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## Compassion in Schopenhauer and Śāntideva

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# Compassion in Schopenhauer and Śāntideva

Kenneth Hutton<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Although it is well known that Schopenhauer claimed that Buddhism closely reflected his own philosophy, this claim was largely ignored until the mid-late Twentieth century. Most commentators on Schopenhauer (with some recent exceptions) since then have mentioned his Buddhist affinities but have been quite broad and general in their treatment. I feel that any general comparison of Schopenhauer's philosophy with "general" Buddhism would most likely lead to general conclusions. In this article I have attempted to offer a more specific comparison of what is central to Schopenhauer's philosophy with what is central to Mahāyāna Buddhism, and that is the concept of compassion.

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<sup>2</sup> More recently there have been detailed comparisons with Chinese Buddhism; see App.

<sup>3</sup> Conze thinks Schopenhauer does not realize that meditation is important and that he misunderstands the relationship of craving to *nirvāṇa*. I am not so sure that Conze is right about a lack of meditation in Schopenhauer (for example, see WWR1 §39, especial-

In this article I focus on compassion as presented by its strongest advocate, the Madhyamaka philosopher-monk Śāntideva, and cover four main areas: (1) previous general comparisons between Schopenhauer and Buddhism; (2) the specific relevant ethics of Śāntideva; (3) the specific relevant ethics of Schopenhauer; and (4) comparisons between Schopenhauer's and Śāntideva's moral philosophy. This will lead to my conclusion that, in a detailed treatment of ethics, the two are not compatible.

### General Comparisons

Schopenhauer's philosophy has been compared to Indian thought (both Hindu and Buddhist) for some time.<sup>2</sup> There is an enormous variety of opinion and conclusion in this area. For example, Copleston and Kishnan have seen Schopenhauer's metaphysics as sharing only superficial features with Buddhism, whereas Muses and Dauer have seen it as the closest philosophy in the West to that of the Mahāyāna. Nanajivako thinks that Schopenhauer is comparable in certain areas to Theravādin Buddhism and in others to Tibetan Mahāyāna. Peter Abelsen seems to suggest that all comparisons are flawed and that Schopenhauer is not compatible with Mahāyāna or non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism; Nicholls specifically disagrees with Abelsen's view and offers a general comparison with the essential teachings of Buddhism and Hinduism. Welbon concentrates on Schopenhauer's interpretation of *nirvāṇa*; Halbfass broadly finds similarities in Schopenhauer to "Indian" ideas; and Conze believes that Schopenhauer's work bears "numerous, and almost miracu-

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<sup>2</sup> More recently there have been detailed comparisons with Chinese Buddhism; see App.

lous, coincidences with the basic tenets of Buddhist philosophy” (222). In fact Conze, rather enthusiastically, claims that “[i]t is only on two points that he [Schopenhauer] differs from Buddhism” (223).<sup>3</sup>

Schopenhauer himself, rather than simply stating that his philosophy and Buddhism are comparable, gives some limited examples of where he thinks the similarities lie. For example, he is aware (by WWR2 in 1844) of the Four Noble Truths:

[In Buddhism] . . . all improvement, conversion, and salvation to be hoped for from this world of suffering, from this Samsara, proceed from the knowledge of the four fundamental truths: (1) *dolor*, (2) *doloris ortus*, (3) *doloris interitus*, (4) *octopartita via ad doloris sedationem*.<sup>4</sup> (WWR2 Payne 623)

These truths, of course, are common to all Buddhist schools and cannot be taken as anything more than evidence that Schopenhauer had a general acquaintance with Buddhism. Even by the time he wrote WWR2 it is still highly doubtful, in my view, that he would have known of the subtle differences between the major schools of Buddhism which later scholarship has afforded and it is therefore very difficult to ascertain whether or not he knew there *were* different schools; for example, he

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<sup>3</sup> Conze thinks Schopenhauer does not realize that meditation is important and that he misunderstands the relationship of craving to *nirvāṇa*. I am not so sure that Conze is right about a lack of meditation in Schopenhauer (for example, see WWR1 §39, especially pp. 203-204 in Payne’s translation).

<sup>4</sup> (1) Suffering’s existence, (2) suffering’s cause, (3) suffering’s end, and (4) the eightfold path to the relief of suffering (my translation). This is at least an implicit acknowledgment from Schopenhauer that in Buddhism knowledge has an impact on behavior, and that if knowledge improves, behavior changes. He does not accommodate that view in his own philosophy but is not critical of it in Buddhism. He thinks that knowledge can help people to transcend suffering but does not accept that our moral character is changeable.

tends to refer to Buddhism as it existed geographically (in Burma, Ceylon, China, Japan and Tibet) but it is not at all clear that he had a good grasp of the differences.<sup>5</sup> He is aware of the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*), and although (in this context) he mentions the Mahāyāna, there is no clear evidence that he knew what made it distinct from non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism or even if he knew that Buddhism was anything other than Mahāyāna even in Burma and Ceylon. In fact, he mentions the *prajñāpāramitā* as though it were generally Buddhist rather than specifically Mahāyāna Buddhist:

. . . to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is—nothing . . . . This is also the Prajna-Paramita of the Buddhists, the “beyond all knowledge,” in other words, the point where subject and object no longer exist. See I. J. Schmidt, *Ueber das Mahajana und Pradschna-Paramita*. (WWR1 Payne 412)

By the time he wrote WWR2 twenty six years later, he does not seem to have advanced his knowledge of the idea or the school from which it comes, nor does he mention that it is related to the Noble Eight-fold Path (of which he knows by this time too; see WWR2 Payne 623), nor does he mention it in context with the other five Perfections (*pāramitās*) of bodhisattvas. In fact his source for the *prajñāpāramitā* is exactly the same in both volumes and is not supplemented by any other references to the *pāramitās* at all. The reference, twenty-six years later, again is to Schmidt:

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<sup>5</sup> He does not refer to Christianity by geographical area but talks about Protestant and Catholic. He also talks about “the Mohammedans” as though it were a collective without differentiation. These do not give any real clues, I feel, as to what he understood of the differences between the schools of Islam or of Buddhism or if he was even aware that there were any more than regional variations of one thing in the case of the latter.

. . . knowledge and plurality, or individuation, stand and fall together, for they condition each other. It is to be concluded from this that, beyond the phenomenon, in the true being in-itself of things, to which time and space, and therefore plurality, must be foreign, there cannot exist any knowledge. Buddhism describes this as Prajna Paramita, i.e., that which is beyond all knowledge. (See I. J. Schmidt, *On the Mahayana and Prachna- Paramita*). (WWR2 Payne 275)

This might tell us that he was unaware of the other *pāramitās* or their relationship to the Eightfold Path, or it might tell us that he did not consider the other *pāramitās* important enough to mention. Any conclusion on this would be a matter of conjecture.

Returning to the Four Noble Truths, comparisons can be made with Schopenhauer's idea that (1) the world is a place of suffering and all sentient creatures experience that suffering in it; (2) suffering is caused by a kind of desire or craving; (3) it might be possible to overcome this suffering; and (4) that the way of overcoming involves a path of knowledge and certain kinds of action.<sup>6</sup> Regarding other general comparisons, both Conze and Dauer go so far as to say that the similarities between Schopenhauer and Buddhism are so obvious that a comparison should only point out the differences (see Conze 222ff and throughout Dauer's short commentary).

However, despite this claim, I believe there is at least one major area of detailed comparison that has been largely overlooked by other commentators: the centrality of compassion to both Mahāyāna Bud-

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Nicholls, who believes that "what can be compared is a *general* [my italics] outline of Schopenhauer's philosophy and what is commonly taken to be the essential teaching of Buddhism" (in Janaway 188).

dhism and to Schopenhauer's ethics. According to Schopenhauer, ethics is the most important part of his philosophy and the bulk of his major work is preparation for his treatment of it (WW1; Payne 271) in his final chapter. Compassion is the most important constituent part of Schopenhauer's ethics and it finds an analog in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Śāntideva, to me, embodies the central idea of compassion in the Madhyamaka and my central emphasis is therefore on Schopenhauer's ideas in relation to Śāntideva's.

### The Specific Relevant Ethics of Śāntideva

Little of Śāntideva's life is known with certainty; however, there are some features of it that find broad agreement amongst scholars. For example, of three works attributed to him, although there is dispute surrounding the authorship of one (the *Sūtrasamuccaya*), there appears to be none of any note with regard to his composition of the *Śikṣā Samuccaya* and his authorship of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (although the authenticity of parts of the latter have been questioned; Crosby and Skilton xxx-xxxiv). For our immediate purposes, I will focus on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

#### *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*

The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is a guide to the path of awakening for a bodhisattva. *Bodhicitta* is the awakening mind and the first chapter is concerned with adopting the kind of attitude (*bodhicitta-parigraha*) that is conducive to becoming a bodhisattva. *Bodhicitta* comes in two forms: (1) an initial intention to work for the welfare of others (all the way to complete Buddhahood) and (2) actually working for their welfare (BCA 1:15, 24, 26-27, 29, 35).



The bodhisattva is one who, at some point, has recognized that attempts to find happiness for oneself only will result in more suffering. This occurrence is the generation of the seed of *bodhicitta*. The bodhisattva determines to leave behind all negative or unwholesome thoughts and deeds (2:29-31, 34, 37, 38, 42, 47, 49, 53, 63-65) and vows to devote all his or her energy to the protection and assistance of all sentient beings (2:49, 54). Śāntideva then explains what this practice will entail (3:7-15, 17-24), how to become a bodhisattva through generating *bodhicitta* (3: 23-28), and then how to begin doing so (4:1-6, 12, 17, 23, 38-44, 47, 48).

*Equality of self and others (BCA 8:90- 119)*

Compassion does not come naturally to everyone and varies in intensity from person to person. It must be cultivated and be given special attention. It occupies a position of highest importance for Śāntideva because (1) it is done in emulation of the Buddha, who is taken to be the purest expression of compassion, and (2) it is not possible to be a fully enlightened Bodhisattva without developing and understanding compassion proper.

With regard to the second point, the example of the *Pratyekabuddha* (cf. Crosby and Skilton 86) who has achieved a form of solitary enlightenment shows that it is possible to be enlightened but not compassionate enough to teach others the *Dharma*. This is unlike Śākyamuni Buddha, who was enlightened *and* compassionate in that he taught the *Dharma* instead of keeping it to himself, and it is his example that the bodhisattva wants to follow. There is a third reason we need to cultivate compassion and that is because, for the Madhyamaka, true compassion does not arise automatically from the realization that there is no meta-

physical difference between self and other.<sup>7</sup> Because it does not occur automatically on this realization, it has to be cultivated separately. This cultivation is central to BCA chapter eight.

To give a brief summary of this section: Śāntideva concentrates on our strong attachment to the physical form in various ways. In an attempt to break this attachment, he focuses on how disgusting this object of desire can be, whether as a dead and rotting corpse (8:30) or in some of the natural bodily functions which are commonly held to be repellent (8:58 and 59). He then turns the focus inward to show that the things he has just identified also apply to our own bodies and not just to others. This is one point where a comparison of *equality* is made with others and he wants us to see that there is no difference between ourselves and another creature which, like us, is temporal (8:30, 31, 45, 63, 70, 82), comes from “filth” (8:56, 57, 59, 60, 63), generates excreta (8:49, 58), and is essentially an animated bag of skin-covered bones (8:30, 31, 32, 43, 48, 51, 52, 57, 63, 70), only briefly separated from death and the various stages of decomposition and which is nothing but putrefying meat on its way to being turned into more excrement by vultures (8:45, 47, 53, 54, 56).

The deconstruction of a desired one into a temporal body and a mind which cannot be properly apprehended (8:55) serves to illustrate that the strong carnal desires most humans experience are for something idealized rather than ultimately real. The object of our desire is a temporary physical form which, when analyzed, turns out to be disgusting when alive, repulsive when dead and not substantially existing. Meditating on this is intended to turn our thoughts away from this strong urge and remove this distraction in order to allow the mind to concentrate with greater purity.

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<sup>7</sup> This is not the case for the other major branch of mainstream Mahāyāna—the Yogācāra (also known as Cittamātra and Vijñānavāda).

Śāntideva also tries to neutralize desire by showing that a man (the perceived audience is male) is prepared to put himself in danger (8:40, 42, 77, 78), risk appearing foolish (8:77), and waste money (8:71, 72, 79) and effort (8:72, 73, 74, 80, 82) to satisfy this desire for what turns out to be something at best temporary and at worst disguised foulness. In fact, even if the man manages to satisfy these desires, he will be disappointed because he will find that the enjoyment is nothing but a small moment in his life, which itself is temporary: “For those prey to passion such misery is abundant, whereas enjoyment is paltry, like snatches at bits of grass made by a beast as it draws a cart” (8:80; Crosby and Skilton 95). As far as Śāntideva is concerned, because such desires are simply not worth the effort, it would make more sense to concentrate on something more productive. (See BCA 8:82-83.)

Śāntideva turns to the tranquility and calmness of the forest, where the trainee bodhisattva, alone and unvexed by internal or external considerations, can begin the meditation “proper” on equality of self and others (BCA 8:89-119). Śāntideva begins this meditation by asking the now calm and undistracted practitioner to consider the fact that because suffering and happiness are experienced by all (including animals), others should be looked after as we would look after ourselves (8:90). He explains that if part of our own body is in pain, we will automatically, and without thinking, cover it and protect it with our hand. If we consider all sentient creatures collectively to be one vast organism, it would seem strange if the “hand” did not protect another part of the organism that was suffering. The reason this does not happen, of course, is that we tend to individualize rather than collectivize our bodies and mental activities. Śāntideva says that because another’s suffering is just like ours, we should help them as we would ourselves (8:93-96).

At this point an imaginary objection is made that because others are, in fact, not you, their suffering does not need to affect you; there-

fore, there is no need to care about their suffering (8:97-98). Śāntideva responds that the hand protects the foot even though the hand is not in pain (8:99); if we remember his previous analogy of all beings as one organism (8:91), it would seem strange if one part did not protect another part from suffering. The only reason not to see it this way is because of the mistaken idea of an independently existent self. Furthermore, suffering should be removed simply because it is there. Regardless of whom it affects (8:102), no one would question its removal and the applicability of this principle to every sentient being: “If one asks why suffering should be prevented, no one disputes that! If it must be prevented, then all of it must be” (8:103; Crosby and Skilton 97).

He has not yet said that self and other are *exchangeable*, only that because they are *equal*, one should not be motivated by a self-interest that ignores the plight of others or that assists them only in order to attain glory or good karma for oneself. In fact, he is moved to remind us at this point that others should be as accepted *as self* (8:110-115). He explains that if you accept the equality of self and others, you should extend your wish for your own freedom from *duḥkha* to others and that “compassion should be practiced towards the world” (8:117, 98).

#### *Exchanging self and others (BCA 8:120-173)*

In the next section of chapter eight, Śāntideva moves from *equalizing* self and others to *exchanging* self and others. Near the start of this section he explains that some people are so self-centered that they use other beings for their own selfish ends by killing them (animals, 8:122; close relatives,

8:123), robbing them (8:122), and/or stealing from the *saṅgha*.<sup>8</sup> Then he moves from considerations of the shortsightedness of selfishness to the rewards<sup>9</sup> of working for the welfare of others (8:125-127).

Śāntideva examines the “self” to which the selfish person is so attached and sees that a strong identification with the idea of self is the source of the recurring *duḥkha* of the world and it is not difficult to see that the person who kills animals<sup>10</sup> causes *duḥkha* for animals; the person who kills humans causes *duḥkha* for humans; the person who steals and lies for self advancement causes *duḥkha* for those from whom he has stolen and to whom he has lied. All such suffering occurs because selfish persons cling strongly to the idea of their own separate selves and the separate selves of others. If they did not think this way, they would not act in ways that cause the kinds of *duḥkha* Śāntideva identifies.

The calamities which happen in the world, the sufferings and fears, many as they are, they all result from clinging onto the notion of self, so what good is this clinging of mine?

If one does not let go of self one cannot let go of suffering, as one who does not let go of fire cannot let go of burning.  
(8:134-135; Crosby and Skilton 100)

Śāntideva then argues that the way to relieve *all* suffering—that of myself and of other sentient beings—is to recognize there is no differ-

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<sup>8</sup> And more figuratively, from the Buddha or the Dharma—Batchelor’s translation is the “Triple Gem” (119), Crosby’s and Skilton’s is the “Three Jewels” (99), and Kelsang’s is “a spiritual community” (133).

<sup>9</sup> Although rewards should not be the motivation for selfless acts: see 8:109.

<sup>10</sup> Including using them for food or medicine, v. 122. This is clearest in Kelsang’s translation (133) and Batchelor’s translation (119).

ence between the two: “Therefore, in order to allay my own suffering and to allay the suffering of others, I devote myself to others and accept them as myself” (8:136).

He then invites us to meditate on the way the world appears to someone who has a strong identification with a “self” which they pit against “others.” Considering others as inferior, superior, or both, is a result of self-thinking and self-striving and leads to *duḥkha* and rebirth. It is shortsighted and ultimately pointless. If we understood that self and other should be *exchanged* so that there were no longer feelings of “self” and “others,” suffering would not exist (8:157). When someone is attached strongly to a notion of self, they forget that they did not spontaneously appear in this world but came into being as a product of the union of their parents. There is no independent origination; to imagine that you are an autonomous self is illusory. To be more in tune with reality, you should acknowledge, as a first step, that you are born of two others and are not entirely and independently distinct from them. Just one more leap of the imagination could lead you to accept that you have a connection to other beings too. Śāntideva puts this in a slightly different way (although the outcome is the same) when he says (8:158) that just as you have no problem identifying with yourself despite the fact that it took the semen and blood<sup>11</sup> of others to create you, you should not find it too difficult to imagine that others are you. It follows that if others *are* you, anything you do should be for others and not this imaginary isolated “self” (8:159):

Therefore, just as you’ve placed the sense of a “me”  
Onto drops of the semen and blood of others,  
Likewise, make it a habit (of placing it)  
Onto those of others as well. (8:158; Berzin)

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<sup>11</sup> Blood refers to the mother.

Non-attachment to self does not mean despising self; rather, we should exchange anything good about it to alleviate the sufferings of others. In that way, we would make the best contribution we can to the ending of existing *duḥkha* and to ensuring that we do not contribute to the creation of *duḥkha* in the future. Freedom from *duḥkha* is achieved by living a moral life; morality is the development of compassion, which for Śāntideva is wisdom in action.

### **The Specific Relevant Ethics of Schopenhauer**

#### *Morality and the world as idea*

If we accept Schopenhauer's argument that our world exists at the level of ideas and the Madhyamaka view that the conventional world does not exist in the way it appears (a view shared by Schopenhauer), it may seem that compassion cannot be the basis of morality because compassion does not appear to deal with reality but only with its representations in the conventional "dreamlike" world. However, that illusory/dreamlike world is the world unenlightened beings take to be reality. Whether or not it is ultimately real, morality must operate within it.

Neither Madhyamaka Buddhism nor Schopenhauer claim that the conventional world does not exist, just that it does not exist as we assume. Śāntideva discusses this when he talks about the ignorant and the wise (9:5), where the ignorant think that conventional things are true and the wise understand that the conventional world is not ultimately real. Moreover, both Śāntideva and Schopenhauer offer to wake us up through helping us understand our situation.

This distinction between the world as it is and the world as it appears to us as representation is the core of the metaphysical superstructure in Schopenhauer's philosophy. It is what underpins his ethics,

which are on the whole pessimistic since they identify a world of suffering from which it is difficult to escape. This pessimism can be contrasted with the optimism in Buddhism about our ability to find salvation from suffering. Schopenhauer is pessimistic, I believe, largely as a result of his belief that people cannot morally “improve,” which in turn he believes is because there is a core will that cannot be changed.

Obviously at this point there is an important difference between Buddhist ethics and Schopenhauer’s. Schopenhauer’s thesis of an unchangeable core is a quasi-Platonic idea that forecloses the possibility of escaping suffering. It shows that what he learned from Buddhism was incomplete. Because of it, it is difficult to agree with anyone who contends that his conclusions are remarkably similar to those found in Buddhism.

Schopenhauer is also mistaken in drawing a comparison between his philosophy and Buddhism when it comes to the role of compassion on the path to liberation from suffering. Schopenhauer (rightly, in my view) thinks that it is not possible to examine his compassion-centric moral system in isolation from the underlying metaphysical superstructure. It is worth briefly summarizing that metaphysical system in order to illuminate the role of compassion.

#### *Summary of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics*

For Schopenhauer the world exists in two ways, as it really is and as it is revealed to us in perception, which he calls the *World as Will* and *World as Representation* respectively. Animals and ordinary humans readily know only the “world as representation.”<sup>12</sup> Sentient creatures see the world as

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<sup>12</sup> This is no advance on Kant so far, except that the world as will, for Schopenhauer, is not plural.



dependent on three dimensions of space, linear time, and causality that together appear to give us empirical reasons for justifying our view as “real.” Were any or all of these elements missing (or added to with, say, an apprehension of a quadridimensional world), our view of the world would be radically different. Our view is not the correct view; it is merely a possible view, and is incomplete: “This actual world of what is knowable, in which we are and which is in us, remains both the material and the limit of our consideration” (WWR1 Payne 273).

The world as it actually is (beyond our experience), the “world as will,” has manifestations as phenomena, and the will can be seen as a force or property of energy which exists in all phenomenal things. The wish to procreate is an example of the underlying will, as is the wish to stay alive, both being very strong in all animals. The will is also manifested in less significant things such as the wish to move one’s arm, turn one’s head or even in the form of gravity found in inanimate objects.

Influenced by our perception of reality as one that resides within space, time and causality, we readily identify with a “self” which we distinguish from “others.” Being driven on by the relentless force of will, and believing there are differences between ourselves and others, contributes to the sufferings of the world because we are self-absorbed and less interested in others than in ourselves. This world as representation is one of suffering, fear and death (see PP2, Payne 291-305<sup>13</sup>). However, the primary source of suffering is not the activities of others but our own will which drives us ever onward with three possible outcomes: (1) the possibility of temporarily satisfying the will; (2) the disappointment of failing to temporarily satisfy the will; and (3) the disappointment of failing to permanently satisfy the will. In the first case, imagine the craving

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<sup>13</sup> This is just a summary of his explanation of suffering. There are references too numerous to mention throughout WWR1 and 2 and in OBM.

for a cigarette; smoking gives you the possibility of temporary satisfaction. In the second case, being denied a cigarette when you want one causes (at least) disappointment since the will is not satisfied. In the third case, all the small cravings such as the wish for cigarettes and all the larger cravings such as not wishing to get old, ill, or to die, combine to create a greater form of suffering. In humans to this is added the realization of this and the fact that we are impotent in terms of finding a way out. Being born, then, is the “crime” for which we suffer, but Schopenhauer thinks he has found two solutions, which I would term his minor and major solutions to the problem of the sufferings of the world, and we can compare and contrast them with what is relevant in Śāntideva.

### **Comparisons between Schopenhauer and Śāntideva**

#### *Schopenhauer’s minor solution to suffering*

Schopenhauer believes that we can find a minor form of liberation from suffering through aesthetic contemplation. Since phenomenal existence is marked by identification with self, and the natural condition of that self is one of suffering,<sup>14</sup> it follows that any way we can “forget” the self will result in non-suffering. Contemplation which is deep enough to allow one to forget oneself results in freedom from suffering, which is es-

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<sup>14</sup> This might seem strange from the perspective of the Twenty-first century first world, but at the time he wrote, Schopenhauer’s developed world was one where life was incomparably harder and shorter than today. He takes suffering to be the natural state of things and for humankind it has always been, on the whole until recently (and even then only in some parts of the world), disease, hunger, war and want.

entially freedom from willing. This can be achieved by reflecting on works of art, poetry, philosophy and music.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, I cannot see Schopenhauer disagreeing with the idea that anything that produces a contemplative experience would result in freedom from willing and with it freedom from suffering. The point is that we are detached from identification with self and object, with perceiver and perceived, and in this way the will is made quiet. However, even though we have temporarily transcended it by overcoming the principle of sufficient reason as found in space, time and causal relationships, it is still there in the background. The distinction between subject and object no longer exists in the contemplator and s/he no longer suffers. The only problem with aesthetic contemplation as a solution to suffering is that it is temporary.<sup>16</sup> Schopenhauer was well aware of this and now offers his major solution to the sufferings of existence.

### *Schopenhauer's major solution to suffering*

Although Schopenhauer does not, in the strict sense, offer a path to liberation from suffering (in contrast to Śāntideva), he does identify what we might take to be a gradation of moral behavior that has similarities

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<sup>15</sup> Music is a special case. He thinks it is not a representation of a representation (say in the way a painting of a landscape might be) but is a representation of the will itself. Regardless, it does the same job here as the other objects of, and means to, contemplation.

<sup>16</sup> There appears to be special dispensation for the genius, someone who is able to maintain contemplation longer than others: "genius is the capacity to remain in a state of pure perception" (WWR1 Payne 185). The result of this longer freedom from our skewed view of reality appears to be the production of works of art. Cf. the Buddha's dissatisfaction with his first two meditation teachers. Meditation provided only a temporary escape from suffering.

with elements of the path found in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. This gradation can be seen as threefold. The first types are pure egoists, who identify strongly with their own selves and are therefore most comprehensively under the influence of the will. These persons demand the satisfaction of all of their desires and are not interested in the desires of others unless they can benefit from them. In fact, such persons would have no qualms about using others (people and animals) to satisfy their own wants.

The second type are persons in whom the barriers between self and other are beginning to break down; they can see beyond what Schopenhauer calls the *principium individuationis*, or the principle of individuation. Such persons begin to do exactly as Śāntideva does in 8:90-119, *equalizing* self and others. They recognize that others are victims of the power of will-driven craving, and as a result, suffer in the same way:

But now how is it possible for a suffering which is not mine and does not touch me to become just as directly a motive as only my own normally does, and to move me to action? As I have said, only by the fact that although it is given to me merely as something external, merely by means of external intuitive perception or knowledge, I nevertheless feel it with him, feel it as my own, and yet not within me, but in another person; and thus there occurs what is expressed by Calderon . . . “that there is no difference between suffering and seeing suffering.” (OBM §18, Payne 165-166)

Schopenhauer thinks that it is in fact rather obvious that apparent differences between creatures are only superficial; we might assume, then, that the egoist’s view is defective: “One must be really quite blind or totally chloroformed . . . not to recognize that the essential and principal thing in the animal and man is the same” (§19, p. 178). Compassion-

ate persons do not seek to exploit others nor have they any wish to harm them, but instead seek to help them as much as possible:

Boundless compassion for all living beings is the firmest and surest guarantee of pure moral conduct . . . Whoever is inspired with it will assuredly injure no one, will wrong no one, will encroach on no one's rights; on the contrary, he will be lenient and patient with everyone, will forgive everyone, will help everyone as much as he can, and all his actions will bear the stamp of justice, philanthropy, and loving-kindness . . . . Tastes differ, but I know of no finer prayer than the one which ends old Indian dramas . . . . "May all living beings remain free from pain." (171-173)

Schopenhauer's compassionate persons cannot be explained: they just are. Schopenhauer is not concerned with explaining how someone naturally comes to be compassionate, that is, how someone is imbued by nature with the ability to see beyond the *principium individuationis*, but just takes it as a fact of life which I think is no stranger than the fact that some people are just born more intelligent than others and we, to this day, have no comprehensive explanation as to why this is the case.

Every purely beneficent act, every instance of wholly and truly disinterested help, which as such has another's distress as its motive, is, if we probe the matter to the bottom, really a mysterious action. It is practical mysticism insofar as it ultimately springs from the same knowledge that constitutes the essence of all mysticism proper. In no other way can it be truly explained. (§114, 212)

Altruists, despite alleviating the sufferings of other sentient creatures, do not find full liberation from suffering themselves through being compassionate. That comes in the form of the third kind of person who can

permanently transcend suffering (the ascetic), and this is where I think Śāntideva and Schopenhauer part company in quite a significant way. Śāntideva at this point takes the equality of self and others further, to the point of *exchanging* them and seeing no difference between the two. Schopenhauer claims that the way to permanently transcend the sufferings of the world caused by the will is to deny the will completely. This means transcending everything given to us in perception by space, time and causality, transcending our entire world view and negating it completely so that the world as representation no longer exists (to us—it will exist for those who do not undergo this transcendence): “Absolute freedom consists simply in there being something not at all subject to the principle of sufficient reason” (WWR2 Payne 530). The means to that end is the very *unBuddhist* life of the ascetic. The ascetic goes beyond all willing and is impervious to the workings of the will:

The will now turns away from life; it shudders at the pleasures in which it recognizes the affirmation of life. Man attains to the state of voluntary renunciation, resignation, true composure, and complete willessness . . . . We would like to deprive desires of their sting, close the entry to all suffering, purify and sanctify ourselves by complete and final resignation . . . the man who sees through the *principium individuationis*, and recognises the true nature of things-in-themselves . . . withdraws. His will turns about; it no longer affirms its own inner nature, mirrored in the phenomenon, but denies it. The phenomenon by which this becomes manifest is the transition from virtue to *asceticism* [Schopenhauer’s italics]. (WWR2 Payne 379-380)

This is a denial of life, at least as it is conventionally taken to be, entailing giving up on it altogether; it requires “the euthanasia of the

will” (WWR2 Payne 637). Schopenhauer seems to think that this is in tune with Buddhist thinking (the most pertinent examples being in his later works, especially at WWR2 560, 604, 628, 623, 643, 645), but it is clearly not, because radical asceticism was specifically identified by the Buddha as a false way of trying to attain liberation from *duḥkha*. In fact, in Buddhism there is no conflict between virtue (or morality) and liberation—a view that Schopenhauer misunderstands.

Since Schopenhauer’s ascetic aims for an end to the will entirely, some may jump to the conclusion that he may not experience any impulses or act in any way whatsoever. I do not believe Schopenhauer is saying this. When he says that the ascetic “. . . tries to establish firmly in himself, the greatest indifference to all things” (WWR2 Payne 380), it seems the ascetic has to continue to make an effort of denial and, I assume, once he has perfected that, he conquers the principle of individuation. It appears, then, that he still exists in some way since we must assume that unless he disappears into thin air, he will need to eat, drink and breathe. However, he no longer differentiates between subject and object. Since the ascetic is beyond the Principle of Individuation and does not distinguish between self and other, his will is negated; but if he is to exist, we can assume there must be some “acts” occurring, even if that entails little more than thinking and, we must imagine, basic bodily functions.

Schopenhauer at times seems almost to make the step Śāntideva does, by exchanging self and others (for Śāntideva’s treatment of this see 8:120-173), but in the end does not attribute sufficient strength to this to suggest it as a means of permanent liberation:

But this [feeling another’s suffering as your own] presupposes that to a certain extent I have identified myself with the other man, and in consequence the barrier between the ego and non-ego is for the moment abolished; only

then do the other man's affairs, his needs, distress, and suffering, directly become my own. I no longer look at him as if he were something given to me by empirical intuitive perception, as something strange and foreign, as a matter of indifference, as something entirely different from me. On the contrary, I share the suffering *in him*, in spite of the fact that his skin does not enclose my nerves. Only in this way can *his* woe, *his* distress, become a motive *for me*; otherwise it can be absolutely only my own. I repeat that this *occurrence is mysterious*, for it is something our faculty of reason can give no direct account of, and its grounds cannot be discovered on the path of experience. And yet it happens every day . . . . (OBM Payne 165-166)

Had Schopenhauer lived long enough to gain knowledge of Madhyamaka philosophy, he might well have seen that the exchange of self and other in itself could be enough to negate the will rather than making the step to asceticism as he does.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps we could conclude that Śāntideva's path is intended to offer a long-term solution to *duḥkha* which will take (almost) endless amounts of time until all sentient creatures are free, whereas Schopenhauer's permanent solution is only for certain human beings in the here and now with the compassionate person alleviating the sufferings of unfortunate humans (he gives examples such as slaves and child mill workers (WWR2 Payne 578)) and animals, through not harming them and through helping them as much as possible. The best way to reach salvation from suffering, according to Schopenhauer, is by following:

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<sup>17</sup> Another option, of course, is to dispute that Śāntideva's exchange is actually possible and to suggest that Buddhists could learn from Schopenhauer.



. . . the narrow path of the elect, of the saints, and consequently is to be regarded as a rare exception. Therefore without that first path [compassion and aesthetic contemplation], it would be impossible for the majority to hope for any salvation. (WWR2 Payne 638)

He recommends equalizing self and others, acting compassionately and seeing through the *principium individuationis*, all of which can be compared to what Śāntideva advocates. However, the problem in the comparison comes with Schopenhauer's recommendation of asceticism; Schopenhauer's ascetic is not anywhere near as compatible to a Buddhist solution as he took it to be. In fact, it seems that, for Schopenhauer, there are several ways to limit suffering: experiencing temporary aesthetic contemplation; experiencing extended periods of aesthetic contemplation (the genius); benefiting from acts of compassion from those who can see beyond the *principium individuationis*; or denying the will altogether through asceticism. This sounds rather unlike what Śāntideva taught. The perfected bodhisattva (or Buddha) is free from attachment, but Schopenhauer's ascetic saint is free from willing altogether, which makes Schopenhauer's enlightened person one who is beyond morality and therefore very unlike the bodhisattva or even the Arhat<sup>18</sup>; in that respect, Schopenhauer's ethics do not chime with Śāntideva's. It seems that the ascetic saint finds salvation in a different way to Śāntideva's bodhisattva.

The question may arise as to what exactly is meant by the idea that the ascetic transcends "willing." Transcending willing and transcending suffering are congruent. One does not exist without the other.

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<sup>18</sup> It seems that King's and Spiro's misinterpretations of the Arhat might be more applicable to Schopenhauer's ascetic saint. See Aronson for a refutation of King and Spiro's views on Theravāda Buddhism.

As to the practicalities of this, Schopenhauer does not elaborate. Had he done so we might have been in a position to probe further about whether or not the ascetic wills or acts at all. My interpretation of Schopenhauer's thinking is that the ascetic will still be alive in some way but no longer driven by any form of self-interest, and that lack of self-interest constitutes "freedom from willing." The picture becomes blurred at this point, as it does when seeking an exact and detailed account of the functioning of an enlightened one in Buddhism. Since the ascetic is beyond willing, according to Schopenhauer, but still lives, I take it that he is not beyond acting but perhaps acts in a minimal way.

Schopenhauer thinks the ascetic is an advance on the compassionate person and in that respect is not compatible with what Śāntideva believed to be the focus of morality:

. . . it is no longer enough for him [the ascetic] to love others like himself, and to do as much for them as himself, but there arises in him a strong aversion to the inner nature whose expression is his own phenomena, to the will-to-live, the kernel and essence of that world recognized as full of misery. He therefore renounces precisely this inner nature . . . [and] . . . tries to establish firmly in himself, the greatest indifference to all things.<sup>19</sup> (WWR2 Payne 380)

Those lesser beings in Schopenhauer's scheme, who are unable to be ascetic saints, are the ones who can (if inclined) practice equalization of self and other, but they do not have the *prajñāpāramitā*. Schopenhauer claims that the ascetic does, and sees that "this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is—nothing" (WWR1 Payne 412). Compas-

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<sup>19</sup> Again this sounds more like the kind of claim King and Spiro (mistakenly) make in relation to Theravāda Buddhism. It also sounds unlike the Mahāyāna bodhisattva who lets go of the world but chooses to "stay" in it in order to help sentient creatures find liberation from suffering. They are not "indifferent" to all things.

sion, then, plays a less important role in Schopenhauer's philosophy than in Śāntideva's. It does not offer liberation from suffering in any significant way: no matter how altruistic one is to other people and to animals, the fact remains that they all experience unsatisfied craving which comes in the ultimate form of wishing to avoid illness and death and which no amount of compassion can stop. For Schopenhauer, our sufferings are only diluted by compassion but are not ended.

Compassionate people are regarded by Schopenhauer as beings with a grasp of what unites creatures rather than what divides them—the *principium individuationis* which the egoist (wrongly) takes to be reality. In Schopenhauer's view, were they to understand the *prajñāpāramitā*, they would be beyond good and evil, and as life-denying ascetics would have no further use for compassion because they would have completely renounced the world. Clearly this is at odds with Śāntideva's account of compassion and its significance in his philosophy, and in this respect compassion in this specific form of mainstream Buddhism and in Schopenhauer's philosophy are incompatible.

### **Abbreviations**

BCA	<i>Bodhicaryāvatāra</i>
OBM	<i>On the Basis of Morality</i>
PP2	<i>Parerga and Paralipomena, Vol. II</i>
SS	<i>Śikṣā Samuccaya</i>
WWR1	<i>The World as Will and Representation Vol. I</i>
WWR2	<i>The World as Will and Representation Vol. II</i>

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