

What's so good about negation of the will?
Schopenhauer and the problem of the *summum bonum*

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1. Introduction

The final part of Schopenhauer's argument in *The World as Will and Representation* concerns "affirmation and negation of the will" (*Bejahung und Verneinung des Willens*). He argues, with a fervour that borders on the religious, that "negation of the will" is a condition of unique value, the only state that enables "true salvation, redemption from life and from suffering" (*Werke* 2: 470/WWR 1, 424). Some commentators have asserted without qualification that this condition is his "highest good." Thus Julian Young writes: "[T]he final goal of 'salvation' ... which Schopenhauer describes as the '*summum bonum*', 'the highest good' ... consists in something he calls 'denial of the will.'"¹ Similarly John Atwell: "Salvation may be called the 'telos of human life,' or even the highest good (*summum bonum*), understood as that without which human life would be devoid of any redeeming feature."² Robert Solomon includes Schopenhauer in a long list of philosophers who have "defended some variation of 'peace of mind' or 'tranquility' ... as the highest good";³ Bernard Reginster locates in Schopenhauer "the highest good (happiness) as the absence of pain and suffering, which he believes can only be achieved through resignation."⁴ Daniel Came finds a "soteriological vision of the *summum bonum* which is in principle attainable for human beings."⁵

However, these assertions are all questionable in one important respect, for Schopenhauer states that there *cannot be* a highest good or *summum bonum*, saying

“such a thing is unthinkable” (Werke 2:428/WWR 1, 389). True, he does immediately add in the same passage that “we might ... *by way of a trope and figuratively* [my emphasis] call the complete self-abolition and negation of the will the *summum bonum*.” But still he maintains that nothing can be the highest good *literally*. Schopenhauer himself seems tempted to say that negation of the will is the highest good, but unable to assert as much directly. In this essay I explore the reasons behind Schopenhauer’s ambivalence, and ask what account of the value of his uniquely redemptive state the resources of his philosophy really allow him to give. I shall argue that a better statement of Schopenhauer’s position would indeed be that negation of the will *is* the highest good, but that his ambivalence over the applicability of the term ‘highest good’ should not be viewed as a mere quibble or lapse of confidence, rather as revealing something of structural importance in his thought. Schopenhauer has a univocal definition of *good* as whatever is conducive to the will. But — so I shall argue — he recognizes two distinct *ways of being good*, corresponding to two kinds of *willing*. The first is what I shall call ordinary individualistic willing: willing whose aim is the well-being of individuals or the alleviation of individuals’ suffering, which includes both egoistic willing and the moral attitude of willing the well-being of other individuals for its own sake. The second is a will to be without ordinary individualistic willing. Schopenhauer explicitly theorizes only the first of these two kinds of willing, but I shall argue that the coherence of this part of his thought depends upon there being something like the second kind, and that there is evidence for his recognizing it. With this dichotomy in place, he can hold that negation of the will is the highest good, while also making clear that it is not the highest of the goods attainable by ordinary individualistic willing. It remains, unclear, however, whether Schopenhauer’s metaphysics is ultimately able to sustain the distinction he needs between the two kinds of willing.

2. Negation of the will to life

According to Schopenhauer, “the whole essence of a human being is will” (*Werke 2: 341/WWR 1, 315*). This is also the essence common to all living things. To exist as a living individual of any kind is to strive after ends that are to do with the individual’s well-being, and also with the preservation of its species. It is this natural disposition to strive after ends that Schopenhauer calls will to life (*Wille zum Leben*). He tends to talk interchangeably of “will” and “will to life”, and states that “it is a mere pleonasm and amounts to the same thing if, instead of simply saying ‘the will’, we say ‘the will to life’” (*Werke 2: 324/WWR 1, 301*). The natural state of all living things is one of affirmation of this will to life: “*The affirmation [Bejahung] of the will is the constant willing itself ... as it fills the life of human beings in general*” (*Werke 2: 385/WWR 1, 353*). But Schopenhauer argues that negation of the will to life, attainable only relatively rarely by human beings, is the superior condition.

It is hard to capture the meaning of term ‘negation of the will to life’ (*Verneinung des Willens zum Leben*) in a single coherent statement. Matthias Koßler has recently summarized at least part of the problem for the interpreter. Within a single section of Schopenhauer’s discussion in *The World as Will and Representation* (§ 68) the expression *Verneinung des Willens zum Leben* applies to (a) a state of “true composure” that arises when all willing is quietened by a remarkable kind of knowledge or recognition (in which someone “recognizes himself, his innermost and true self in all beings” and “must ... regard the endless suffering of all living things as his own,” (*Werke 2: 447/WWR 1, 405*); (b) this very knowledge or recognition itself; (c) an ascetic practice of striving or struggling against one’s own will. Koßler concludes that *Verneinung des Willens zum Leben* is not a unitary phenomenon or a unitary philosophical concept.⁶

However, the following is a summary of at least some of the central points that emerge from Schopenhauer’s account:

1. The state of “composure” in which this negation culminates is a state of will-lessness or absence of will (*Willenslosigkeit*, see e.g. *Werke 2: 428, 448/WWR 1,*

389, 406). Will is characterized as including episodes of desiring and striving towards ends, and affective states that result from the attainment or non-attainment of ends. (Will encompasses, besides desires, also “inclinations, passions, affects [*Neigungen, Leidenschaften, Affekte*]” (*Werke* 3: 252/WWR 2, 224)). In “will-lessness” all such states are conceived as absent from a subject’s consciousness. Cognition occurs, but “known appearances no longer act as *motives* for willing” (*Werke* 2: 336/WWR 1, 311).

2. It is a state in which the sense of self alters, so that one is aware of being a “pure, will-less subject of cognition” (cf. *Werke* 2: 429/WWR 1, 390) or a center of consciousness, but does not regard oneself as an individual entity distinguishable from other entities: “a secret presentiment . . . makes him suspect that, to whatever extent time and space might present him as completely distinct from other individuals . . . and present these as entirely foreign to him, nonetheless, in himself and apart from representation and the forms of representation, it is one will to life that appears in them all” (*Werke* 2: 431–2/WWR 1, 392).

3. A human being may make a transition to the state of recognition and its resulting will-lessness, in one of two circumstances: (a) if they come to “see through the principle of individuation” and regard the suffering and well-being of all individuals as mattering to them in the same way as the suffering and well-being of the individual human being they have naturally identified themselves with; (b) if they undergo suffering of sufficient magnitude to transform their state to one of resignation. (“The difference . . . is whether this recognition is called into existence by suffering that is merely and purely *cognized*, and which is freely approached by our seeing through the *principium individuationis*, or whether, on the other hand, recognition comes from one’s own immediate *feeling* of suffering” (*Werke* 2: 470/WWR 1, 424).)

4. The transition into the state of will-lessness is not one that someone can bring about in themselves intentionally by an act of will, but rather one that they undergo, experiencing it as “the *self-abolition* [*Selbst-aufhebung*] of the will” (*Werke*

2: 478/WWR 1, 432); so “negation of the will ... cannot be forced by any intention or resolution, but ... arrives suddenly, as if flying in from outside” (*Werke* 2: 478/WWR 1, 432).

Many questions can be raised concerning the coherence and plausibility of Schopenhauer’s claims about negation of the will. In this essay I want to pursue one question in particular: What is the nature of the *value* that he attributes to this condition?

One point to clarify straight away is that Schopenhauer makes a fundamental distinction between negation of the will and “happiness.” “Happiness” is the satisfaction of the desires that are natural to an individual human being by virtue of the individual’s embodying the will to life. His terms most naturally translated as “happiness” are *Glück* and *Glücksäligkeit*. *Glück* is equated with *Befriedigung*, “satisfaction,” and sometimes with *Wohlseyn* (“well-being”).⁷ Thus he says “the will of human beings is directed only towards its own well-being [*Wohlseyn*], the sum of which we think of under the concept of *happiness* [*Glücksäligkeit*].” It is a basic natural characteristic of any individual living being to will its own well-being:

The chief and fundamental incentive in a human being, as in an animal, is *egoism*, i.e. the urge to existence and well-being. ... This egoism, both in an animal and in a human being, is linked in the most precise way with his innermost core and essence, and indeed is properly identical with it. ... *Egoism* is by nature boundless: the human being unconditionally wills to preserve his existence, wills it unconditionally free from pains, including also from all lack and privation, wills every pleasure of which he is capable, and even seeks where possible to develop new capacities for pleasure. ... In line with this, everyone makes himself the mid-point of the world, relates everything to himself. (*Werke* 4: 196–7/*BM*, 190)

For Schopenhauer egoism is inimical to morality, hence a eudaemonistic ethics based around the value of happiness is not viable: “[p]eople tried to present happiness now as *identical* to virtue, now as a *consequence* and effect of it: both failed every time” (*Werke* 4: 113/*BM*, 120). Such ethical theories failed, in Schopenhauer’s view, because the will towards happiness is a “striving which leads [the will] on quite another path than the one morals would like to prescribe for it.” Happiness cannot be a basis for ethics, then, in Schopenhauer’s view, because it is concerned always with satisfying naturally occurring desires for one’s own individual well-being.

By contrast, negation of the will is a state of renunciation (*Entsagung*) or resignation (*Resignation*) from desires (*Werke* 2: 448/*WWR* 1, 406), which Schopenhauer characterizes using other psychological terms: *Säligkeit*, *Friede*, *Ruhe*, *Heiterkeit*, *Erhabenheit*, *Gelassenheit*, *Freudigkeit*, *Zufriedenheit* — blissfulness, peace, rest, cheerfulness, elevation, composure, joyfulness, contentment.⁸ The contrasts between this group of terms and the “happiness” group (especially *Glück*, *Glücksäligkeit*, *Befriedigung*) are sometimes subtle and may be missed, especially in translation.⁹ For example, *Befriedigung* is contrasted with *Zufriedenheit*. *Befriedigung* suggests a “having-been-satisfied,” connoting relation to a prior state of unfulfilled desire. *Zufriedenheit*, by contrast, evokes a stable state of being untroubled by desires. *Glücksäligkeit* likewise is used for an achieved state of happiness or well-being resulting from the satisfaction of desires, while *Säligkeit*, blissfulness, denotes a state in which desires do not arise. Thus it is inaccurate to say, as Reginster does, that for Schopenhauer “the highest good (happiness)” is “the absence of pain and suffering, which he believes can only be achieved through resignation.”¹⁰ Through resignation one reaches a state other than happiness. We find a parallel in Schopenhauer’s conception of aesthetic experience, where, with the temporary suspension of willing in the subject’s consciousness, “happiness and unhappiness disappear ... neither happiness nor misery is taken with us across this border” (*Werke* 2: 233/*WWR* 1, 221–2). So happiness is not Schopenhauer’s “highest good.” But what about the rest of Reginster’s statement? There is reason to expect that in Schopenhauer’s view the

absence of pain and suffering attained through resignation should indeed count as the highest good. Schopenhauer is quite emphatic that the essence of the good is “to exist only in relation to a desiring will” (*Werke* 2: 429/WWR 1, 389). He also believes that “the basis of all willing is need, lack, and thus pain” (*Werke* 2: 367/WWR 1, 338). Thus if desiring is pain, and the good, whose essence exists in relation to the desiring will, consists in that pain’s cessation, we might reasonably expect a permanent absence of all pain to be the highest good. So those who treat the negation of the will as Schopenhauer’s highest good do so quite intelligibly and are going with the grain of his thought. And yet Schopenhauer denies that negation of the will is the highest good. We need to examine why he does so.

3. No highest good

In 1817, as he was preparing *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer wrote the following note:

As is often said, *good* is that which pleases the will, and is therefore always only relative. It never satisfies the will completely so that afterwards the will ceases to desire. Such cessation occurs only when the will turns and abolishes itself But since this self-abolition is the complete and absolute silencing of the will, then figuratively and in comparison with the conditional and temporal means of silencing the will which we all call *good*, that self-abolition could be called the absolute good, the highest good, the *summum bonum*. (HN 1: 466/MR 1: 516, translation slightly modified)

This perhaps gives the impression that Schopenhauer thinks there is a highest good, and is just being hesitant when he says you could (*könnte*) say so, if you were speaking figuratively (*bildlich*). These qualifications are rather obscure, however, and are not further explained here. In the published text of *The World as Will and*

Representation his position has hardened considerably. He makes a point of raising the question whether there can be a highest good or *summum bonum* at all, and answers the question with a firm “No.” Here is the passage:

Given what we have said, the *good*, according to its concept, is a relative thing [*tôn pros ti*], which is to say that every good is essentially relative: because its essence is to exist only in relation to a desiring will. *Absolute good* is thus a contradiction: highest good [*höchstes Gut*] or *summum bonum* mean the same thing, denoting properly an ultimate satisfaction for the will, following which there will be no new willing. ... But ... such a thing is unthinkable. ... The will can have no lasting fulfilment that gives perfect and permanent satisfaction to its strivings. It is the vessel of the Danaids: there is no highest good, no absolute good for the will, but rather only ever a temporary good. (*Werke* 2: 427–8/WWR 1, 389)

That there is no ultimate satisfaction for the will is one of Schopenhauer’s most insistent themes, expressed sometimes with powerful rhetoric: “its desires are unlimited, its claims inexhaustible, and every satisfied desire gives birth to a new one. No possible satisfaction in the world could suffice to still its craving, set a final goal to its demands, and fill the bottomless pit of its heart” (*Werke* 3: 657/WWR 2, 573). Attaining a state of satisfaction is good, but in no case does it eliminate our disposition to form new unsatisfied states of desire, and there is no such thing as an overall satisfaction that leaves us desiring nothing. With this picture of willing firmly in place, Schopenhauer must hold that there is no highest good to be attained through the satisfaction of the will.

The claim that a highest good is impossible *per se* is consistent with the rest of Schopenhauer’s published writings, for while the phrase *höchstes Gut* occurs from time to time, in no serious philosophical context does Schopenhauer use the expression in his own voice.¹¹ He uses it sometimes for a supposed good that he

regards as illusory: thus a man may be *deluded* into thinking that union with a particular beautiful woman is the highest good (*Werke* 3: 617/WWR 2, 539), and at a more general level “life must *count* [*gelten*] as the highest good” (*Werke* 3: 532/WWR 2, 465; my emphasis) to all of us who are imbued with the will to life and restricted to its limited perspective. Schopenhauer criticizes the use of “highest good” in other ethical theories, such as Stoicism’s “virtue is the highest good” (see *Werke* 2: 103, 106/WWR 1, 113, 116) and Kant’s notion of the highest good, which he claims is a disguised appeal to an egoistic eudaemonism.¹² But Schopenhauer does not make any literal assertion of his own concerning a highest good. The closest he comes to a positive, unqualified use of the expression is in the evocative passage in the Third Book of *The World as Will and Representation* where he characterizes the tranquility of aesthetic experience:

the peace [*Ruhe*] that we always sought on the first path of willing but that always eluded us comes of its own accord, and all is well with us [*uns ist völlig wohl*]. It is the painless state that Epicurus prized as the highest good and the state of the gods: for that moment we are freed from the terrible pressure of the will, we celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing, the wheel of Ixion stands still. (*Werke* 2: 231/WWR 1, 220)

The conception of highest good here is attributed only to Epicurus, but the question arises: Why would Schopenhauer himself refuse to concur? This aesthetic state of being freed from willing is later invoked in his characterization of the will’s self-negation: “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” (*Werke* 2: 461/WWR 1, 417). It seems a short step to saying that this enduring painless state genuinely is the highest good. But Schopenhauer cannot take that step if he denies that a highest good is possible.

Schopenhauer himself appears still to be in two minds, however, as he immediately follows his denial of the possibility of a highest good with an elaboration of his “*bildlich*” point from the notebooks:

But if we would like to retain an old expression out of habit, giving it an honorary or *emeritus* status, as it were, we might by way of a trope and figuratively [*tropischerweise und bildlich*] call the complete self-abolition and negation of the will, the true absence of the will [*Willenslosigkeit*], the only thing that can staunch and appease the impulses of the will forever, the thing that can give everlasting contentment, the only thing that can redeem the world ... — we might call this the absolute good, the *summum bonum*. (*Werke* 2: 428/WWR 1, 389)

The notion of an honorary or *emeritus* status for the expression ‘highest good’ is new in the published version. What light can this notion throw on the value that Schopenhauer here envisages for the negation of the will? I shall discuss two recent answers, before offering my own different account.

First, Mark Migotti gives this reading of the distinction between a highest (or unconditioned) good and an *emeritus* highest good:

[I]n Schopenhauer’s thought, the possibility of overcoming the will performs some, but not all, of the functions that the possibility of achieving the unconditioned good does in the thought of, for example, Aristotle and Kant (just as an *emeritus* professor performs some, but not all, of the functions of a regular full professor). (Migotti, 1995: 653)

Migotti elaborates on this by drawing attention to claims Schopenhauer makes elsewhere: (1) that if, prior to one’s existence as a human being, one had to make a rational choice between this existence and non-existence, then non-existence would

be the option to go for¹³ (Migotti calls this Schopenhauer's "prohairesis thesis"); and (2) that the only effective moral argument against suicide is that it masquerades as a "release" from the misery of the world, thereby preventing realization of the "real release" (*wirkliche Erlösung*) that consists precisely in staying alive in a conscious state of will-lessness.¹⁴ Migotti reasons that if there were the possibility of realizing the highest good, it would provide an ultimate, non-relative ground for existing as a human being, and would make clear that it is "worthwhile to *be* a human being in the first place." Schopenhauer's *emeritus* highest good does not do the full job, but does at least show what "makes it worthwhile to *continue* to be a human being, *given that one already is one*" (Migotti 1995: 653). Thus on this reading the limited function of the *emeritus* highest good is to give us reason to carry on existing, despite the fact that there would be no reason to choose existence, if we had had the choice. Migotti accordingly refers to the *emeritus* highest good as an "ersatz *summum bonum*" and as a "next best thing to an unconditioned good."¹⁵

Bernard Reginster's more recent reading uses similar terms to characterize Schopenhauer's attitude to the state of "complete resignation" in which the will negates itself: "Although it is the best condition available to human beings, complete resignation remains for him a distant second-best to the fulfilment we had been hoping for, merely an ersatz happiness."¹⁶ On this view genuine "happiness," construed as the fulfilment of all our desires, *is* after all the highest good, but it is certifiably unattainable. So negation of the will is just a depressing default, the highest *attainable* good — not real happiness, but a substitute for it. Reginster finds in this a "curious ambivalence" on Schopenhauer's part towards negation of the will, and speaks of "the persistent hankering for fulfilment it makes manifest,"¹⁷ as though Schopenhauer's view were "if only we could attain the highest good ... but we cannot, so let us give up on fulfilment and be satisfied with the lesser good that we can attain."

For both Migotti and Reginster the state of will-lessness is a "next best" or "second best." It is good for limited purposes, or as a replacement, an attainable good

that falls somewhere short of another conceivable good that is unattainable.¹⁸ There are, however, grounds to question two implications of these readings: (1) that will-lessness is to be regarded in any sense as an “ersatz” or “second-best” to something else, (2) that it is even to be regarded as good.

The first point is easier to challenge. There is no sense of “ersatz” in Schopenhauer’s account. He himself does not use this term, which the commentators themselves have imported into the argument, nor anything approaching the connotation of “second-best.” He writes only positively of the state of complete will-lessness, saying that it can “redeem the world.” This is not easily read as a second-best to anything. Furthermore, what it is allegedly second-best to is not merely something we happen not to be capable of — rather, for him, it is an *impossibility*, a *contradiction*. Someone under the illusion that a highest good through final satisfaction of the will is a possibility might be subject to the “hankering” that Reginster mentions, but Schopenhauer himself is not under that illusion. (If he were, he would resemble someone who carried on yearning to find a square circle, despite the fact only the merely circular ones are within our grasp.) He cannot, then, hold that there is a possible state of fulfilment for will-lessness to be a second-best to. So I maintain that (1) is false: Schopenhauer does not regard will-lessness in any sense as an “ersatz” or “second-best.” To the reader who is not convinced by Schopenhauer’s theory, negation of the will may well look like a second-best. But for Schopenhauer himself that cannot be the import of the *emeritus* metaphor.

The second point is more troublesome, but a case can be made that in the relevant passage Schopenhauer does not treat the state of will-lessness as *good* at all. We can see this by making better sense of the metaphor of retirement. Schopenhauer’s point is that the *expression* ‘*summum bonum*’ is now *emeritus*. It no longer has any real work to do. Schopenhauer continues to define the concept *good* as “essentially relative,” such that it “designates the *suitability of an object to any particular effort of the will*.” “So,” he continues, “anything that is agreeable to the will in any one of its expressions, that is conducive to its purpose, is intended in the concept *good*” (*Werke*

2: 425/WWR 1, 387), and again “its essence is to exist only in relation to a desiring will” (*Werke* 2: 427/WWR 1, 389).¹⁹ But now it must occur to us that for someone in the state of will-lessness there is no desiring will to stand in relation to, with the apparent consequence that nothing can — literally — be good for someone in that state. While the *satisfaction* of willing can be a good (though never a final or *highest* good), *absence* of willing cannot, it seems, even be *good*. And since the concept *bad* likewise relates essentially to the will, denoting in general what is “not conducive to the striving of the will” (*Werke* 2: 426/WWR 1, 387), a state of true will-lessness ought presumably to be one that is beyond good and bad altogether. This seems to be corroborated by Schopenhauer’s description of the *indifference* of the will-less subject, who

remains only as a pure, cognizing being, as an untarnished mirror of the world. Nothing can worry him any more, nothing more can excite him, because he has cut all the thousands of threads of willing that keep us bound to the world He gazes back calmly at the phantasm of this world that ... now stands before him as indifferently as chess pieces after the game is over.
(*Werke* 2: 462/WWR 1, 417)

But now what Schopenhauer says looks puzzling in another way. If in this state nothing can even be good any more, and *a fortiori* nothing can be the highest good, why retain the expression ‘highest good’ in any capacity, why give it even a figurative role? There is ambivalence here, but *contra* Reginster it is not ambivalence about the *value* of will-lessness. As we shall see in the following sections, Schopenhauer regards negation of the will as having what he calls “final value” and as “superior to everything else.” Given such assertions, we might expect him to assert that *being* in that state (albeit a state in which you have become indifferent to items in the world) would itself be *good*. But, on the other hand, if *nothing* can be good for you in a state of will-lessness, it seems at least uncomfortable to agree that being in

that state would be good. So Schopenhauer is ambivalent because he finds himself in a conceptual strait-jacket, bound by the following commitments: If your will is absent, nothing can be good for you; but your will's being absent is the state that has final value, indeed final value for you. This would allow the conclusion that being in the state that has final value for you cannot be good for you. Schopenhauer's perfectly understandable ambivalence is thus conceptual: he hesitates to assert that absurd-seeming conclusion. Hence the escape-clause: will-lessness is not literally the highest *good*, but we are on the right lines if we think of it as being so figuratively. In what follows we shall confront the question whether Schopenhauer has, or can have, a coherent position built out of these materials.

4. Moral goodness and transcendent value

Schopenhauer makes a complex link between the negation of the will and moral goodness. (1) The two have a common origin: "from the same source that gives rise to all goodness, love, virtue and nobility there ultimately arises also what I call negation of the will to life" (*Werke 2*: 447/WWR 1, 405). (2) They are distinct, and there is a "transition" by which the one gives rise to the other: "complete resignation and holiness ... comes from goodness once it attains its highest degree" (*Werke 2*: 434/WWR 1, 394). And (3) the value of moral goodness is derivative from the value of negation of the will.

Morally good actions, for Schopenhauer, are those performed out of loving kindness (*Menschenliebe*) or justice (*Gerechtigkeit*), the two cardinal virtues that stem from the single morally valuable incentive, compassion (*Mitleid*), which is the disposition to will the well-being of another individual pure and simple. A particular action has moral worth if and only if it stems from compassion, and is one in which the other becomes "the ultimate end of my will [*der letzte Zweck meines Willens*]" (*Werke 4*: 208/*BM*, 200). It is important that moral goodness attaches to a kind of

willing, and hence is distinct from will-lessness. “‘To love one’s neighbour’ means to will!”— as Wittgenstein succinctly noted among some obliquely Schopenhauerian musings.²⁰ Thus the goodness of a moral action still falls under the definition of *good* as suitability to an effort of the will. If I will the well-being of another individual, my will is satisfied to the extent that their well-being (*Wohl*) is promoted or their suffering or “woe” (*Wehe*) is diminished. The outcome of such an action is good relative to my will. But its *moral* goodness stems from its bearing also a relation to the will of the other. Those who are “benevolent [*wohlwollend*]” were originally “called *good* human beings, because of the way their actions related to the wills of others in general” (*Werke* 2: 426/WWR 1, 387). My actions are good because they promote what others want, their own well-being; and I am good if my actions tend to be good in this way.

The common source for both moral goodness and negation of the will is the recognition of one’s innermost self in all beings. The morally good person already “makes less of a distinction than is usually made between himself and others” (*Werke* 2: 439/WWR 1, 399), and the highest moral goodness belongs to the person who attains a “pure ... unselfish love of others” to such a degree that his or her own existence can be sacrificed for others (*Werke* 2: 443/WWR 1, 401–2). The person who exhibits this kind of selflessness can undergo a transition to will-lessness:

someone takes over also the sufferings that originally fall to the lot of others ... [H]e now identifies his own lot with that of mankind in general; but this is a hard lot, namely that of striving, suffering, and dying. Therefore, whoever ... wills for himself no other lot than that of mankind in general, can no longer will even this for any length of time. Clinging to life and its pleasures must now soon yield, and make way for a universal resignation; consequently, there will come about the negation of the will. (*Werke* 3: 696/WWR 2, 606–7; translation slightly modified)

The idea seems to be that if you are an exceptionally virtuous human being to whom all suffering and all threats to well-being begin to matter equally, irrespective of which individual bears them, then from a state in which you are motivated to alleviate all suffering, you find suffering too great, too all-pervasive, to be prevented or alleviated, and become motivationally inert.

The value that attaches to the resulting negation of the will is to be contrasted with that of morality as such. In a letter dated 20 November 1844 the jurist Johann August Becker posed Schopenhauer the question: “For whom does the incentive that you call ‘uniquely moral’ have particular value?”²¹ Schopenhauer’s reply of 10 December contains these remarks:

You ask: 1) *for whom* moral actions have value? — For *him* that performs them. Hence ... his satisfaction with himself and the approval of impartial witnesses And 2) in comparison with what? — with all of his other actions that arise from the first two incentives [egoism and malice].

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, 220, my translation).

We should pause to ask what “final value” might mean here. On a common recent understanding we attribute “final” value to something that is valued “as an end” or “for its own sake,” rather than for the sake of something else, or instrumentally as a means to something else.²² No doubt Schopenhauer construes the state of “absolutely final” value as being valuable for its own sake. But in making the above contrast he appears to say that the value in my acting compassionately is *not* a final value, but

some kind of instrumental value. He calls the moral virtues “a *means of advancing* self-denial, and consequently negation of the will to life” (*Werke* 3: 696/WWR 2, 606),²³ again as if the moral virtues were not valuable for their own sake. Secondly, and more shockingly, he seems to suggest that my acting compassionately has value only *for me*. However, I suggest that both of these impressions are misleading. 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:

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.” (*Werke* 4: 228–9/*BM* 217–8)

Thus my compassionate action can be good for the other, and the non-occurrence of the other’s pain, which is the end at which I aim in being compassionate, can be good for its own sake.

In order to distinguish the “absolutely final” value of negation of the will from the value of moral goodness, we need to interpret “final value” not only as value for its own sake, but as what we might call *complete* or *terminal* value. In the very passage on the *emeritus* highest good from which we started Schopenhauer designates negation of the will as “the one radical cure for the disease against which all other

goods — such as fulfilled wishes and achieved happiness — are only palliatives, only anodynes” (*Werke* 2: 486/ WWR 1, 389). Even moral action resembles ordinary egoistic action in being concerned with the fulfilment of desires for some individual’s well-being. Hence even moral action achieves only palliative goods. There is no *completable* good to be attained either by egoistic willing or by moral willing. Whatever desires one satisfies, whatever sufferings one alleviates — whether of this individual or that — there will always be more unsatisfied desires and more unalleviated suffering. (Hence the images of the bottomless pit, the ever-revolving wheel of Ixion and the eternally leaking sieve of the Danaids.) In this sense no egoistic good is ever final, but neither is any moral good. By contrast, negation of the will achieves finality by terminating willing. It therefore transcends the goodness of individualistic desire-satisfaction, whether concerning the agent’s own desires towards individual well-being or the corresponding desires of other individuals.

5. Two kinds of value?

Schopenhauer studiously avoids saying even that negation of the will is good, let alone that it is the highest good. But if will-lessness is the state of final value, how can it fail to be good? Are there two kinds of value at stake here: good *versus* neither-good-nor-bad? And does negation of the will have the value of being neither-good-nor-bad? At one level this appears to be the case. The ordinary unredeemed individual achieves goods for herself from time to time by satisfying her will; by contrast the subject of *Willenslosigkeit* is unmoved and indifferent. The game of willing is over and nothing presents itself as good or bad for her at all. Schopenhauer sometimes portrays the latter condition as a seeming void that is incomprehensible and repellent from the ordinary perspective in which things can be good for us:

Only nothing remains before us. But our nature, which resists this melting away into nothing, is really only the will to life which we ourselves are

The fact that we hate nothing so much is nothing more than another expression of the fact that we will life so much, and we are nothing other than this will and know nothing other than it. (*Werke* 2: 486/WWR 1, 438)

If it is hard for us to see what kind of value there could be in indifference to the world, that is because of our limited, naturally will-bound perspective. The problem, however, is that Schopenhauer wishes not only to contrast these as different, mutually opaque conditions, but to rank them in value. One condition is the salvation *from* the other, the genuinely final end or goal that frees someone from pursuing the lesser goals attainable in the other. Although he resists saying that will-lessness is a higher good than the natural life of willing, or even that it is a good, Schopenhauer is implicitly thinking in this way when he describes the condition of salvation as “superior” (*überwiegend*) to everything else (*Werke* 2: 461/WWR 1, 417), and negation of the will as “the one radical cure for the disease against which all *other goods* — such as fulfilled wishes and achieved happiness — are only palliatives, only anodynes” (*Werke* 2: 428/WWR 1, 389; my emphasis). Implicitly, will-lessness is *good* here, just good in a different way from the fulfilment of desires. And surely this must be so, for if being in the state of indifference to good and bad were not itself a good of some kind, albeit hard to fathom, what could there be to recommend it over the natural life of willing?

It now begins to look as though Schopenhauer needs a modification to his conception of *good*, and perhaps if we are charitable we might grant it to him implicitly.²⁴ One suggestion might be that Schopenhauer is implicitly operating with two concepts of *good*, which we could call *good_w* and *good_n*. Something is *good_w* if and only if it satisfies some will. Something is *good_n* if it has value, but does not have it in virtue of satisfying a will. There can be no highest *good_w*. Will-lessness is not among things that are *good_w*, but it is *good_n*. So, there is a highest good, but only in

the sense of good_n. That might be a way to re-describe Schopenhauer's struggle with the literal/figurative dichotomy. However, this view meets serious objections. It would not only go against Schopenhauer's consistently maintained claim that *good* is univocal (being effectively just our *good_w*), but would also fall foul of the need to rank the different ways of being good against one another. Unless there is some way of asking whether it is better to be in a *good_w* or a *good_n* state, the notion of the latter kind of state as "superior", "final" and "redemptive," as against the other's inferior "palliative" or "temporary" nature, seems unsupported once again. This ranking is crucial to Schopenhauer, but would seem to throw him back upon a unitary concept of *better*, and hence of *good, tout court*.

6. A different kind of willing

It seems that for Schopenhauer's doctrine of negation of the will as the state of final value to make sense we need two *ways of being good*. How to achieve this without abandoning his univocal definition of *good* as existing "only in relation to a desiring will"? The key is to see that there can be *two kinds of willing*. This again may seem to fly in the face of Schopenhauer's basic contrast between willing and willlessness, but there is, I suggest, more evidence for two kinds of willing than there is for two conceptions of good. Consider the following passages:

we sometimes gain a very intimate recognition of the nothingness and bitterness of life in the form of our own painful sufferings or our vivid recognition of the sufferings of others, and we *would like to* [*möchten*] take the sting out of desire and prevent any suffering from coming in, to cleanse and sanctify ourselves through complete and lasting renunciation — but then we are quickly enmeshed in the delusion of appearance once more, and its

motives put the will back into motion: we cannot tear ourselves away. (*Werke* 2: 448/WWR 1, 406; my emphasis)

if the negation of the will has arisen in someone, that person is full of inner joy and true heavenly peace ... and when we behold this person with our eyes or in our imagination, we cannot help feeling *the greatest longing* [*die größte Sehnsucht*], since we acknowledge that this alone is in the right and infinitely superior to everything else. (*Werke* 2: 461/WWR 1, 416–17; my emphasis)

These passages show that the ordinary person caught in the round of natural desire and satisfaction that Schopenhauer normally calls “the will,” also wants or longs for a superior state of peace and renunciation. In some sense then, we *will* will-lessness. If that is so, we can retain Schopenhauer’s univocal definition of good, and say that the peace of will-lessness would after all be a good for us. And since we long for it as “superior to everything else,” it would after all be the highest good. So Schopenhauer need not have been so cagey. Negation of the will can be literally the highest good after all, because it is the satisfaction of the will to be will-less.

Schopenhauer therefore needs an account of a kind of will other than the natural, individualistic will to life, which, as we have seen, he regards as the human essence and tends just to call “the will.” He does not officially develop a case that there are different kinds of willing, but the notion surfaces in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, in his treatment of the effects of tragedy on the spectator:

He becomes aware, though only in an obscure feeling, that it is better to tear his heart away from life, to turn his willing away from the world and life. Thus in the depth of his being the consciousness is then stirred that for *a different kind of willing* [*ein anderartiges Wollen*] there must be a different kind of existence also. (*Werke* 3: 497/WWR 2, 435; my emphasis)

In this case, as in the two passages previously quoted, the subject becomes conscious of a will or desire for a state in which the desires characteristic of “the world and life” are in abeyance. Schopenhauer likewise refers to a “striving [*Streben*] that tends in a direction diametrically opposed to that of happiness, i.e. of well-being and life” (*Werke 2*: 427/WWR 1, 388). So there must be a state of will or desire distinct from the will to life, in whose grip the subject remains for the time being.

A further reason for distinguishing this willing or striving from the will to life is found in Schopenhauer’s description of the psychological conflict in the “saintly” subject who has attained the state of “will-lessness” but must struggle to maintain it:

the peace and blissfulness we have described in the lives of saintly people is only a flower that emerges from the constant overcoming of the will, and we see the constant struggle with the will to life as the soil from which it arises; on earth nobody can have lasting peace. ... Thus we also see people who have succeeded at some point in negating the will bend all 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: anything in order to subdue the will that will always strive anew. ... I have often used the expression *asceticism*, and I understand by it, in the narrow sense, this *deliberate* [*vorsätzliche*] breaking of the will. (*Werke 2*: 463/WWR 1, 418–19)

These people are striving, by deliberate and persistent effort, towards the end of “subduing,” “breaking,” or “overcoming” the will to life. Schopenhauer oscillates between “will to life” and “will” here, as elsewhere. But it is clear that what is striven against is specifically the will to life, the natural tendency towards satisfying individualistic desires. And equally clearly the “saintly” agent has *desires* towards that natural tendency. He or she has a desire to be without individualistic desires.

Schopenhauer locates this desire “in the depth of our being,” saying that it “sometimes” comes to consciousness, and that on occasion we “cannot help” feeling it. So this is no ordinary desire that is uppermost in our deliberations and upon which we act in our ordinary dealings with the world. It appears to be a dispositional desire that can be present despite our not being consciously aware of it. Schopenhauer is eminently receptive in principle to such a desire, given his recognition that “we often do not know what we desire or fear. For years we can have a desire without admitting it to ourselves or even letting it come to clear consciousness” (*Werke* 3: 234–5/WWR 2, 209). It accords with this that the presence of a desire to be without individualistic desires appears anomalous and can be revealed only in the exceptional circumstances Schopenhauer mentions — reflection on overwhelming suffering, receptivity to tragic drama, saintly concern for the world that extinguishes concern for individual well-being, encounter with a saintly person or an imaginative attempt to identify with what they would experience. In these circumstances we glimpse what for Schopenhauer must be a truth, that beyond willing their own individual well-being, and beyond willing even the well-being of all individuals equally, human beings also *will* release from that kind of willing altogether, indeed release from individuality as such.

7. Summary

We are now in a position to understand better Schopenhauer’s ambivalence over the issue of the highest good. There is a sense in which negation of the will to life is the highest good, but also a sense in which it would be quite misleading to characterize it in that way. It is not the *highest of* the goods that can be attained by satisfying ordinary, individualistic desires, nor a summative good that is compounded out of any number of such desires being satisfied. If *good* is understood as the satisfaction of desires that are directed towards individual well-being or happiness, then negation of the will, which is the absence of such desires, is not the highest good.

On the other hand, since negation of the will is the unique state of final value, which transcends both egoistic and moral goods, it is a kind of good higher than those other goods. It can be good in the full Schopenhauerian sense of answering to a desiring will, provided that we recognize a will to be without desires that are directed towards individual well-being. I have suggested that Schopenhauer needs such a counter-will in order to avoid major inconsistency. Without this different kind of willing, either (1) there is a unique state of final and superior value that is not good, or (2) there is a kind of good that is not the satisfaction of a will. The solution is to allow that negation of the will is good, and that it is the satisfaction of a will, but to make clear that it is good in virtue of satisfying a different kind of willing, a desire to be without desires directed to the well-being of individuals. Thus, although it is something that I want at some level, negation of the will is not the attainment of the happiness or well-being of the individual human being that I am, or regard myself as being. As Schopenhauer puts it in reply to Becker, “The pursuit [*Verfolgen*] and attainment of one’s own salvation, since it consists in the negation of the will to life and along with that the giving up of one’s own individuality [*Aufgeben der eigenen Individualität*], is not to be subsumed under the concept *egoism*,” for “by *egoism* we understand the exclusive concern for one’s own individual” (GB, 221).

8. Some difficulties

We have argued that an explicit claim that negation of the will *is good*, combined with his commitment to the view that good is solely what answers to a desiring will, would lead Schopenhauer to acknowledge that the will’s negation is itself something willed. However, serious difficulties ensue for Schopenhauer if he openly acknowledges this latter point. What threatens is nothing less than a contradiction at the heart of his metaphysics. We can start with the challenge of

explaining how beings whose essence is to will can become non-willing beings. Ivan Soll has recently raised this objection in stark form:

Schopenhauer argues that we are ... creatures whose entire being is will and nothing but will. Given this view of our nature, it becomes incomprehensible how we could ever possibly suspend our will or have an experience in which our wills were not engaged. One can take a break from what one does, but not from what one *is*.²⁵

As we have seen, according to Schopenhauer's official picture "will" is interchangeable with "will to life." If the will to life is my essence, I can surely not cease to will life. It is at best unclear whether Schopenhauer has developed the resources to explain this duality convincingly. His most obvious move is to exploit the notion of the non-individuated will to life, that which underlies all individuals as their common metaphysical essence, what we might call "the will to life in itself." Thus while I, as individual empirical manifestation of will to life, strive for the well-being of the human individual that I am, the will to life in itself is indifferent to the individual and can freely turn to "not willing" ("the same thing that *willed* hitherto *wills* no more The subject of these two acts is one and the same" (*Werke* 6: 331/PP 2, 218).²⁶ But this replicates the same problem as above at a higher metaphysical level: it is mysterious how the metaphysical essence that manifests itself in me precisely as the urge to individual existence and well-being can manifest itself also in the cessation of desiring that existence and well-being. Schopenhauer's associate Frauenstädt presented this objection to him in correspondence: "if in its extra-temporality it is already *will to life*, how is it ever supposed to be able to get rid of its essence? After all, no thing can ever become free of its *essence*."²⁷ Schopenhauer's response is not convincing. He simply makes a bald counter-assertion: "Precisely *in* willing the will can *never* be free, ... but it can become free *from* willing" (*GB*, 288). He rejects Frauenstädt's suggestion that a retreat to the Kantian position in which the

thing in itself is indeterminate would remove the problem. The thing in itself must have a determinate essence: it is will, but can also be free from the willing that is its essence. How it does so, he continues, is not intuitively graspable, but that it does so somehow is evidenced over millennia by the history of asceticism.

While this is a serious problem for Schopenhauer, it is not the full story. It can be argued that to find nothing but a contradiction here is to ignore the complexity in Schopenhauer's conception of our sense of selfhood. Rudolf Malter, in his magisterial account of Schopenhauer's soteriology, writes as follows (my translation): "The will can will only its willing. The talk of the free-willed negation (self-negation) of the will, if it were Schopenhauer's final soteriological word, would make the system end in a straight logical contradiction, and so in a simple scandal."²⁸ But, Malter continues, this is not the end of the matter: instead Schopenhauer "rescues his soteriology and thereby the goal of his entire philosophy from the *nihil negativum* of logical contradiction"²⁹ by recourse to the pure subject of cognition. Malter emphasizes rightly that this conception of the subject is built into Schopenhauer's philosophy from the very start. 'I' must refer (or purportedly refer) not only to an individual human being who embodies will to life, but to a self that can cease to identify itself with any such individual. Schopenhauer provides for this with his notion of the pure subject of cognition that we ordinarily "find ourselves as" (*Werke* 2: 5/WWR 1, 25), and that we can remain as once the will is negated. That we are thus aware of ourselves as subject does not contradict the claim that our entire being is will. For awareness of oneself as subject, like the Kantian "synthetic unity of apperception,"³⁰ introduces no ontological commitments; the subject is a mere arena of conscious experience that has "only a conditioned, in fact, properly speaking, a merely apparent reality" (*Werke* 3: 315/WWR 2, 278). In ordinary life, 'I' embraces both the individual, embodied human being who wills his or her own well-being, and the self as subject. If we can accept this complexity in the notion of self,³¹ then it at least *prima facie* makes sense that one can persist as a self-conscious center of experience without desiring or striving for the well-being of any one individual in the

world. But, as Malter points out, this does not solve the mystery of the will's becoming free to negate itself. Schopenhauer cannot explain how the inert and indifferent pure subject can bring about the will's transformation from willing to not-willing. He says that the negation of the will "emerges from the innermost relation of cognition to willing in human beings" (Werke 3: 478/WWR 1, 432), but that relation remains in principle unfathomable. Schopenhauer may remove the pernicious contradiction in the will's ceasing to be itself, but only by superseding the contradiction with "a problem which is shown not to be capable of solution."³²

However, assuming the account we have given above, a contradiction still remains if Schopenhauer wishes to claim that negation of the will is good. If the negation of the will is good, then it must be the object of some kind of willing. But where can that willing come from? The pure subject of cognition is "not capable of any willing or affect at all [*überhaupt keines Wollens oder Affektes*]" (Werke 3: 571/WWR 2, 498; translation modified). So if there is a desire that opposes the will to life, it must stem not from the pure subject, but from some willing element in me. There is nothing about me that can *oppose* — i.e. desire not to have — the will to life, other than the will to life itself. In order for negation of the will to be good, therefore, the will to life still seems required to "take a break" from what it is; it has to be both a seat of desires for the well-being of the living individual, and of a desire to be free of such desires. With his implicit notion of a desire to be free of the will, Schopenhauer has recognized a degree of psychological complexity that his dual account of the metaphysical thing in itself and the pure subject is too simple to capture.

Finally, a different problem arguably arises for Schopenhauer's argument against suicide: that by ending individual existence it prevents realization of the real release or redemption (*wirkliche Erlösung*) that consists in a state of will-lessness.³³ Would not an act of terminating one's own individual existence fulfil the desire to be without individualistic desires, and consequently result in the same value as will-less consciousness? Schopenhauer's argument works only against a suicide that occurs

when someone still has desires for individual well-being, and suffers from their being unfulfilled:

The person who commits suicide wills life, and is only unsatisfied with the conditions under which life has been given to him. Thus, when he destroys the individual appearance he is relinquishing only life, not the will to life. He wills life, wills the unimpeded existence and affirmation of his body, but the tangle of circumstances does not allow him this and he undergoes great suffering.

(*Werke* 2: 471/WWR 1, 425–6)

Suicide of this kind eliminates suffering prematurely, still under the assumption that the individual's well-being or lack of it matters, rather than realizing the final state of becoming indifferent both to individual suffering and to individual satisfaction. But what if one chose to end one's existence *because* one had become indifferent both to individual suffering and to individual satisfaction? Schopenhauer has no argument against that kind of suicide.³⁴ In fact, he approves of it:

it seems that the complete negation of the will can reach the point where even the will needed to maintain the vegetative functions of the body through nutrition can fall away. Far from stemming from the will to life, in this kind of suicide an ascetic of this type stops living simply because he has stopped willing altogether. (*Werke* 2: 474/WWR 1, 428).

In such a state one can acquiesce in or welcome death: “to die willingly [*willig*], to die gladly, to die cheerfully is the prerogative of the resigned, of him who gives up and negates the will to life” (*Werke* 3: 583/WWR 2, 508; translation modified). So once again the subject of will-lessness retains a desire of a kind: to be rid of the individual, finding in death “the great opportunity no longer to be I” (*Werke* 3: 582/WWR 2, 507).

Schopenhauer's argument is that choosing non-existence for the wrong reasons robs one of the opportunity to enter the experiential state of will-lessness, which we have argued is the highest good for Schopenhauer by virtue of its satisfying the desire to be free of individualistic desires. There is of course a distinction between satisfying a desire to experience the peace or contentment of having no individualistic desires and satisfying a desire to be rid of such desires by not existing as an individual at all. It is the former, not the latter, that is termed "salvation." Salvation is not non-existence. Yet to enter this state is to lose — allegedly beneficially — the sense that one's existence as such is really worth holding on to. So to attain Schopenhauer's highest good is compatible with desiring one's non-existence, and at least entails recognizing its desirability.³⁵

Bibliography and Abbreviations

Schopenhauer

- BM* *Prize Essay on the Basis of Morals*. In *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, translated and edited by Christopher Janaway, 113–258. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- GB* *Arthur Schopenhauer: Gesammelte Briefe*. Edited by Arthur Hübscher. Bonn: Bouvier, 1978.
- HN* *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß*. Edited by Arthur Hübscher. Frankfurt am Main: Kramer, 1970, vols. 1–5.
- MR* *Manuscript Remains*. Edited by Arthur Hübscher, translated by E. F. J. Payne. Oxford: Berg, 1988, vols. 1–4.
- PP 1* *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 1. Translated and edited by Sabine Roehr and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- PP 2* *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2. Translated and edited by Adrian del Caro and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Werke* *Sämtliche Werke*. Edited by Arthur Hübscher. Mannheim: F. A. Brockhaus, 1988, vols. 1–7.
- WWR 1* *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1. Translated and edited by Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- WWR 2* *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2. Translated by E.F.J. Payne. New York: Dover, 1958.

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Notes

¹ Young, *Schopenhauer*, 188 (and see also 196). Young uses ‘denial’ for *Verneinung*, following the well-established usage found in the translations by E.F. J. Payne. I use ‘negation’ for *Verneinung*.

² Atwell, *Character of the World*, 184.

³ Solomon, “Passionate Life,” 92.

⁴ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 12. In section 2 below we shall see that negation of the will is quite distinct from “happiness” in Schopenhauer’s view.

⁵ Came, “Schopenhauer on Salvation,” 259.

⁶ *Den § 68 zusammenfassend läßt sich festhalten, daß es sich bei der in ihm thematisierten “Verneinung des Willens zum Leben” weder um ein einheitliches Phänomen noch um ein einheitliches philosophisches Konzept handelt. Sie bezeichnet einmal den Zustand der “wahren Gelassenheit,” der aus der Erkenntnis als einem “Quietiv alles und jeden Wollens” hervorgeht ...; sie ist einmal die Erkenntnis selbst ...; und sie bezeichnet auch die asketische Praxis, den (willentlichen) Kampf gegen das eigene Wollen (Kobler, “Schopenhauers Soteriologie,” 175).*

⁷ See *Werke 2*: 365, 376, 427/WWR 1, 336, 345, 389.

⁸ For examples see *Werke 2*: 442, 448, 461, 464/WWR 1, 401, 406, 417, 419.

⁹ A further complication is that in different contexts Schopenhauer occasionally uses some of his less frequent terms on both sides of the divide, e.g. *Heiterkeit* and *Freudigkeit*. Compare passages at *Werke 2*: 373, 461, 486/WWR 1, 343, 416 439/.

¹⁰ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 12.

¹¹ In *Parerga and Paralipomena*, in the popular “Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life,” Schopenhauer states that *Heiterkeit*, cheerfulness, is “the highest good for a being whose reality has the form of an indivisible present between two eternities” (*Werke* 5: 344/PP 1, 283). But the context here is not philosophically serious. The “Aphorisms” are prefaced with the caveat that they are an exercise in “eudaemonism,” which his own previous work has shown to be an error, and that they are “instructions to a happy existence,” something whose possibility his philosophy denies (*Werke* 5: 333/PP 1, 273).

¹² “This reward postulated afterwards for virtue ... appears, however, decently veiled under the name of the *highest good*, which is the unification of virtue and happiness. But at bottom this is nothing other than the morals that issues in happiness and is consequently supported by self-interest, or eudaemonism, which Kant had ceremoniously ejected through the front door of his system as heteronomous, and which now creeps back in through the back door under the name *highest good*. Thus the contradiction-concealing assumption of an *unconditional, absolute ought* avenges itself” (*Werke* 4: 124/BM, 128). See also *Werke* 4: 118/BM, 123; *Werke* 2: 621/WWR 1, 555.

¹³ See *Werke* 5: 333/PP 1, 273 where Schopenhauer denies that human life is “an existence that, considered objectively or rather after cool and careful consideration ... would be decidedly preferable to non-existence.” There is a related thought at *Werke* 2: 382/WWR 1, 350: “perhaps there will never be a man who, clear-headed and sincere at the end of his life, would want to do it all again — he would much rather choose complete non-existence instead.”

¹⁴ See *Werke* 6: 328/PP 2, 309.

¹⁵ Migotti, “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism,” 654.

¹⁶ Reginster, “Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wagner,” 355–6.

¹⁷ Reginster, “Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wagner,” 356.

¹⁸ Paul Guyer suggests a similar “second-best” status for a moral ideal of alleviating all suffering: “Schopenhauer’s negatively conceived *summum bonum* must ... remain a mere ideal: the highest good would be to alleviate all suffering, but that is not something we can accomplish within the life of any natural beings” (“Schopenhauer, Kant and Compassion,” 412). Schopenhauer, however, does not conceive this specifically moral aim as the *summum bonum*, either literally or figuratively.

¹⁹ For Schopenhauer there can arise no generalized version of the Euthyphro dilemma. There is no possibility that someone should “recognize that something is *good* and will it only as a result of this, instead of willing it first and calling it *good* as a result of that” (*Werke* 2: 345/WWR 1, 319).

²⁰ “*Seinen Nächsten lieben, das hieße wollen!* (Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 77). Young, *Willing and Unwilling*, 150 makes the connection with this passage from Wittgenstein’s notes of 29 July 1916, where he seems to be ruminating on Schopenhauerian issues that relate to those of the present paper: “Is it possible to will good, to will evil, and not to will? Or is only he happy who does *not* will? ... Is it ... good to want *nothing* for one’s neighbour, neither good nor evil? And yet in a certain sense it seems that not wanting is the only good.” (*Kann man gut wollen, böse wollen und nicht wollen? Oder ist nur der glücklich, der nicht will? ... Ist es ... gut, seinem Nächsten nichts zu wünschen, weder Gutes noch Schlechtes? Und doch scheint im einem gewissen Sinne das Nichtwünschen das einzig Gute zu sein.*)

²¹ Becker, *Briefwechsel*, 27, my translation.

²² See, e.g. Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness”; Rabinowitz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, “A Distinction in Value.”

²³ My emphasis, and some modification from Payne’s translation.

²⁴ Migotti, “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism,” 657, raises this issue: “John Atwell in personal correspondence suggests that we attribute to Schopenhauer two conceptions of good, the strict one defined above, and a broader one according to which will-

lessness ... is good. I think that this is a suggestion worth pursuing, though it would immediately invalidate Schopenhauer's claim that the concept 'good' is univocal."

²⁵ Soll, "Inevitability", 311–12.

²⁶ In this passage from the second volume of *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer contrasts willing and not-willing under their Latin names *velle* and *nolle*, and insists both that they have the same "subject," but that the subject of *nolle* must remain unexplained: "The *affirmation* and *negation of the will* to life is a mere *velle* and *nolle*. The subject of these two acts is one and the same ... Of the latter we can only say that its appearance cannot be that of the *velle*, but we do not know whether it appears at all, i.e., whether it obtains a secondary existence for an intellect which it would first have to produce. ... [N]or can we say anything about its subject, since we have positively recognized it only in the opposing act, the *velle*, as the thing in itself of its world of appearance" (*Werke* 6: 331–2/PP 2, 281–2).

²⁷ *Sei er nun in seiner Außerzeitlichkeit schon Wille zum Leben, wie sollte er da jemals von diesem seinen Wesen loskommen können? Von seinem Wesen könne doch kein Ding jemals frei werden* (from Hübscher's summary of Frauenstädt's letter, *GB*, 568–9).

²⁸ *Der Wille kann nur sein Wollen wollen. Die Rede von der freiwilligen Verneinung (Selbstverneinung) des Willens würde, wenn sie Schopenhauers letztes soteriologische Wort wäre, das System in einem einfachen logischen Widerspruch, also in einem simplen Skandal, enden lassen* (*Transzendentalphilosophie*, 408–9).

²⁹ *seine Soteriologie und hiermit den Zielpunkt seiner gesamten Philosophie vor dem nihil negativum des logischen Widerspruchs rettet* (*Transzendentalphilosophie*, 409).

³⁰ Schopenhauer makes this comparison at *WWR* 2, 277/*Werke* 3: 314.

³¹ On the complexity of the self in Schopenhauer see Janaway, *Self and World*; Welsen, *Theorie des Subjekts*; Zöller, "Schopenhauer on the Self."

³² *mit einem Problem ... von welchem nachgewiesen ist, daß es nicht gelöst werden kann* (*Transzendentalphilosophie*, 409).

³³ *Werke 6*: 328/ PP 2, 309.

³⁴ This is recognized in the secondary literature, e.g. by Young, *Willing and Unwilling*, 127.

³⁵ Some parts of this material were delivered to audiences at Ghent University, University of Texas at San Antonio, and University of Southampton. I am grateful for the responses of the audiences on those occasions, and for helpful discussions with David Woods and Christine Lopes.