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On the Second-Person Perspective in Schopenhauer's Moral Philosophy

Abstract:

In this paper, the author reflects on the concept of second-person perspective in Schopenhauer's moral philosophy, with a special emphasis on his ethics of compassion and moral psychology. By referring to some of the pioneers who introduced the concept of second-person perspective into philosophy, the author first tries to define the terms: *second-person perspective* and *second-person relatedness*. After that, he argues (1) that Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion has a second-person character, (2) that the concept of second-person perspective can help in a better understanding of his moral philosophy, and (3) that the latter concept is closely related to compassion – the basis of Schopenhauer's moral theory. In doing so, the author is putting forward the thesis that the concept of second-person perspective can be used as a key for interpreting Schopenhauer's moral philosophy. The author believes that there are at least five elements of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy (i.e., his ethics of compassion and moral psychology) that reflect the second-person character of his theory. These elements include: compassion, self-overcoming, humility, intersubjectivity, and moral responsibility. Finally, the author gives general remarks, which he believes are valid for Schopenhauer's theory of morality, and from which further implications can be drawn for a future investigation of his ethics of compassion.

Keywords

Arthur Schopenhauer, moral philosophy, ethics, second-person perspective, second-person relatedness, compassion, metaphysics

1. Introduction

In the history of moral philosophy, there has been a continuous academic debate about the moral way of living.[1] In its essence, from Socrates and Aristotle to John Rawls and Bernard Williams, the debate about the moral way of living dealt with some of the most important questions of human reasoning: (1) "how should I live my life," (2) "how should I act," and (3) "what is the source of moral values," just to name a few.[2] Those questions, as well as many other morally relevant questions throughout the history of moral philosophy, generated numerous answers in the form of different moral theories. However, this debate is far from over because almost every morally relevant question – in one way or the other – can be traced back to the initial conundrums of moral reasoning. Namely, (1) "what is the nature of morality," (2) "is there a fundamental moral principle," and (3) "why, if at all, lead a 'morally justified' way of life" – are the questions that are still open for discussion.

Although these questions have occupied the minds of various philosophers since the time of ancient Greece, only in the last few decades has there been a noticeable "change in perspective" in trying to answer the latter questions. With certain exceptions, a large number of thinkers throughout the history of moral philosophy have tried to offer answers to the latter questions from the position of their philosophical systems, offering a certain moral theory (e.g., virtue ethics, deontological ethics, utilitarian ethics), which corresponds to their "personal ethics." Supporters of such moral theories – sometimes deliberately and often out of ignorance – rarely took into account the perspective of the Other as the basis for justifying their moral judgment and reasoning. This has, however, largely changed not only in moral theory but also in philosophy in general, approximately at the beginning of the last century, after the two World Wars and all the horrors they have brought with them. For example:

> (1) Martin Buber, who emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships and dialogue in human experience, argued that genuine dialogue

1) This paper was awarded second prize in the "Oxford University 2023 Competition for Central and Eastern European Perspectives on Philosophy, Theology, and Science."

2) For a historical overview of various ethical issues and moral theories, see Rawls, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, and MacIntyre, *Short History of Ethics*.

involves a recognition of others as unique and valuable individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. Such genuine dialogue, which takes into account the perspective of others, Buber based on the so-called "I-Thou" relationships.[3]

(2) Emmanuel Lévinas, who emphasized the ethical dimension of human relationships, argued that our encounters with others are characterized by a fundamental ethical demand, which requires us to recognize and respond to the other person's needs and vulnerabilities. For him, others always exceed our attempts to comprehend or categorize them, and our responsibility to others involves recognition of their infinite alterity.[4]

(3) Jean-Paul Sartre emphasized the importance of intersubjectivity in human experience. He argued that our awareness of ourselves as conscious beings is intimately tied to our awareness of others. According to Sartre, our encounters with others can either help us to become more fully aware of our own existence or can lead us to feel alienated from ourselves.[5]

In contemporary literature, the general change in perspective – from "I" to "You" – in philosophy (especially in moral philosophy), but also in other humanities and social sciences, is usually called the "You-turn."[6] Among other things, this change also

3) For more details, see Buber, *I and Thou*. In a somewhat different form, the importance of "genuine dialogue with the otherness" can also be found in Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic theory. Namely, Gadamer emphasized the importance of dialogue in the interpretation of texts and traditions. He argued that the "problem of understanding" is always a matter of interpretation and that our process of interpretation requires a willingness to engage with the otherness of the text or tradition. For more details, see Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

4) For more details, see Lévinas, *Humanism of the Other*, as well as *Time and the Other*. Michael E. Bratman has also written about the recognition of the other. Bratman has argued that "shared intentions" and "joint action" involve a recognition of the other as a participant in the activity, and that our ability to engage in "joint action" is crucial for our social and moral lives (cf. Bratman, *Shared Agency*). For more about Emmanuel Lévinas and his theory, see Fagenblat and Melis, *Levinas and Analytic Philosophy*.

5) For more details, see Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. In this context, it is convenient to mention Charles Taylor as well. Namely, Taylor has written extensively on the nature of the self and the importance of interpersonal relationships. He has argued that our understanding of ourselves is inherently social and relational, and that our ability to engage in genuine dialogue with others is essential for our well-being and moral behavior. For more details, see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

6) See Eilan, "The You Turn."

resulted in the articulation of new concepts that are today often used in the never old debate about the moral way of living.

In this paper, we will deal with one of those concepts – the concept of second-person perspective – in the context of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy, with a special emphasis on his moral psychology and ethics of compassion. The aim of the paper is (1) to show that Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion has a second-person character, (2) that the concept of second-person perspective can help in a better understanding of his moral philosophy, and (3) that the latter concept is closely related to compassion – the basis of Schopenhauer's moral theory. In doing so, we will present the thesis that the concept of second-person perspective can be used as a key for interpreting Schopenhauer's moral philosophy.[7]

2. The Concept of Second-Person Perspective in Philosophy

In the last few years, the concept of second-person perspective has taken the debate about the moral way of living by surprise. Although it is a concept that has been known in a slightly different formulation since the beginning of the last century, and in a slightly different conceptual framework even much earlier than that, it has only recently received a systematic analysis and a (relatively) precise definition, accompanied with an academic discussion throughout several fields in philosophy (as well as in other humanities and social sciences).[8] But what does this concept mean in philosophy? Before offering our understanding, let us first consider how the term was defined by some of the pioneers who introduced the concept of second-person perspective into philosophy.

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7) In this paper, we will primarily refer to Schopenhauer's work *The Basis of Morality*, in which he presented his ethics of compassion in a critical discussion with Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics (cf. Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, § 3–11, the second book of *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, and last chapter of *The World as Will and Representation*). We will also refer to his other works, such as *The World as Will and Representation* and *Parerga and Paralipomena*, which are related to his moral philosophy, although his moral theory is not their primary subject of discussion.

8) In contemporary academic debates, the concept of second-person perspective has been used to explore a wide range of topics, including epistemology, ethics, moral philosophy, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, and so forth. One of the reasons is "the rise of social neuroscience," which has "brought the second-person perspective back into the focus of philosophy" (Pauen, "Second-Person Perspective," 33). For more about the second-person perspective in interdisciplinary research, see Vanney and Sáenz, "Second-person Perspective in Research."

Stephen Darwall, the author of the book *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, in one of his papers said: "By the 'second-person standpoint,' I mean the perspective you and I take up whenever we address (putatively valid) claims or demands to someone, whether explicitly, in speech, or implicitly, in thought, whether to others or to ourselves (as in self-addressed feelings of guilt)."[9]

Referring to Darwall, many authors clarified further the meaning of the latter term. For example, Honneth added in one of his papers that: "According to Darwall, the distinctive sense of obligation that characterizes modern ethics is due solely to a so-called 'second-personal' standpoint: an 'I' that sees itself confronted with a 'you' knows itself to be bound to moral rules simply in virtue of this intersubjective relation."[10] While on the other hand, Isern-Mas and Gomila drew attention to the following:

> In a second-personal interaction a subject addresses a claim or demand to another, who can recognize the claim or demand as valid or not. And through these interactive dynamics of claims, recognitions, mutual demands and reasons, both subjects hold each other accountable. According to Darwall, it is this holding each other accountable that is implicit in the moral notions, such as respect or dignity.[11]

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9) Darwall, "Precis: The Second-Person Standpoint," 216. Here, it is important to note that the second-person perspective is essentially about communication – being able to *answer* to another person *why* do we treat them as we do. This becomes a point of tension when considering Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion, which arguably bears a second-person character, yet does not place the same emphasis on interpersonal communication as found in Darwall's account. Nevertheless, one might argue that Schopenhauer's "Caius and Titus" argument offers a way to address this apparent "communication problem" in his ethics (see Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, §19). Moreover, regarding the question "why do we treat other persons (and animals) as we do," Schopenhauer's answer is quite clear: because we are all representations of the universal Will. For Schopenhauer, then, the real question is not *why* do we treat others as we do, but rather *how* does compassion arise in beings who are ultimately part of an impersonal, blind, and insatiable Will. In this light, the issue of communication becomes something of a pseudo-problem. This will be explored further in the following chapters.

10) Honneth, "'You' or 'We,'" 581. For more about the limits of Darwell's second-person perspective, see ibid.

11) Isern-Mas and Gomila, "Naturalizing Darwall's Standpoint," 786.

Here is important to note that Darwall also distinguishes the so-called "second-personal reasons." He pointed out that:

> What is distinctive about second-personal reasons is that they are analytically related to claims and demands that an addresser has the authority to make of, and address to, the agent second-personally. Reasons of this kind always involve an accountability relation between addresser and addressee-that is, that the addressee is answerable to the addresser in some way, if not for compliance, then at least to give consideration or something similar.[12]

In order to define the latter concept within the framework of philosophy, a considerable number of authors distinguished between the first-, second-, and third-person perspective. Michael Pauen explains the difference as follows:

> Making a difference between the first-person and the third-person perspective is accepted by many. But why should we add a second-person perspective to this picture? The reason is that there is a specific kind of epistemic access which is quite different both from first-person and third-person perspective taking. This access plays an important role in social contexts, when epistemic subjects use their own mental experiences, either explicitly or implicitly, in order to understand other subjects and their mental experiences. These epistemic acts differ from *third-person* perspective taking, because it's neither theories nor empirical evidence that they are based upon. Rather, it's one's own experiences that are used to understand other persons' beliefs, desires, and emotions. But the second-person perspective differs also from *first-person* perspective taking because the experiences one draws upon are not the experiences one tries to under-

12) Darwall, "Law and Second-Person Standpoint," 891. In that sense, Isern-Mas and Gomila are right when they say: "According to Darwall, these second-personal practices are relevant for morality because moral notions involve second-personal notions, and because the grounds of moral motivation lie in the second-personal relationship. Moral notions do not stand in a rational heaven, but presuppose those second-personal practices among moral subjects." (Isern-Mas and Gomila, "Naturalizing Darwall's Standpoint," 787). For more about the attempt of naturalizing Darwall's second person standpoint, see Ibid.

> stand. After all, I don't have direct access to your mental states. Rather, because it's somebody else's mental experiences, their beliefs, emotions, and desires that are subject to second-person perspective taking, access to the other person's mental states can only be indirect and inferential – even if these inferences are automatic and subpersonal.[13]

But Andrew Pinsent made perhaps the biggest step forward in discussing the second-person perspective and moral philosophy. In his book, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics: Virtues and Gifts*, in which he explores the role of the second-person perspective in the ethical thought of the medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas, Pinsent argued that the second-person perspective is essential for moral action, as it involves a "recognition of the otherness of others" and a "willingness to engage with them" in a way that acknowledges their unique existence and perspective. Such a perspective, Pinsent believes, allows us to see others as "ends in themselves," rather than merely as "means to our own ends." Pinsent also emphasizes the importance of the second-person perspective in the relationship between human beings and God. He argues that the second-person perspective allows us to engage in a personal relationship with God, in which we recognize and respond to God as a person, rather than as an abstract concept or force. It is interesting to note that such an interpretation also led Pinsent to thematize the possibilities and limits of "philosophical second-person virtue ethics."[14]

However, in addition to the term "second-person perspective" (or "intersubjective perspective"), the term "second-person relatedness" was also formulated and put to good use. What (if anything) is the difference between those two concepts? One could say that (1) the concept of second-person relatedness refers to the idea that

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13) Pauen, "The Second-Person Perspective," 38. With regard to this distinction, one could roughly say that: (1) the first-person perspective is subjective and focuses on the individual's own experiences, while (2) the third-person perspective tries to be objective and deals with individuals as objects of study. In addition, it should be pointed out that Nagel tried to offer a "view from nowhere," while he was dealing with the problem: "how to combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his viewpoint included" (Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 3).

14) Pinsent, *Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics*, 105. Pinsent also writes about "joint attention," a phenomenon that is of great importance for understanding the second-person perspective. In his book, he argued that "Aquinas's virtue ethics is inherently second-personal, involving dispositions that cause a person to be moved in the manner of joint attention with another personal agent" (ibid).

our relationships with the other are essential for our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. The concept emphasizes the importance of "recognizing" and "engaging" with others as unique individuals with their own perspectives and experiences. It involves a recognition of the otherness of others, as well as a willingness to engage with them in a way that acknowledges their unique existence and perspective. On the other hand, (2) the concept of second-person perspective refers to a way of "viewing the world" from the standpoint of the other. It involves an ability to take on the perspective of someone (or something) else, and to imagine how the other sees and experiences the world. While the second-person perspective and second-person relatedness are related concepts, they emphasize different aspects of our relationships with others.[15] Therefore, to answer the question, we can say the following: the concept of second-person perspective emphasizes the importance of our relationships with others and our ability to understand and empathize with their experiences and perspectives. It differs from the objective perspective, which seeks to understand the world through a detached, impersonal lens. In moral philosophy, which is the main theoretical framework of this paper, the second-person perspective is a way of understanding the ethical dimensions of human experience that emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships and interactions. It is a perspective that acknowledges that moral behavior (or moral way of living) involves a recognition of the other as a distinct and valuable individual with their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. In that sense, the second-person perspective is also associated with empathy and compassion – as it involves an ability to understand and relate to the experiences of others. With that in mind, in this paper, we will consider the relationship between the concept of second-person perspective and Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion, while at the same time – we will also defend the thesis that the latter concept can be understood as a key for interpreting Schopenhauer's moral philosophy.

15) The distinction presented here is not universally valid, because certain authors understand these concepts differently. Our distinction is more semantically oriented (keeping in mind the tradition of earlier authors, such as Buber, Lévinas, Sartre, Gadamer, and others), while certain authors are more oriented toward the phenomena in which these perspectives are reflected. For example, Pinsent rightly pointed out that "second-person relatedness is experienced under the range of phenomena classified as joint attention" (Pinsent, *Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics*, 67). For more about the second-person relatedness and second-person perspective, see Pinsent, *Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics*, as well as "Non-Aristotelian Virtue of Truth," and "'Till We Have Faces.'"

3. Schopenhauer's Ethics of Compassion and Moral Psychology

The foundations of Schopenhauer's moral psychology can be found in his main work *The World as Will and Representation*, which was first published in 1818. In this work, Schopenhauer presents his philosophical system, which is based on the idea that the world can be understood as the product of two aspects: *representation* and *will*. The first volume of the book deals with the nature of representation, while the second volume deals with the nature of will. It is in the second volume that Schopenhauer develops his ideas about the (universal) Will, including his moral psychology. At the core of Schopenhauer's moral psychology is his belief in the fundamental nature of the Will – an irrational force, which is constantly in conflict with itself, that cannot be fully understood or controlled by reason alone. However, according to Schopenhauer, the will is divided into two aspects: the *individual will* and the *universal Will*.[16] In terms of moral behavior, he believes that the key to a moral way of living is to recognize the fundamental nature of the universal Will and to strive toward overcoming the desires of the individual will, which involves recognizing the interconnectedness of all things. Even though his moral psychology is often seen as pessimistic,[17] Schopenhauer argued that there are moments of "transcendence" and "joy" that can be experienced when individuals are able to transcend the "limitations of the individual will" and act in accordance with "pure (moral) knowledge."

Although there is no consensus about his philosophical system, it is well known that ethics has a fundamental place in Schopenhauer's thought and that it is directly rooted in his metaphysics and aesthetics.[18] Namely, when it comes to his ethics, his core

16) The individual will is the "particular will" of each individual, which is concerned with their own desires and goals, while the universal Will is the "underlying force" that drives all of nature, and is responsible for the interconnectedness and unity of all things (cf. Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, § 17).

17) Schopenhauer believed that the individual will can never be fully satisfied and that human beings are fundamentally unhappy (cf. Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, § 41–46). For a broader theoretical context, see Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 3–22. This is also discussed in great detail in *Parerga and Paralipomena* (e.g., vol. 2, § 304).

18) Schopenhauer's metaphysics posits that the fundamental nature of reality is an irrational and insatiable Will, which is the source of all life (the so-called "Will to live"), and drives all living beings to pursue their own individual ends, often at the expense of others. When it comes to his aesthetics, which he believed shared a fundamental underlying principle with his ethical views (i.e., the overcoming of the desires of the individual will), Schopenhauer believed that it was concerned with the temporary suspension of the

metaethical view consists of two claims: (1) that moral worth is attributed to actions based on compassion, and (2) that compassion, in contrast to egoism, arises from a deep metaphysical insight into the non-distinctness of beings. For Schopenhauer, compassion is a central ethical principle that arises from our recognition of the suffering of others. He argues that true moral behavior involves overcoming our self-centered desires and acting in a way that alleviates the suffering of others.[19]

It can be said that Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion is based on several fundamental assumptions, which include:

(1) *The Will as the fundamental nature of the universe*: Schopenhauer believed that the universe is ultimately comprised of an impersonal, blind, and insatiable Will that manifests itself in all living beings.[20]

(2) *All living beings are suffering*: He thought that all living beings experience suffering, regardless of their level of intelligence or consciousness. According to Schopenhauer, this suffering is the result of the insatiable Will and the struggle for survival that characterizes all living beings.[21]

(3) *Human beings have the capacity to recognize the suffering of others*: Schopenhauer argued that true morality requires the recognition of the suffering of others and the desire to alleviate that suffering. Compassion, therefore, is the foundation of all moral actions.[22]

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individual will, allowing the individual to connect with the universal Will that underlies all existence. This experience, which he called "pure knowing," can be achieved by almost anyone who does not yield to the desires of his own will, but only to the greatest extent by a genius (cf. Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, § 31). Similarly, Schopenhauer believed that the true moral way of living involved a rejection of the individual will and a connection with the universal Will. By cultivating compassion, individuals could transcend their own selfish desires and connect with the suffering of others, recognizing the inherent value and worth of all living beings. Schopenhauer wrote more on this topic in *Parerga and Paralipomena* (e.g., vol 1, "Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life").

19) Namely, as Janaway rightly suggested, Shopenhauer's ethics of compassion: "tries to explain the difference between good and bad in terms of a divergence of attitudes which individuals may take towards one another, and towards the world as a whole" (Janaway, *Schopenhauer*, 89).

20) This is being discussed in great detail in numerous sections in *The World as Will and Representation* (e.g., § 17) and *Parerga and Paralipomena* (e.g., vol. 2, § 304).

21) Cf. Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, § 17 ff; Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 3–16.

22) Cf. Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 3–16; Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, § 18–20.

(4) *The rejection of egoism*: He believed that egoism, or the pursuit of self-interest, is the root of all evil and is incompatible with true morality. He argued that the egoistic individual seeks to dominate and exploit others, which inevitably perpetuates the suffering in the world.[23]

(5) *The importance of asceticism*: Schopenhauer believed that the pursuit of material possessions and pleasures is ultimately futile and can never provide true happiness. He was a strong advocate for a life of asceticism, where individuals limit their desires and focus on the cultivation of compassion and inner peace.[24]

However, Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion has also been subject to a number of criticisms over the years. Some of the most common criticisms include:

(1) *The pessimistic worldview*: Schopenhauer is often criticized for his extremely pessimistic worldview, which emphasizes the pervasive suffering and meaninglessness of existence.[25]

(2) *The rejection of reason*: His rejection of reason and emphasis on intuition has been criticized for its lack of clarity and coherence.[26]

(3) *The focus on individual suffering*: Critics argue that Schopenhauer places too much emphasis on individual suffering and fails to address larger social and political issues that contribute to human misery.[27]

(4) *The rejection of social engagement*: His emphasis on asceticism and rejection of material pleasures has been criticized for its lack of engagement with the social world.[28]

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23) Cf. Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, § 18–20.

24) Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 32–39; Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, § 18–20.

25) Cf. Janaway, *Schopenhauer*, 103 ff.

26) Cf. Magee, *Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer*, 440 ff; Wicks, *Schopenhauer*, 184 ff; Wicks, *Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, chpt. 5.

27) Cf. Janaway, *Schopenhauer*, 28 ff; Wicks, *Schopenhauer*, 127 ff; Wicks, *Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, chpt. 2.

28) Cf. Janaway, *Schopenhauer*, 103 ff; Magee, *Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer*, 226 ff.

(5) *The lack of practical application*: Schopenhauer's ethics is often criticized for its lack of practical application. Critics argue that his ideas are too abstract and esoteric to be of much use in guiding moral behavior in the real world.[29]

Overall, it would not be wrong to say that Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion emphasizes the importance of recognizing the suffering of others and the rejection of egoism as a means of alleviating that suffering. It is based on the belief that compassion is the foundation of all moral actions and that the pursuit of material possessions and pleasures is ultimately futile.

Although Schopenhauer's moral philosophy (i.e., his ethics of compassion and moral psychology), is not often associated with a strong emphasis on the second-person perspective, it is possible to point out elements of the second-person perspective in his view of moral behavior. But before emphasizing these elements, a crucial question arises: why are we even bringing together a classical moral philosophy and a modern concept? Well, the answer to that question is the following: we believe that the concept of second-person perspective can shed new light on Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion and that it can be used as a key for interpreting his moral philosophy. We firmly believe that the concept of second-person perspective can help to overcome the biggest problem of Schopenhauer's moral theory – the "problem of compassion." Namely, Schopenhauer never fully explained the true nature of compassion, and at one point he even stated that it represents "the greatest mystery of ethics."[30] This is precisely why we propose a new interpretation of Schopenhauer's ethics, the one in the key of the second-person perspective, which hopefully will be able to deal with this "mystery." So, let us take a closer look at the second-person elements of his moral theory to ground our thesis further.

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29) Cf. Wicks, *Schopenhauer*, 81 ff; Wicks, *Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, chpt. 4; Magee, *Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer*, 226 ff.

30) Cf. Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, 171, 200, 278. However, one can certainly argue that this mystery is resolved through Schopenhauer's metaphysical monism. Cf. Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 3–39.

4. The Second-Person Character of Schopenhauer's Moral Philosophy

For Schopenhauer, as we pointed out earlier, moral behavior is rooted in a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all things. He argues that our suffering is ultimately connected to the suffering of others, and that true moral behavior involves recognizing and responding to this connection. With that in mind, we can point out five elements of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy that reflect the second-person character of his theory. These elements include:

(1) *Compassion:* Schopenhauer placed great importance on the ability to empathize with others and to feel their suffering as one's own.[31]

(2) *Self-overcoming*: He believed that one should try to overcome one's individual will to achieve a higher state of being. He argued that the pursuit of individual desires only leads to suffering and that one should strive to attain a state of selflessness.[32]

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31) Schopenhauer sees compassion as a basis for achieving two fundamental virtues: *justice* and *loving-kindness*. In his words:

Compassion is the root no less of justice than of loving-kindness; but it is more clearly evidenced in the latter than in the former. We never receive proofs of genuine loving-kindness on the part of others, so long as we are in all respects prosperous. The happy man may, no doubt, often hear the words of good-will on his relations' and friends' lips; but the expression of that pure, disinterested, objective participation in the condition and lot of others, which loving-kindness begets, is reserved for him who is stricken with some sorrow or suffering, whatever it be. (Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, 216)

Schopenhauer wrote more about this topic in his work *Parerga and Paralipomena* (e.g., vol 2, § 304), as well as in his *Essays and Aphorisms*, 139–60.

32) For Schopenhauer, the self-overcoming and compassion are linked:

It is this Compassion alone which is the real basis of all voluntary justice and all genuine loving-kindness. Only so far as an action springs therefrom, has it moral value; and all conduct that proceeds from any other motive whatever has none. When once compassion is stirred within me, by another's pain, then his weal and woe go straight to my heart, exactly in the same way, if not always to the same degree, as otherwise I feel only my own. Consequently, the difference between myself and him is no longer an absolute one. (Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, 170)

However, the self-overcoming has also an epistemological note:

How can that which affects another for good or bad become my immediate motive, and actually sometimes assume such importance that it more or less supplants my own interests, which are, as a rule, the single source of the incentives that appeal to me? Obviously, only because that other person becomes the ultimate object of my will, precisely as usually I myself am that object; in other words, because I directly

(3) *Humility*: Schopenhauer argued that individuals should recognize their limitations, as well as the limitations of human knowledge. For him, humility is the basis for openness toward others.[33]

(4) *Intersubjectivity*: He put forward a worldview according to which all living beings are linked in their suffering, which is the result of the irrational universal Will and desires of the individual will.[34]

(5) *Moral responsibility*: Schopenhauer believed that we are responsible for our own actions and the consequences that follow. He argued that we should take moral responsibility for our actions and work to mitigate any harm that we may cause toward others.[35]

In that sense, Schopenhauer's moral philosophy can be seen as having a second-person dimension, in that it emphasizes the importance of recognizing and responding to the needs and suffering of others. Moreover, Schopenhauer argued that compassion involves recognizing the suffering of others as our own, and responding to it with a sense of shared humanity. This sense of shared humanity (which resembles a type of "joint attention"), arises from our recognition of the other person's subjectivity and unique existence. That is why compassion involves a kind of second-person perspective,

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desire weal, and not woe, for him, just as habitually I do for myself. This, however, necessarily implies that I suffer with him, and feel his woe, exactly as in most cases I feel only mine, and therefore desire his weal as immediately as at other times I desire only my own. But, for this to be possible, I must in some way or other be identified with him; that is, the difference between myself and him, which is the precise *raison d'être* of my Egoism, must be removed, at least to a certain extent. Now, since I do not live in his skin, there remains only the knowledge, that is, the mental picture, I have of him, as the possible means whereby I can so far identify myself with him, that my action declares the difference to be practically effaced. (Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, 179)

Schopenhauer wrote more about this topic in his *Essays and Aphorisms*, 32–39.

33) Cf. Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, 115–38, 234–54.

34) As Barbara Hannan pointed out: "The basis of moral action, according to Schopenhauer, is the quasi-mystical intuition of the oneness of all things. Because all creatures are manifestations of the same Will, the suffering Other is ultimately identical with one's Self. The ancient Indian doctrine of *tat tvam asi* ('that art thou') is, for Schopenhauer, the metaphysical truth lurking behind our deepest moral intuitions." (Hannan, *Riddle of the World*, 34)

35) Cf. Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*, § 12–20.

where we acknowledge and engage with the other person in a way that recognizes their individuality and their experience of the world. In this way, Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion can be seen as a philosophy of second-person perspective, emphasizing the importance of our relationships with others and the recognition of their suffering as an essential aspect of our human experience.[36]

5. Concluding Remarks and Implications

By reflecting on Schopenhauer's moral philosophy (i.e., his ethics of compassion and moral psychology), in connection with the concept of second-person perspective, we came to three general remarks, which we believe are valid for his moral theory, and from which further implications can be drawn for a future investigation of his ethics, as well as the problems it faces. Those remarks and implications include:

> (1) Compassion is intimately related to the second-person perspective, as it involves a deep awareness and concern for the experiences and needs of others. To be compassionate, we need to be able to take on a second-person perspective and see the world from the point of view of the person who is suffering or in need.
>
> (2) At its core, compassion involves recognizing the intrinsic value and dignity of every person and responding to their suffering or distress with empathy and a desire to alleviate their pain. This requires us to be able to see beyond our own experiences and concerns and to appreciate the unique experiences and needs of others. By taking on a second-person perspective, we can gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and needs of others, and respond to them with kindness and understanding.

36) On that note, further engagement with Nietzsche's moral philosophy could deepen the present discussion. Nietzsche's explicit rejection of compassion as a basis for ethics – seeing it as emblematic of "slave morality" – stands in stark contrast to Schopenhauer's position, and a comparative analysis could clarify the stakes of defending a compassion-based ethics in a second-person framework. While such a confrontation exceeds the scope of this paper, it raises important questions for future research, particularly regarding whether a second-personal account of moral obligation can effectively counter Nietzsche's critique.

> (3) The second-person perspective is also important for developing a sense of moral responsibility and a commitment to moral behavior. By recognizing the importance of our relationships with others and our ability to understand and empathize with their experiences and perspectives, we can cultivate a sense of moral responsibility and a commitment to treating others with kindness, respect, and compassion. This can lead to a deeper sense of connection and meaning in our lives, as well as a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment.

In short, the second-person perspective is essential for developing compassion, as it allows us to see beyond our own experiences and concerns, and appreciate the unique experiences and needs of others. By cultivating a sense of empathy and moral responsibility, we can develop a deeper sense of connection and meaning in our lives, and contribute to a more compassionate and just world.[37]

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