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Schopenhauerian Moral Awareness as a Source of Nietzschean Nonmorality

ROBERT WICKS

In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Friedrich Nietzsche observed that Arthur Schopenhauer, a supposed “pessimist,” actually played the flute, presumably happily and with great personal delight. In his reflections on this activity, and on other comparable ones within Schopenhauer’s daily schedule, Nietzsche wondered whether Schopenhauer himself was indeed a pessimist, and also whether Schopenhauer’s philosophy reveals itself to be less pessimistic than is usually thought, owing to its allegiance to, and advocacy of, Christian moral values. Nietzsche writes:

The difficulty of providing a rational foundation for the [moral] principle cited¹ may indeed be great—as is well known, Schopenhauer did not succeed either—and whoever has once felt deeply how insipidly false and sentimental this principle is in a world whose essence is will to power, may allow himself to be reminded that Schopenhauer, though a pessimist, *really*—played the flute. Every day, after dinner: one should read his biography on that. And incidentally: a pessimist, one who denies God and the world but *comes to a stop* before morality—who affirms morality and plays the flute—the *laede neminem* [offend no one] morality—what? is that really—a pessimist?²

In his consideration of Schopenhauer’s philosophy at this later stage in his career (1886), Nietzsche clearly distinguished his own view from Schopenhauer’s insofar as he associated Schopenhauer’s view with Christian morality, and his own view with a standpoint “beyond good and evil,” as is indicated by the title of his book from which the above excerpt is cited. Describing Schopenhauer simply as an adherent of Christian morality—which he was, without a doubt—nonetheless remains, as Nietzsche might himself admit, one-sided and incomplete, for it neglects how Schopenhauer took great pains to distinguish his own moral theory from that of Immanuel Kant, and, more significantly, it overlooks ways in which Schopenhauer’s conception of moral awareness is morally ambiguous in certain important respects.

In this article, I will explore some of the moral ambiguities in Schopenhauer’s conception of moral awareness, with the aim of showing that

Nietzsche's tendency to align Kant and Schopenhauer with Christian morality, such as to characterize them as standing diametrically opposed to his presumably more nuanced and freer nonmoral perspective, obscures those features of Schopenhauer's view that have a distinctly nonmoral quality, and that can be understood to be among the sources of Nietzsche's own nonmoral standpoint. I will also discuss how Schopenhauer's critique of Kant's moral theory led Schopenhauer to a position that made it possible for the development of the Nietzschean view that life itself is "immoral," and that the perspective of life is beyond good and evil.³ In light of these considerations, we will be able to see how a certain misinterpretation of Nietzsche's philosophical relationship to Schopenhauer still prevails in contemporary scholarship, namely, the idea that at an early age Nietzsche "broke away" from Schopenhauer insofar as Nietzsche, in contrast, was a wholeheartedly "life-affirming" rather than "life-negating" thinker.⁴ I will show, to the contrary, that insofar as Nietzsche was provably a "suffering-negating" thinker in his early work, that although he intended to be life-affirming in manner far beyond what Schopenhauer had ever prescribed, he was not as wholeheartedly life-affirming during that period of his career as has been a prevailing tendency to assume.

I. SCHOPENHAUER'S RESPECT FOR CHRISTIAN MORALITY

As Nietzsche suggests in his remarks on Schopenhauer's flute-playing, although Schopenhauer was innovative along several philosophical dimensions, he nonetheless came "to a stop" before the fundamental tenets of Christian morality. This is an indisputable fact about Schopenhauer's moral theory, for Schopenhauer himself states that Christian ethics "is entirely in the spirit we have mentioned,"⁵ and that:

Here I have introduced these dogmas of Christian theology, in themselves foreign to philosophy, merely in order to show that the [Schopenhauerian] ethics which results from the whole of our discussion, and is in complete agreement and connexion with all its parts, although possibly new and unprecedented according to the expression, is by no means so in essence. On the contrary, this system of ethics fully agrees with the Christian dogmas proper, and, according to its essentials, was contained and present even in these very dogmas.⁶

Nietzsche is on solid ground in associating Schopenhauer's moral theory with Christianity. At the same time, though, we should not overlook that Immanuel Kant's moral theory is equally understandable as a view consistent with, if not expressive of, a Christian moral outlook, and that Schopenhauer made a significant effort to distance himself from Kant's moral

theory. Specifically, Schopenhauer opposed Kant's rationalistic foundation for morality by maintaining that the feeling of compassion toward others, as opposed to the pure (self) respect for rule-governedness, was the proper ground of our moral action. One could say, in brief, that Schopenhauer developed Kantian ethics along more romantic lines that emphasized the importance of feeling over pure reasoning. We might ask then: Does the very style of Schopenhauer's critique of Kant's moral theory ultimately work to undermine Schopenhauer's own association of his moral theory with the Christian moral outlook? An affirmative answer to this question will be developed below.

Despite the differences between Kant's and Schopenhauer's respective moral intuitions, it might nonetheless appear that a choice between Kant's and Schopenhauer's respective moral theories would be a merely academic exercise, since their conclusions are so very similar in terms of the kinds of moral behaviors their views prescribe. Both urge, for instance, that we accord a basic and equal measure of respect toward all people, that injury to others should be avoided, and that one always act in view of humanity at large, as opposed to acting predominantly from the standpoint of the selfish individual.

The distinguishing point between Schopenhauer's and Kant's moral theories, however, remains of crucial philosophical, historical, and experiential importance, for the respective ways in which each reaches a generalized, universal standpoint indicates a distinction in mentality as stark as the difference that Nietzsche himself believes to hold between him and the Schopenhauer-Kant pair. More precisely, Schopenhauer's emphasis upon compassion as the foundation of morality reveals a strongly experience-grounded standpoint, whereas Kant's emphasis upon our awareness of duty in connection with respect toward ourselves as rational beings involves a grounding that is far more abstracted and detached from spatiotemporal experience. Another way to describe the difference between Schopenhauer's and Kant's respective foundations for morality is to say that whereas Kant grounds his theory on an abstracted definition of the essence of humanity as rationality-centered, Schopenhauer grounds his theory on a shared emotional experience. Kant achieves universality via abstraction and mental distancing from individual differences; Schopenhauer achieves universality via the empathic fusion of all individual differences.

II. THE BUDDING NONMORALITY OF SCHOPENHAUER'S CONCEPTION OF MORAL AWARENESS

Schopenhauer's focus upon compassion as the foundation of moral awareness rests upon the idea of empathy. This latter idea directly reflects his interest in referring, not simply to a common, abstracted essence that all people

share, but to a directly experienceable “single eye” that he believes looks out from every human being, insofar as everyone is regarded as a manifestation of the same life-force that he calls “will.” At the basis of Schopenhauer’s conception of moral awareness, then, is the thought that to become truly moral beings, we need to “become,” or have a general sense of what it is like to “be within,” every single person who has ever lived, now lives, or will ever live. This, in effect, is the experience of becoming “humanity itself,” not by means of an abstracted characterization (e.g., humans are “rational beings”) or a very narrow experience (e.g., the feeling of respect for law-governedness in general), but through a kind of rich experience, set before us as an ideal, in alignment to which we try to expand our individual awareness. This marks the crucial diverging point from Kant, since on Kant’s view, we need only, at least in principle, contemplate the abstract rationality within us—the bare conception of law itself—in order to develop our moral awareness. For Schopenhauer, in contrast, we need to make a concerted effort to enter directly into the complicated minds of others, if only imaginatively.

The result of developing, in real-life experience, Schopenhauer’s conception of moral awareness leads to modes of awareness that Kant probably never considered to be morally constitutive. For Schopenhauer, as noted, in order to adopt a moral perspective, we must try to become “everyone” in a concrete way, such that we adopt simultaneously, for instance, not only the mentality of the murderer’s victim but also the mentality of the murderer. To develop a properly moral awareness, that is, we must develop a consciousness that includes, constitutively, if only in a rudimentary and generic way, the specific contents of every possible mentality, as opposed to achieving this general end by focusing exclusively and more abstractedly, as Kant would have it, on this or that property that each person happens to have in common with every other, such as rationality, or the bare feeling of self-respect. Schopenhauer’s conception of moral awareness leads us to a morally complicated and conglomerated consciousness—a consciousness that, to employ a Hegelian distinction, exhibits a more “concrete” as opposed to “abstracted” universality.⁷ Schopenhauer writes:

Tormentor and tormented are one. The former is mistaken in thinking he does not share the torment, the latter in thinking he does not share the guilt. If the eyes of both were opened, the inflicter of the suffering would recognize that he lives in everything that suffers pain in the whole wide world, and, if endowed with the faculty of reason, ponders in vain over why it was called into existence for such great suffering, whose cause and guilt it does not perceive. On the other hand, the tormented person would see that *all the wickedness that is or ever was perpetrated in the world proceeds from that will which constitutes also his own inner being, and appears also in him.* He would see that, through this phenomenon and its affirmation, *he has taken upon himself all the sufferings resulting from such a will, and rightly endures them so long as he is this will.*⁸

It [the benighted consciousness] does not see to what extent the offender and the offended are in themselves one, and that it is *the same inner nature* which, not recognizing itself in its own phenomenon, *bears both the pain and the guilt.*⁹ (italics added)

Schopenhauer happens to interpret this empathetic awareness in sympathy with Christian morality: he emphasizes that since, within this mode of awareness, we come to understand what it is like to be a universal victim, or to feel timelessly guilty as the embodiment of universal violence, we therefore understand, firsthand, how horrible these conditions truly are. As a consequence, he maintains that this knowledge will motivate a person to resist injuring anyone, lest she or he become involved in perpetuating an already-too-repulsive situation. In effect, Schopenhauer's view is that once we empathetically locate ourselves at the very "inside" of "humanity itself," we are led to understand the essentially selfish desire that resides at the source of most, if not all, immorality. And insofar as we are sickened by this experience, we will become good. Knowing the true nature of violence, he believes, generates a repulsion from violence.¹⁰

What is obscured in Schopenhauer's interpretation of universal empathy is that in becoming "everyone," one must fully adopt not only the consciousness of those upon whom suffering is inflicted but also the consciousness characteristic of the thoroughly malicious; one must become both the tormentor and the tormented. The contents of this universally-encompassing consciousness, consequently, do not express moral purity. This consciousness is more obviously a mixture of moral and immoral consciousnesses, all of which are given equal value, if only because every human is taken to be of the same value, as human, within this imaginative condition.

If one empathizes with a "tormentor," however, one must savor whatever deep pleasures there are in being a tormentor, and these pleasures cannot be ignored, or factored out of the resulting global consciousness. Which is to say that Schopenhauer's prescribed universal empathy, contrary to Schopenhauer's own Christian understanding of it, appears to generate a non-moral, or morally leveled, consciousness that includes the qualities of everyone's consciousnesses without diminishing any of those qualities.

Schopenhauer does develop this reflection in part, for he observes that if one "affirms life" with all of one's strength, the consequence is to locate oneself in a condition of virtually infinite torture (which would include the sufferings involving any guilt that a torturer might feel): "According to the true nature of things, *everyone has all the sufferings of the world as his own*; indeed, he has to look upon all merely possible sufferings as actual for him, so long as he is the firm and constant will-to-live, in other words *affirms life with all his strength*" (italics added).¹¹

In this thought, nonetheless, we continue to see emphasized the Christian

dimension of Schopenhauer's universal empathy, for it here has the effect of transforming people into Christ-like figures, who take on as their own all the sins of the world. Within the context of addressing the distinction between Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's views, what is intriguing is that this Christ-like mentality arises, supposedly, when one "affirms life" with all of one's strength. Absolute life-affirmation—the kind of awareness Nietzsche advocates—thus generates an awareness that takes virtually infinite strength to bear, since infinite suffering is, more or less, unbearable for any finite human being.¹²

What is absent in Schopenhauer's account is the flip side of the universal sufferer, namely, as noted above, the standpoint of the universal torturer, insofar as this standpoint provides any pleasure to the torturer, as morally objectionable as that pleasure might be. And it is here where we can again discern how a more nonmoral standpoint emerges straightforwardly from Schopenhauer's prescribed universal empathy as a suggested path toward genuine Christian moral awareness. Once one affirms life with all of one's strength, one must affirm the standpoint of the most immoral people who ever existed, who now exist, and who will ever exist. So what Schopenhauer refers to as "moral awareness" is perhaps more comprehensively described as an uneasy fusion within a single consciousness, of the Divine and the Satanic. In more secular terms, what Schopenhauer calls "moral awareness" shows itself to be, in fact, a nonmoral, or morally suspended, awareness—the kind of awareness that Nietzsche describes as being that of "life itself," which is an awareness "beyond good and evil."

Scattered about in Schopenhauer's texts are further hints of this morally-neutral awareness that issues from a universal awareness, except that these characterizations are set forth in a slightly different context than what has been discussed so far. Among the modes of universal consciousness Schopenhauer describes are moral awareness and artistic awareness, and it is within the context of the latter that we find additional parallels to a consciousness that is "beyond good and evil," as later developed by Nietzsche. It is striking that Schopenhauer uses the term "superhuman" in connection with this mode of awareness when he describes the standpoint of the artistic genius and of the artist in general.¹³ Two key excerpts follow:

On this account, the action of [artistic] *genius* has always been regarded as an *inspiration*, as indeed the name itself indicates, as the action of a *superhuman being* [*übermenschlichen Wesens*] different from the individual himself, which takes possession of him only periodically.¹⁴ (italics added)

Yet in the lyrics of genuine poets is reflected the inner nature of the whole of mankind; and all the millions of past, present, and future human beings have found and will find in the same constantly recurring situation, finds in them its corresponding expression. Since these situations, by constant recurrence,

exist as permanently as humanity itself, and always call up the same sensations, the lyrical productions of genuine poets remain true, effective, and fresh for thousands of years. *If, however, the poet is the universal man*, then all that has ever moved a human heart and all that a human nature produces from itself in any situation, all that dwells and broods in any human breast—all these are his theme and material, and with these all the rest of nature as well. Therefore the poet can just as well sing of voluptuousness as of mysticism, be Anacreon or Angelus Silesius, write tragedies or comedies, express the sublime or the common sentiment, according to his mood and disposition. *Accordingly, no one can prescribe to the poet that he should be noble and sublime, moral, pious, Christian, or anything else, still less reproach him for being this and not that. He is the mirror of mankind*, and brings to its consciousness what it feels and does.¹⁵ (italics added)

Despite these foreshadowings of the position Nietzsche would later advance, it remains, nonetheless, that Schopenhauer himself gravitated to the view that Christian morality is expressive of an enlightened consciousness that is in touch with the truth, and that a perspective completely devoid of moral valuations is simply benighted. In the following passage, Schopenhauer expresses this position in a particularly noteworthy formulation, for he associates the nonmoral standpoint with the “Anti-Christ”—a phrase later to be adopted explicitly by Nietzsche. This excerpt is from Schopenhauer’s later work, so it is clear that he retained this position throughout his life: “That the world has merely a physical, and no moral significance, is the greatest, the most pernicious, the fundamental error, the true perversity of opinion, and is at bottom that which faith has personified as Anti-Christ.”¹⁶

At this point, we can indicate for the purposes of introducing the next section, a very sharp contrast between Schopenhauer’s and Nietzsche’s outlooks. In the passage below, Nietzsche virtually reiterates the general subject of the above excerpt, except in a way that completely inverts Schopenhauer’s ascription of negative value to a world that is devoid of moral significance. We must wait, though, until 1882 for Nietzsche to express explicitly the following thought:

The total character of the world, however, is in all eternity chaos—in the sense not of a lack of necessity but of a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms. . . . [and yet] Let us beware of attributing to it heartlessness and unreason or their opposites: it is neither perfect nor beautiful, nor noble, nor does it wish to become any of these things; it does not by any means strive to imitate man. *None of our aesthetic and moral judgments apply to it.*¹⁷ (italics added)

III. NIETZSCHE, TRAGEDY, AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

In 1886, the same year in which *Beyond Good and Evil* was published, his earlier book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), was reissued with both a new subtitle and an introductory segment entitled “An Attempt at a Self-Criticism.”¹⁸ In this segment, Nietzsche notes that in his earlier work the experience of classical tragic art was said to offer a “metaphysical comfort” that helped make the horror of daily life bearable. Nietzsche also indicated that he no longer believed in this “metaphysical comfort,” and that he now thought it preferable to seek instead a “this-worldly” comfort (in laughter), if any comfort is to be sought. In sum, Nietzsche came to reject the key feature of his earlier account of tragedy, because it was, in effect, too other-worldly.

Now this remark of Nietzsche’s is slightly puzzling, in light of a tradition of respectable Nietzsche scholarship which informs us that Nietzsche—already in *The Birth of Tragedy*—substituted a “this-worldly,” “life-affirming” outlook for Schopenhauer’s “other-worldly,” “life-negating” outlook.¹⁹ Did the Nietzsche of 1872, however, unequivocally express a view that captured the idea of facing “the terrors of history and culture with unbroken courage and say Yes to life”²⁰ and did he “break with the essence of Schopenhauerian thinking”?²¹ Many Nietzsche scholars distinguish the early Nietzsche from Schopenhauer on the grounds that Nietzsche advocates a distinctively “life-affirming” and “this-worldly” philosophy. That Nietzsche himself criticizes his views in *The Birth of Tragedy* as being, in effect, too other-worldly, however, suggests that Nietzsche—to this very day—understood himself better than some of his commentators.

We should ask, then, what is it, exactly, that led Nietzsche to regard his earlier analysis of tragedy as too otherworldly? Not surprisingly, it is that he regarded his earlier views as being too “Schopenhauerian.” What perhaps is remaining underappreciated, though, is that Nietzsche’s views on tragedy can be seen as even more Schopenhauerian than Schopenhauer’s own views in connection with this general subject matter, namely, that involving the apprehension of the everyday world as one that involves excessive violence and suffering—the world, some claim, that the Nietzsche of 1872 was considering with “unbroken courage.” Nietzsche might have considered the world with unbroken courage later in his career, but in 1872 this does not seem to be the case.

To recall, Nietzsche asserts that the experience of tragedy provides a “metaphysical comfort”:

Dionysian art, too, wishes to convince us of the eternal joy [*Lust*] of existence: only we are to seek this joy not in phenomena, but *behind* them [*nur sollen wir diese Lust nicht in der Erscheinungen, sondern hinter den Erscheinungen suchen*]. We are to recognize that all that comes into being

must be ready for a sorrowful end; we are forced to look into the terrors of the *individual* existence—yet we are not to become rigid with fear: *a metaphysical comfort* tears us away momentarily from the bustle of the changing figures. *We are really for a brief moment primordial being itself, feeling the raging desire for existence and joy in existence*; the struggle, the pain, the destruction of phenomena, now appear necessary to us, in view of the excess of countless forms of existence which force and push one another into life, *in view of the exuberant fertility of the universal will*. We are pierced by the maddening sting of these pains just when we have become, as it were, *one with the infinite primordial joy in existence*, and when we anticipate, in *Dionysian ecstasy, the indestructibility and eternity of this joy*. In spite of fear and pity, *we are the happy living beings, not as individuals, but as the one living being, with whose creative joy we are united.*²² (italics added)

Similarly, I believe, the Greek man of culture felt himself nullified in the presence of the satyric chorus; and this is the most immediate effect of the Dionysian tragedy, that the state and society and, quite generally, the gulfs between man and man give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature. *The metaphysical comfort—with which, I am suggesting even now, every true tragedy leaves us—that life is at the bottom of things, despite all changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable*—this comfort appears in incarnate clarity in the chorus of satyrs, a chorus of natural beings who live ineradicably as it were, behind all civilization and remain eternally the same, despite the changes of generations and of the history of nations.

With this chorus the profound Hellene, uniquely susceptible to the tenderest and deepest suffering, comforts himself, *having looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature*, and being in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will. Art saves him, and through art—life.²³ (italics added)

The above excerpts speak largely for themselves, but it is clear that Nietzsche describes an experience that purportedly reveals what is “behind” (*hinter*) the world of ordinary life (*den Erscheinungen*; i.e., the appearances), and maintains that this experience provides a comfort and relief from the world’s agonies. So whatever “essence” of Schopenhauer’s thinking that some believe Nietzsche “breaks away from” in *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is not obviously the “appearance vs. reality” distinction that forms the core of Nietzsche’s clearly Schopenhauerian claim that the truth resides behind phenomenal appearances.

If we consider the situation more broadly, what some commentators appear to have had in mind as the distinguishing factor between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer is the Nietzschean idea of “life-affirmation” as opposed to the Schopenhauerian idea of “life-negation.” This difference can be unduly magnified, if one reads Schopenhauer as an advocate of Christian values, under-

stands Schopenhauer's understanding of tragedy in light of his allegiance to Christianity, and then adds that Christianity, for Nietzsche, is a life-negating view. At first sight, one could imagine that an interpreter of Nietzsche would be hard-pressed to deny that Nietzsche aims to be life-affirming in his analysis of the experience of Greek tragedy. He undoubtedly aims to do this, but more central is the fact that Nietzsche is hardly suffering-affirming in his analysis, and suffering, by his own lights, is essential to life, at least insofar as it is lived by real-life individuals. The disambiguated situation in *The Birth of Tragedy*, then, is that Nietzsche is manifestly "life-affirming," and therefore distinct from Schopenhauer, but is at the same time suffering-denying, which draws him very close to Schopenhauer's view.

It might come as a surprise to claim that Nietzsche is suffering-denying in his analysis of tragedy, but there is little doubt that this is the case. In *The Birth of Tragedy* he states:

This view of things already provides us with all the elements of a profound and pessimistic view of the world, together with the *mystery doctrine of tragedy*: the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of everything existent, *the conception of individuation as the primal cause of evil* [italics added], and of art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation may be broken in augury of a restored oneness.²⁴

Thus it is intimated that this dismemberment, the properly Dionysian *suffering*, is like a transformation into air, water, earth, and fire, that we are therefore to regard *the state of individuation as the origin and primal cause of all suffering* [italics added], as something objectionable in itself.²⁵

Hence follows the core argument of this essay: if one identifies with "life itself" in the experience of tragic art, and if this identification involves a transcendence of the principle of individuation, and if the principle of individuation is the "original and primal cause of all suffering," then the amount of suffering in the state of identification with life itself amounts to zero. That is, Nietzsche might be celebrating and affirming "life itself," but his conception of "life itself" is so abstracted, rarefied, and sublimated that it allows the individual to completely escape the world of suffering. This move is extremely Schopenhauerian, and it appears to be essentially a transposition of Schopenhauer's account of aesthetic experience into the field of the experience of tragic art. Just as Schopenhauer describes aesthetic experience as involving the transformation of consciousness from an individualistic, painful, conflictual, desiring condition into a universalistic, painless, peaceful, and contemplative attention to universal concepts (viz., Platonic Ideas), Nietzsche describes the experience of tragedy in roughly the same terms (substituting Schopenhauer's "will" itself for the Platonic Ideas), as involving the tran-

scendence of the everyday world of suffering. So in this respect, Nietzsche's analysis of tragedy is entirely Schopenhauerian.

Saying, as some commentators do, that Nietzsche is "life affirming" as opposed to "life denying," or saying that he has a "this-worldly" orientation as opposed to an "other-worldly" orientation at this point in his career, buries the fact that Nietzsche himself later realized that the principle-of-individuation-independent conception of "life itself" with which he was operating in *The Birth of Tragedy* functions as more of an escape from daily life than as a solid affirmation of it. And this, one can easily suspect, is exactly why in his later work Nietzsche advocated a "this worldly" comfort in laughter, rather than in the experience of a mystical oneness with "life itself."

Part of the reason Nietzsche was led to his surprisingly "life-negating" conclusions in *The Birth of Tragedy*, one can speculate, is because he was very concerned with the project of advancing a more exuberant, Greek-centered interpretation of life in opposition to a moral, Christian-centered one. So this led him to concentrate on Schopenhauer's conception of art and aesthetic awareness, since Nietzsche was disposed to oppose a "moral" conception of life with an "artistic" conception, and consequently to attend less to Schopenhauer's discussion of morality. It is in the latter discussion, though, where Schopenhauer addresses the question of human suffering more directly, and formulates an account of a universal awareness that is derived directly from reflections on life's terror. In a way, then, Nietzsche would have been better off developing his account of tragedy from Schopenhauer's account of moral awareness.

The reason is this: in Schopenhauer's account of moral awareness—as discussed above—there is a greater development of the idea of experiencing life's sufferings in a condition of enlightenment. Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory, by contrast, is far more escapist and aims to be more straightforwardly suffering-eliminating. As noted above, moral awareness, for Schopenhauer, does not obviously eliminate suffering, but might even maximally increase it, insofar as a person in this condition—the condition of affirming life "with all of one's strength"—would need to take on all the sufferings of the world. Schopenhauer notes that some peace of mind is generated within moral awareness, owing to our knowledge of the truth of things, but he also adds that moving ourselves into the heart of life itself involves becoming both the tormentor and the tormented at the same time, eternally. Moreover, as seen above, this kind of awareness also takes a step beyond the distinction between good and evil. In contrast to Schopenhauer's "suffering-inclusive" account of moral awareness, then, Nietzsche's "suffering-eliminative" account of tragedy is far more effective in removing us from life's sufferings. In this respect, Nietzsche is even more Schopenhauerian than Schopenhauer.

So one must wait until the later Nietzsche—it is clearly present by 1882

(see excerpt from *The Gay Science* above)²⁶—to arrive at a more individualistic, life-on-earth focused view, which is not tempered by an abstracted and universalized conception of “life itself” that has the disadvantage of overly diminishing one’s recognition of the terrors that life sets forth. This later, more mature, more “this-worldly” conception, is often projected mistakenly into Nietzsche’s early period, such as to perpetuate an inaccurate construal of the condition of Nietzsche’s insights and theoretical style at the time. At any rate, though, it seems that Nietzsche’s concern with providing a non-moral “justification” for existence led him to base much of his analysis of tragic art upon the model of Schopenhauer’s account of aesthetic awareness, rather than upon Schopenhauer’s account of moral awareness, probably because he failed to realize that Schopenhauer’s theory of moral awareness was far less morally centered than it appears to be.

IV. HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE EMERGENCE OF NIETZSCHE’S NONMORALITY

It has been widely noted that during the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, a more pronounced sense of history emerged within the European cultural spirit.²⁷ Within many spheres of inquiry, one can discern the growing presence of self-conceptions that were more historically developmental, more temporally sequential, more individual-context-sensitive, and less focused upon timeless and unchanging universal concepts, as had been the prevailing style of the preceding Enlightenment period. Accompanying this deepening of the temporal sense, the spatiotemporal world in general became less of a “moving image of eternity,” as Plato had described it long ago, and assumed a more intense, down-to-earth reality of its own, almost as if people were slowly waking from a dream. With this change of awareness, there came a greater attention to physical detail, and an emphasis upon concrete, individualized existence as opposed to generalized abstractions.

This theme is noticeable in the presentation of many theories of the time, and is perhaps stated most succinctly by Hegel in a short essay entitled “Who Thinks Abstractly?” Here Hegel rebels against the practice of thinking in purely abstract and universalist terms, for he believes that this style leads to superficial and cartoonlike characterizations that disrupt, disperse, and soften our discriminating focus upon the concrete reality of the objects or people described. He gives the memorable example of how the full being of a person convicted of murder is obscured by the label “murderer”—a label that forces the mind to consider only one of the person’s many qualities, such that it is taken to stand for the entirety of the person’s characteristics:

A murderer is led to the place of execution. For the common populace he is nothing but a murderer. Ladies perhaps remark that he is a strong, handsome, interesting man. The populace finds this remark terrible: What? A murderer handsome? How can one think so wickedly and call a murderer handsome; no doubt, you yourselves are something not much better! This is the corruption of morals that is prevalent in the upper classes, a priest may add, knowing the bottom of things and human hearts.

. . . This is abstract thinking: to see nothing in the murderer except the abstract fact that he is a murderer, and to annul all other human essence in him with this simple quality.²⁸

Hegel's example is particularly appropriate in the present discussion because his accentuation of the murderer's extended set of human qualities can easily lead us to a degree of moral uncertainty in our assessment of the murderer's character. When the person is no longer seen exclusively as a murderer, but is regarded also, perhaps, as someone's father, as another person's son, as yet another person's husband, as a former friend in the workplace, as a person who once assisted the poor, as a person who fought bravely for his country, and so on, the assessment of the situation becomes far more complicated, and moral and immoral qualities blend together into a morally confusing amalgam.

Within Hegel's general philosophy, his criticisms of Kant's moral theory as being too "abstract" and as not sufficiently grounded within the specific richness of historical contexts follow this example of a more "concretist" mentality. A decade after Hegel's death, similarly, we find comparable criticisms of Hegel himself advanced by Søren Kierkegaard, who claimed that Hegel's adamant intellectual allegiance to the project of developing an absolutely comprehensive philosophical system was simply inconsistent with the nature of individual existence:

If a dancer could leap very high, we would admire him. But if he tried to give the impression that he could fly, let laughter single him out for suitable punishment; even though it might be true that he could leap as high as any dancer ever had done. Leaping is the accomplishment of a being essentially earthly, one who respects the earth's gravitational force, since the leaping is only momentary. But flying carries a suggestion of being emancipated from telluric conditions, a privilege reserved for winged creatures, and perhaps also shared by the inhabitants of the moon—and there perhaps the System [of Hegel] will first find its true readers.²⁹

Within the same time period—as a third example—criticisms that exemplify the same concretist spirit are aimed at Ludwig Feuerbach by Karl Marx, who claimed that although Feuerbach's outlook was properly centered on earthly concerns and officially opposed to Hegel's supposedly "abstract thinking," its formulation still remained too abstracted and generalized. Marx's

criticism of Feuerbach, as we can see in the following excerpt, echoes Hegel's criticism of Kant's moral theory, which is similarly thought to have divorced itself from concrete historical contexts: "Feuerbach, consequently, does not see that the "religious sentiment" is itself a social product, and that the abstract individual whom he analyzes belongs in reality to a particular form of society."³⁰

Schopenhauer's criticisms of Kant's moral theory, as outlined above—criticisms written about a decade after Hegel advanced his own criticisms of Kant—are set forth in a comparable concretist vein. This is evident in how the moral awareness Schopenhauer describes attends not simply to human nature in the abstract, but to the specific contents of each person's consciousness. All of these examples—from Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, and Schopenhauer—are evidence of a general trend toward concretist thinking that forms the context within which the present interpretation of the relationship between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche is being advanced.

An underlying general thesis of this article, here exemplified only in part, is that the emergence of Nietzsche's nonmoral standpoint from Schopenhauer's moral standpoint is understandable significantly as an artifact of the deepening intensity of temporal awareness that was typical of the nineteenth century. This deepening sense of time carries a greater attention to individuality and change, and we have seen this instantiated in the way Schopenhauer's view of moral awareness attended more to the details of particular consciousnesses, and moreover, in how moral qualities—qualities previously grounded in a timeless universal sphere—were slowly undermined as the result of an increased attention upon the notion of individuality.

Nietzsche's understanding and adoption of Schopenhauerian views can also be seen in this historical light, for he appears to have moved away from Schopenhauer's outlook toward a greater sense of concreteness. This, as has been argued, happened in two basic steps. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche partially brought Schopenhauer's aesthetics down to earth, by substituting the concept of "life itself" for the Platonic Ideas Schopenhauer believed were the object of aesthetic awareness. In this sense, all those who wish to emphasize Nietzsche's "breaking away" from Schopenhauer are correct.³¹ They are only partially correct, however, because in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche formulated this concept of "life itself" in an abstracted, universalist, and pain-free way, such that it became completely divorced from individuality and suffering, and could thereby serve as a comfort for those existential distresses. It is only in reference to works written after 1872, where one can explicitly disengage Nietzsche's views from Schopenhauer's "individuated appearance vs. unified reality" distinction, and assert in a more unqualified way, that in contrast to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche was far more "this-worldly" and concrete in his conception of life.³²

As a means to situate Nietzsche's development within the overall trend toward concreteness that has been described, we can observe that Nietzsche's own self-criticisms, as he looked back at *The Birth of Tragedy* from the vantage point of 1886, stylistically mirror one the critical efforts immediately mentioned above. Just as Hegel's criticisms of Kant's moral theory are later echoed in Marx's criticisms of Feuerbach—criticisms to the effect that although Feuerbach had made an advance over Hegelianism in having adopted a materialist stance, Feuerbach was still not fully down-to-earth insofar as he continued to understand the essence of the human being to be a universally defined abstraction, and not as a complicated practical activity—Marx's criticisms of Feuerbach are later echoed in Nietzsche. In 1886, Nietzsche made the very same point about his earlier 1872 self that Marx made in connection with Feuerbach forty-one years earlier.

What is instantiated in Nietzsche's development of a standpoint that is "beyond good and evil," then, is the effect of an ever-deepening historical consciousness, which Nietzsche himself expressed in terms of the "death of God"—a theme that he advanced in *The Gay Science* as well.³³ In sum, within Nietzsche's view, as one "comes down to earth" more and more plainly and solidly, the burden of responsibility for one's values falls more and more squarely upon one's own shoulders. It is only if we attend to this idea of how the theorists of the time were making a concerted attempt to "come down to earth" as intensely as possible—to incarnate the divine, or to simply create it, however conceived, first and foremost within themselves—can we discern how Schopenhauer's conception of moral awareness was historically central to the development of Nietzsche's nonmoral "perspective of life." The increasingly passionate quest to secure the most concrete, existence-centered perspective, so it appears from this history, inevitably leads to a more penetrating interrogation of traditional moral values. For temporality and traditional morality, in effect, become opposed, insofar as time is regarded as an absolute force of erosion that undermines even the most apparently steadfast values.³⁴

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1. "Hurt no one; rather, help all as much as you can."
2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), §186, p. 99.
3. In his 1886 "Attempt at Self-Criticism" preface to *The Birth of Tragedy* reissue, Nietzsche states that "life is something essentially immoral" (*"das Leben etwas Unmoralisches ist"*). (Kaufmann translates this as "life is something essentially amoral.") Nietzsche could have used the adjective "*nicht-moralisch*" (nonmoral) or "*amoralisch*" (amoral) in this context, but he instead chose to say "*unmoralisch*" (immoral). The sense conveyed is that life itself involves a transgression of traditional moral values, and that if one fully advocates the perspective of life itself, then one is thereby standing against, and not simply standing above or beyond, traditional moral values.

4. The alternative extreme, namely, that in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche did not break away from Schopenhauer in any significant life-affirming respects, is also prevalent (see note 31 below).

5. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), §68, p. 386.

6. *Ibid.*, vol. I, §70, p. 408. Schopenhauer adds, “It is also just as much in agreement with the doctrines and ethical precepts of the sacred books of India, which again are presented in quite different terms.”

7. Despite their differences in outlook, Schopenhauer and Hegel are of a similar mentality here. Both have conceptions of moral awareness that involve a greater sense of articulation and experiential detail than what we find in Kant.

8. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, §63, p. 354.

9. *Ibid.*, vol. I, §64, p. 357.

10. This distantly echoes the claim expressed in Plato’s *Protagoras*—that no one goes willingly toward the bad, or toward what is believed to be bad.

11. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, §63, p. 353.

12. The allusion here is to Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence, which Nietzsche believes is of the greatest psychological “weight.”

13. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche replicates these terms in his discussion of the relationship between the “superhuman” and the “genius” (§548). In *The Gay Science* (§290), he develops the ideas of artistry, superiority, and creativity, in connection with the related theme of making one’s own life a work of art.

14. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, §36, p. 188. This text is interpretable as referring either to a “superhuman” dimension of the artist herself/himself, or to a “superhuman” being—some “god” or other—that exists independently of the artist as a force of inspiration. Since Schopenhauer did not recognize the existence of otherworldly beings in his philosophical outlook that took the form of “gods,” the most straightforward interpretation of the passage is that the “superhuman” quality he refers to—if the general thought were to be translated into Schopenhauer’s own framework—is a quality of the artist herself/himself that arises under the conditions of artistic inspiration.

The capacities of the artistic genius referred to as “superhuman” can be found in Pseudo-Longinus’s essay, “On the Sublime” (c. 1st century A.D.).

15. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, §51, p. 249.

16. Arthur Schopenhauer, “On Ethics,” in *Selected Essays of Schopenhauer*, ed. Ernest Belfort Bax (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1926), 195. The essay was originally published in Schopenhauer’s *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1851).

17. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), §109, p. 168.

18. The earlier title was: *The Birth of Tragedy—Out of the Spirit of Music*; the later title was: *The Birth of Tragedy—Or: Hellenism and Pessimism*. The earlier title was preserved in the new edition but was inserted after the introductory self-critical remarks Nietzsche added.

19. See Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* [1950], 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974; Martha Nussbaum, “Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ivan Soll, “The Redemption of Life Through Art,” in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche’s Educator*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Ted Sadler, *Nietzsche: Truth and Redemption* (London: The Athlone Press, 1995), chap. 3, “Redemption and Life Affirmation”; Carl Pletsch, *Young Nietzsche: Becoming a Genius* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), chap. 7, “First Works.”

20. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 131.

21. Nussbaum, “Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus,” 369.

22. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §17, pp. 104–5.

23. *Ibid.*, §7, p. 59.

24. *Ibid.*, §10, p. 74.

25. *Ibid.*, §10, p. 73.

26. In *The Gay Science* (§99, “Schopenhauer’s Followers”), Nietzsche explicitly criticizes the Schopenhauerian assumptions that he had advocated in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

27. Two writers who discuss this theme at some length are Jürgen Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985) and Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* (1966).

28. G. W. F. Hegel, “Who Thinks Abstractly?” [c. 1807], in *Hegel: Texts and Commentary*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 116–17.

29. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 112–13.

30. Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” [1845], in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 145.

31. Contrary to this trend is Julian Young’s view, which diminishes most of the purportedly life-affirming aspects of *The Birth of Tragedy* (see *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Art* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], chap. 2). Young understands the idea of “life” in a noticeably restricted way, though, as referring only to life as ordinarily lived (i.e., life in the condition of individuation). This leads the interpretation to obscure the fact that the state into which one is immersed in the experience of tragic art is, nonetheless, as Nietzsche clearly believes, that of life itself. Suggesting that one’s complete immersion into heart of life itself constitutes an unambiguous kind of “life-negation” can yield a reasonable and nonparadoxical account, only on the condition that the term “life” is used in two different senses. Nietzsche’s intended meaning of the term, however, includes both the sense of “life itself” and the sense of “life as ordinarily lived,” and not simply the latter.

Another well-known writer who tends to read Nietzsche’s early views on art such that the Schopenhauerian suffering-relieving aspect tends to overshadow the more “Nietzschean” life-affirming aspect is Arthur Danto, in his *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), chap. 2, “Art and Irrationality.” More recently, a similar position has been expressed by Tyler T. Roberts, *Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche, Affirmation, Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), chap. 2.

32. Nietzsche claimed in 1887 that in 1876 he wanted to justify life, “even at its most terrible, ambiguous, and mendacious” (*The Will to Power*; trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Vintage Books, 1968], §1005 [spring–fall 1887], 520.) This quote does not imply that at an earlier date Nietzsche had a life-negating, as opposed to life-affirming, view; more reasonably, it suggests that Nietzsche realized that his aesthetic justification of “life itself” in *The Birth of Tragedy* had not justified all of life’s sufferings, and that a stronger life-affirming position (i.e., a more “this-worldly” one) was needed.

In a later section of *The Birth of Tragedy* (§18), Nietzsche states that the metaphysical comfort provided by the experience of tragedy is an illusion (and therefore not a revelation of truth). Some writers, such as Maudemarie Clark and Paul de Man, have considered this remark to constitute a significant contradiction in Nietzsche’s early view, since he does adhere in the main to the Schopenhauer-inspired position that in the experience of tragic art, one comes in contact with the truth. There is indeed a contradiction here, but one can release some of the tension by noting that Nietzsche’s remark can be understood—in line with the interpretation offered in this essay—as his later, more concretist, self (and perhaps his more authentic self) having a brief, momentary voice at this early date. The claim that the metaphysical comfort involves illusion does, in fact, foreshadow his critical remarks about the (un)desirability of this comfort in his 1886 “Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” since he appears to be taking a stronger “no comforting illusions allowed” view by this time. For a discussion of this contradiction, see Maudemarie Clark, “Language and Deconstruction: Nietzsche, de Man, and Postmodernism,” in *Nietzsche as*

Postmodernist: Essays Pro and Contra, ed. Clayton Koelb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 75–90.

33. See *The Gay Science*, §§108–25.

34. I would like to express my thanks to an anonymous editorial commentator whose observations on an earlier version of this essay were extremely helpful.