reflect on what they are and, therefore, that provides an opportunity for the will to realize what it is and to understand that it is unfree. He characterizes the suffering of non-human animals, for example, as a 'tormented, fearful will in thousands of forms' that does not have 'the freedom to redemption which is conditioned by soundness of mind' (SW 6:342/PP 2:290). He furthermore observes in a beautiful passage, which resonates with the phrase *homo homini lupus*, that 'the hungry wolf sinks its teeth into the flesh of its quarry with all the necessity of a rock falling to earth, and there is no possibility of it recognizing that it is the mauled as well as the mauler' (SW 2:478/WWR 1:431). He also writes that, in contrast with other creatures, 'humanity is the only level on which the will can negate itself, turning entirely away from life. While the will fails to negate itself, every birth provides it with a new and different intellect – until it has recognized the true nature of life and as a result wants no more of it' (SW 3:733/WWR 2:653).

This brings me to the *second* step: once the will has woken up 'in' this situation, it starts rebelling against the individualizing mall in which it has been 'squeezed' and imprisoned. Again, we can use the metaphor of waking up: the will now tries to stay awake by refusing to fall asleep again. This attempt to stay awake suggests that it is here that the will *splits up*: this struggle, after all, takes place between a will that has become aware of itself on the one hand, and strivings and cravings that try to pull it back to sleep 'into' its individual vessel on the other. Concretely, this means that the former part of will turns away from as many desires and motives that are linked to its existence as an individual being (hunger, thirst, sexual desires, etc.) as possible, even actively thwarting them, for example through forms of asceticism.

Descriptions of the transition to this second step can be found in passages in which Schopenhauer states that self-denial concerns the will turning against itself *as individual embodied phenomenon* and then wanting to *distance* itself from this phenomenon. He discusses this process as follows by, again, emphasizing the transition from virtue to asceticism and using the metaphor of imprisonment:

As we have shown, the moral virtues, that is to say justice and loving kindness, (when pure) from the fact that the will to life sees through the principle of individuation and recognizes itself again in all its appearances; as such, the virtues are in the first place a sign, a symptom that the appearing will is no longer entirely imprisoned in that delusion, but rather that the disillusionment has already begun; so one could say metaphorically it is already beating its wings to fly away.

(SW 3:695/WWR 2:621).

This ‘flying away’ should, according to my reading, be understood as the awakened part of will ‘burning up’ as many of the strivings and desires that are rooted in and focused on the individual vessel in which it has woken up as possible. Schopenhauer uses the metaphor of ‘burning up’ in the following passage:

[T]he person who will have the least fear of becoming nothing in death is the one who has recognized that he is already nothing, and who therefore does not take any more interest in his individual appearance, since cognition has, as it were, burned and consumed the will in him, so that no will, and thus no *craving for individual existence* is left in him.

(SW 3:699–700/WWR 2:624, *my emphasis*).

This passage is confusing, but I want to argue, partly inspired by Janaway’s interpretation described above, that Schopenhauer suggests here that on the path to salvation the will that has woken up targets and extinguishes *individual willing*.

This then leads to a *third* and last step: eventually, this process of self-denial goes so far that the will comes extremely close to ‘burning up’ its individualizing prison: the body. Crucial, however, is that this has not yet happened *completely* in most of the conditions that Schopenhauer describes in several passages on salvation: these conditions, I believe, still *circle around* a utopian form of salvation that cannot be described and that we might not even reach, which means that they are still located on the *brink* before complete nothingness. After all, in order to *experience* the transition to salvation, one still has to have a body and mind, which means that one *remains* an individual, embodied objectivation of will that still *desires* complete nothingness.

It is here that, I believe, his references to embodiment should be foregrounded. At two places in *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer describes a condition in which the will has almost been extinguished, referring to the body as *still* present in the form of what he calls a ‘trace’ (*Spur*) or ‘spark’ (*Funke*).⁹ The first of these is part of a passage cited above, and again emphasizes cognition:

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

(SW 2:461/WWR 1:417, *my emphasis*)

In the second passage, Schopenhauer describes ‘those who have overcome the world’ as people ‘in whom the will, achieving full self-cognition rediscovers itself in everything and then freely negates itself, and which then only needs to wait for the *last trace of the will to disappear along with the body that it animates*’ (SW 2:486/WWR 1:438, *my emphasis*)

These two passages suggest, I believe, that the consciousness or cognition that many commentators link to the state of salvation still has a material dimension: Schopenhauer describes conditions in which the body, as objectivation of will, has been denied *right until* the moment it is extinguished. However, this body, including the self that *is* this body, *still* exists, otherwise there would be no such thing as a self *experiencing* this form of peacefulness and this form of cognition. The contemplation of beautiful artworks, I want to argue, presents us with a ‘preview’ of this situation (in a similar vein, Came [2012, 35] calls it a

‘signpost’): during this contemplation, individual willing disappears for a brief moment. Still, however, it must be accompanied by the body, since otherwise it would not be able to perceive a work of art at all or to be ‘touched’ by it. Still, in other words, a *shred* of embodiment remains.

This means that, according to this reading, the condition that Schopenhauer describes in most passages on salvation revolves around an in-between moment on the border between existence and nothingness, balancing on the line between the material and the ‘post-material’, as it were floating in a *liminal* space between individual willing and an indescribable ‘something else’. This might explain why this condition is still characterized by a last trace of *longing*; a longing for a nothingness. And it is in light of this longing, which permeates the last trace of embodiment on the border with nothingness, that salvation appears as the *summum bonum*: a highest good that is presented as such by a will that longs for nothing else than its own disappearance. It is also this longing, furthermore, that provides the condition that Schopenhauer describes with a *utopian* element, indicated by the word ‘wait’ in the above-cited passage: in these passages, the will circles around but does not reach a longed-for vacuum, since it still exists as an individual corporeal ‘trace’ or ‘spark’ in the material world.

What happens after this liminal moment, when the ‘last glimmering spark’ has truly died out together with the body, I believe, cannot be described within the framework of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. As he writes in a passage in ‘Additional Remarks on the Doctrine of the Affirmation and Negation of the will to life’:

Counter to certain silly objections I maintain that the *negation of the will to life* in no way signifies the annihilation of a substance, but the mere act of not-willing; the same thing that *willed* hitherto *wills* no more. Since we know this being, the will, as thing in itself merely in and through the act of *willing*, we are incapable of saying or grasping what else it is or does after it has given up this act; this is why negation *for us*, who are the appearance of the will, is a transition to nothingness.

(SW 6:331/PP 2:281)¹⁰

Again, the passages indicate that it is impossible to know what lies beyond the walls against which his philosophy eventually crashes but over which it wants to leap, driven by a utopian longing for nothingness. The ‘nothingness’ that Schopenhauer here describes, therefore, is still a ‘relative nothingness’ that is linked to a waiting self that is kept alive by a ‘last glowing spark’, imprisoned within its own limited framework of knowledge.

22.8 Conclusion

This brings me to the conclusion of my overview of Schopenhauer’s soteriology and of my own reading of this part of his ‘single thought’. My reading, we have seen, mainly substantiates the claim – developed by Janaway and others – that we need to postulate two ‘forms of willing’ to make sense of Schopenhauer’s descriptions of salvation: individual willing on the one hand, and a desire to eradicate this willing on the other, the latter born in the will’s essential freedom beyond the world-as-representation. Indeed, Schopenhauer states: ‘the negation of the will does not follow from suffering with anything like the necessity of an effect from its cause, but rather the will remains free. In fact, *this is the only place where its freedom emerges directly into appearance ...*’ (SW 2:467/WWR 1:422, my emphasis).

I have tried to foreground the idea that an important aspect of Schopenhauer's thought – his concern with human beings as embodied selves – provides us with additional arguments regarding the coming about of these two levels. It is *because* the will is born in the prisons of our individual bodies, this reading suggests, that it 'splits up' and starts longing for the freedom it has/had beyond the *principium individuationis*. Self-denial is therefore not an individual act, but it is something that 'happens' to a person because the will finds itself imprisoned in that person's individual body and, through this imprisonment, negatively becomes aware of the freedom it has 'lost' and that can not 'appear'. Before the self dissolves into a nothingness that cannot be described, however, it is still embodied as an individual manifestation of will. In certain passages, furthermore, Schopenhauer himself even seems to claim that it is already in this liminal condition, which comes about because of the tension between will manifested as individual body – and therefore as individual willing – on the one hand, and on the other the essential freedom of the will 'directly emerging' 'in' this body, that we find glimpses of the state of salvation.

Of course, I realize that this reading raises several questions and, as the many interpretations developed by other commentators, also conflicts with several claims that Schopenhauer himself makes throughout his works. Most importantly, my emphasis on corporeality conflicts with Schopenhauer's own references to a completely immaterial and 'pure' form of cognition. Again, my reading therefore mainly perpetuates the problems already discussed above instead of solving them. However, solving these contradictions and conflicts in a completely satisfying manner might be impossible, I believe, and perhaps this is Schopenhauer's own way of negating our thirst for knowledge; our will to cognition. Nevertheless, I hope that my reading emphasizes an, in my view, crucial aspect of his thought: his concern with corporeality, which makes Schopenhauer's philosophy the crossing point of several theoretical and intellectual traditions of the time in which he lived: German idealism, a proto-Darwinian naturalism, a Spinozistic embodied materialism, and forms of Western and Eastern mysticism.

Even though his soteriology contains several contradictions, I want to conclude with the observation that it is also precisely in struggling with this part of his theory that we come to reflect on the riddles of our existence as human, embodied animals, as well as on the limits of our thought. And these struggles still make Schopenhauer into one of the most intriguing and inspiring philosophers of the nineteenth century.

Notes

- 1 Using a fitting phrase, Janaway describes Schopenhauer's philosophy as 'Platonism turned sour' (1989, 274).
- 2 In this context Schopenhauer refers favorably to Hobbes's phrase that *homo homini lupus*: 'man is a wolf to man' (SW 2:175/WWR 1:172; SW 3:683/WWR 2:610).
- 3 On the different meanings of 'compassion' and 'sympathy', see Mannion 2003, 200–1. I will use the word *Mitleid* in this chapter.
- 4 Both Came (2012, 246) and Janaway (2016, 652) analyze this passage in their discussions of Schopenhauer's understanding of salvation.
- 5 For a comparison with Wittgenstein's ladder-metaphor in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, see Hannan 2009, 141.
- 6 I have slightly changed this translation by adding two parentheses (after 'willing' and 'asceticism') to come closer to the original German.
- 7 Gerard Mannion, for example, argues that 'behind' the will that forms the origin of our suffering, there must be a *true* 'in-itself' that is 'analogous to theistic interpretations of ultimate reality and the ground of existence' (2003, 237). Julian Young, in turn, argues that to make sense of

- Schopenhauer's references to salvation the 'thing-in-itself' must be understood as lying beyond the will, the latter presenting merely a concept used by Schopenhauer to explain phenomena in nature (see Young 1987, 77). Atwell offers a slightly different interpretation, which revolves around the idea that the will, as discussed by Schopenhauer, forms the 'thing in itself as appearance' (1995, 127). Salvation, in his view, eventually revolves around the will becoming one with itself, beyond the individual willing in the form of which we know the will (see Atwell 1995, 172). This interpretation partly forms a response to Patrick Gardiner's claim that Schopenhauer presents two forms of mystical awareness, one revolving around insight into our 'true' nature', the other around a much deeper and ungraspable essence (see Gardiner 1963, 299).
- 8 Janaway (2016, 666) observes that this has been suggested by Rudolf Malter (1991).
 - 9 Atwell (1995, 160) refers to this trace as well.
 - 10 On the similarities and differences between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's observations on this will to nothingness, see Constâncio 2017. On Nietzsche's related critique on Schopenhauer's ethics, see Mannion 2003, 204–6.

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