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978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

### *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*

The purpose of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Schopenhauer is to offer translations of the best modern German editions of Schopenhauer's work in a uniform format suitable for Schopenhauer scholars, together with philosophical introductions and full editorial apparatus.

Arthur Schopenhauer's *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics* (1841) consists of two groundbreaking essays: *On the Freedom of the Will* and *On the Basis of Morals*. The essays make original contributions to ethics and display Schopenhauer's erudition, prose-style and flair for philosophical controversy, as well as philosophical views that contrast sharply with the positions of both Kant and Nietzsche. Written accessibly, they do not presuppose the intricate metaphysics which Schopenhauer constructs elsewhere. This is the first English edition of these works to re-unite both essays in one volume. It offers a new translation by Christopher Janaway, together with an introduction, editorial notes on Schopenhauer's vocabulary and the different editions of his essays, a chronology of his life, a bibliography and a glossary of names.

CHRISTOPHER JANAWAY is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southampton. His many publications include *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (1989) and *Schopenhauer: A Very Short Introduction* (2002); he is also editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (1999).

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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GENERAL EDITOR

Christopher Janaway

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translated and edited by Christopher Janaway

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

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TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY  
CHRISTOPHER JANAWAY



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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

<i>General editor's preface</i>	<i>page</i> vi
<i>Editorial notes and references</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	xi
<i>Notes on text and translation</i>	xl
<i>Chronology</i>	xlvii
<i>Bibliography</i>	l

## THE TWO FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS OF ETHICS

Contents	3
Preface to the first edition	5
Preface to the second edition	28
Prize essay on the freedom of the will	31
Prize essay on the basis of morals	113
<i>Variants in different editions</i>	259
<i>Glossary of names</i>	266
<i>Index</i>	274

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## *General editor's preface*

Schopenhauer is one of the great original writers of the nineteenth century, and a unique voice in the history of thought. His central concept of the will leads him to regard human beings as striving irrationally and suffering in a world that has no purpose, a condition redeemed by the elevation of aesthetic consciousness and finally overcome by the will's self-denial and a mystical vision of the self as one with the world as a whole. He is in some ways the most progressive post-Kantian, an atheist with profound ideas about the human essence and the meaning of existence which point forward to Nietzsche, Freud and existentialism. He was also the first major Western thinker to seek a synthesis with Eastern thought. Yet at the same time he undertakes an ambitious global metaphysics of a conservative, more or less pre-Kantian kind, and is driven by a Platonic vision of escape from empirical reality into a realm of higher knowledge.

Schopenhauer was born in 1788, and by 1809 had gone against his family's expectations of a career as a merchant and embarked on a university career. He completed his doctoral dissertation *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* in 1813, then spent several years in intensive preparation of what became the major work of his life, *The World as Will and Representation*, which was published at the end of 1818, with 1819 on the title page. Shortly afterwards his academic career suffered a setback when his only attempt at a lecture course ended in failure. Thereafter Schopenhauer adopted a stance of intellectual self-sufficiency and antagonism towards university philosophy, for which he was repaid by a singular lack of reaction to his writings. In 1835 he published *On the Will in Nature*, an attempt to corroborate his metaphysics with findings from the sciences, and in 1841 two self-standing essays on free will and moral philosophy, entitled *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*. A large supplementary second volume to *The World as Will and Representation* appeared in 1844, accompanied by a revised version of the original which now appeared as Volume One; then in 1851 another two-volume work,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*General editor's preface*

vii

*Parerga and Paralipomena*, a collection of essays and observations. Only in the 1850s did serious interest in Schopenhauer's philosophy begin, with a favourable review appearing in an English journal and a few European universities offering courses on his work. In this final decade before his death in 1860 he published a third edition of *The World as Will and Representation* and a second edition of *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*. After Schopenhauer's death his follower Julius Frauenstädt produced the first six-volume edition of his works in 1873, providing the basis for many subsequent German editions up to the *Sämtliche Werke* edited by Arthur Hübscher, which we use as the basis for our translations in the present edition.

Though Schopenhauer's life and the genesis of his philosophy belong to the early part of the nineteenth century, it is the latter half of the century that provides the context for his widespread reception and influence. In 1877 he was described by Wilhelm Wundt as 'the born leader of non-academic philosophy in Germany', and in that period many artists and intellectuals, prominent among them Richard Wagner, worked under the influence of his works. The single most important philosophical influence was on Nietzsche, who was in critical dialogue throughout his career with his 'great teacher Schopenhauer'. But many aspects of the period resonate with Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory, his pessimism, his championing of the *Upanishads* and Buddhism, and his theory of the self and the world as embodied striving.

Over the last three decades interest in Schopenhauer in the English-speaking world has been growing again, with a good number of monographs, translations and collections of articles appearing, where before there were very few. More general trends in the study of the history of philosophy have played a part here. There has recently been a dramatic rise in philosophical interest in the period that immediately follows Kant (including the German Idealists and Romanticism), and the greater centrality now accorded to Nietzsche's philosophy has provided further motivation for attending to Schopenhauer. Yet until now there has been no complete English edition of his works. The present six-volume series of Schopenhauer's published works aims to provide an up-to-date, reliable English translation that reflects the literary style of the original while maintaining linguistic accuracy and consistency over his philosophical vocabulary.

Almost all the English translations of Schopenhauer in use until now, published though they are by several different publishers, stem from a single translator, the remarkable E. F. J. Payne. These translations, which were done in the 1950s and 1960s, have stood the test of time quite well

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

*General editor's preface*

and performed a fine service in transmitting Schopenhauer to an English-speaking audience. Payne's single-handed achievement is all the greater given that he was not a philosopher or an academic, but a former military man who became a dedicated enthusiast. His translations are readable and lively and convey a distinct authorial voice. However, the case for new translations rests partly on the fact that Payne has a tendency towards circumlocution rather than directness and is often not as scrupulous as we might wish in translating philosophical vocabulary, partly on the fact that recent scholarship has probed many parts of Schopenhauer's thought with far greater precision than was known in Payne's day, and partly on the simple thought that after half a century of reading Schopenhauer almost solely through one translator, and with a wider and more demanding audience established, a change of voice is in order.

In the present edition the translators have striven to keep a tighter rein on philosophical terminology, especially that which is familiar from the study of Kant – though we should be on our guard here, for Schopenhauer's use of a Kantian word does not permit us to infer that he uses it in a sense Kant would have approved of. We have included explanatory introductions to each volume, and other aids to the reader: footnotes explaining some of Schopenhauer's original German vocabulary, a glossary of names to assist with his voluminous literary and philosophical references, a chronology of his life and a bibliography of German texts, existing English translations and selected further reading. We also give a breakdown of all passages that were added or altered by Schopenhauer in different editions of his works, especially noteworthy being the changes made to his earliest publications, *On the Fourfold Root* and the single-volume first edition of *The World as Will and Representation*. A further novel feature of this edition is our treatment of the many extracts Schopenhauer quotes in languages other than German. Our guiding policy here is, as far as possible, to translate material in any language into English. The reader will therefore not be detained by scanning through passages in other languages and having to resort to footnote translations. Nevertheless, the virtuoso manner in which Schopenhauer blends Latin, Greek, French, Italian and Spanish extracts with his own prose style is not entirely lost, since we have used footnotes to give all the original passages in full.

CHRISTOPHER JANAWAY



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Editorial notes and references*

Three kinds of notes occur in the translation:

- (1) Footnotes marked with asterisks (\*, \*\* and so on) are Schopenhauer's own notes.
- (2) Footnotes marked with small letters (*a*, *b*, *c*) are editorial notes. These either give information about the original wording in Schopenhauer's text (in German or other languages) or provide additional editorial information. All (and only) such *additional* information is enclosed in brackets [ ]. All footnote material *not* in brackets consists of words from the original text.
- (3) Endnotes marked with numerals 1, 2, 3. The endnotes for both essays are towards the end of the whole volume, and indicate variations between the different texts of the essays published during Schopenhauer's lifetime.

Schopenhauer's works are referred to by the following abbreviations:

Hübscher SW 1–7	<i>Sämtliche Werke</i> , ed. Arthur Hübscher (Mannheim: F. A. Brockhaus, 1988), vols. 1–7.
FR	<i>On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason</i> [ <i>Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde</i> ].
PP 1, 2	<i>Parerga and Paralipomena</i> [ <i>Parerga und Paralipomena</i> ], vols. 1 and 2.
WN	<i>On the Will in Nature</i> [ <i>Über den Willen in der Natur</i> ].
WWR 1, 2	<i>The World as Will and Representation</i> [ <i>Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung</i> ], vols. 1 and 2.

Unpublished writings by Schopenhauer are referred to thus:

GB	<i>Gesammelte Briefe</i> , ed. Arthur Hübscher (Bonn: Bouvier, 1978).
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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics  
Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

*Editorial notes and references*

- HN* 1–5     *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß*, ed. Arthur Hübscher  
(Frankfurt am Main: Kramer, 1970), vols. 1–5.
- MR* 1–4     *Manuscript Remains*, ed. Arthur Hübscher, trans. E. F. J.  
Payne (Oxford: Berg, 1988), vols. 1–4 [a translation of *HN*  
vols. 1–4].

Passages in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are referred by the standard method, using A and B marginal numbers corresponding to the first and second editions of the work. Other writings by Kant are referred to by volume and page number of the monumental 'Akademie' edition (Berlin: Georg Reimer/Walter de Gruyter, 1900–), in the form Ak. 4: 397. Translations are based on those in the relevant volume of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. References to works of Plato and Aristotle use the standard marginal annotations.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Introduction

In 1841 Arthur Schopenhauer published a book entitled *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics* (*Die Beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik*), containing a pair of complementary essays, which the present volume re-unites for the first time in English translation. The original publication of the essays was the culmination of a train of events that began in April 1837 when Schopenhauer found a prize competition advertized in the *Halle Literary Journal* (*Hall'sche Litteraturzeitung*). The challenge was to answer a question posed in Latin: *Num liberum hominum arbitrium e sui ipsius conscientia demonstrari potest?* that is, 'Can the freedom of the human will be proved from self-consciousness?' Writing largely in his native German, Schopenhauer answered that question in the negative, in a thoroughly argued, powerful and scholarly essay which situated his own contribution in relation to a broad sweep of philosophical and literary predecessors, and left room for the thought that the denial of freedom is ultimately unsatisfying because of our definite feelings of responsibility – responsibility for our character, our very being, he claimed, not for our particular actions, all of which are casually determined. He submitted this essay, *On the Freedom of the Human Will* (*Über die Freiheit des menschlichen Willens*) to the learned academy that had set the question, namely The Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences in Trondheim. At their meeting of 26 January 1839 the Society 'crowned' the essay with the prize of a gold medal, and made its author a member of their Society – most of which information can be gleaned from the wording Schopenhauer proudly placed on the title page of *The Two Fundamental Problems*.

This success and recognition clearly meant a great deal to Schopenhauer, for although he was approaching his fifty-first birthday, and although it was already twenty years since he had published *The World as Will and Representation*, by any standards a remarkable and substantial philosophical work, he had enjoyed no acclaim, no public, no academic career, and he had been living as an independent, albeit wealthy, scholar, actively researching

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics  
Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii

*Introduction*

and writing, but publishing only one other book (*On the Will in Nature*, 1836), which had likewise failed to gain much of an audience.<sup>1</sup> (When *On the Will in Nature* was reprinted in 1854 the situation had begun to improve, as he reported in the Preface with the memorable Latin phrase ‘*legor et legar*’, ‘I am read and I will be read’.) Schopenhauer’s long intellectual isolation was heightened by the school of thought prevailing in German academic philosophy in the first part of the nineteenth century, that of German Idealism, and its powerful head, G. W. F. Hegel. The style of Hegelian philosophizing – which Schopenhauer saw as using pomposity and convolution to impress and mask its vacuity – and its optimistic claims to knowledge of various absolutes were anathema to Schopenhauer, who prized clarity and directness and always cared to root his philosophical claims in what he took to be concrete and empirical instances. Academic philosophy had passed him by since a failed lecture course he had given at Hegel’s University of Berlin in 1820, and he was full of bitterness towards what he saw as the self-serving, overly abstract and fundamentally dishonest mode in which university philosophy tended to be conducted. Diatribes against Hegel (a ‘charlatan’), his predecessor J. G. Fichte (a ‘windbag’) and their acolytes in the university system found their way into all his published works. So the honour of being accepted into a learned academy in Norway was one that he valued, and he still speaks of his gratitude with evident warmth in the Preface to the second edition of *The Two Fundamental Problems* two decades later in 1860, the year of his death.

Freedom of the will, then, was the first fundamental problem of ethics. But what of the second problem and the second essay? The occasion for the latter was strikingly similar. The Royal Danish Society of Sciences set another prize question in the same literary journal, enveloped in a longer piece of Latin. Their question ran: ‘Is the source and basis of morals to be sought in an idea of morality that resides immediately in consciousness (or conscience) and in an analysis of the remaining basic moral concepts that arise out of it, or in another cognitive ground?’ Schopenhauer’s response to this question, once he had carefully dissected it, is a rich and penetrating essay, entitled *On the Basis of Morals* (*Über die Grundlage der*

<sup>1</sup> In 1830 he had also published a Latin version of his treatise *On Vision and Colours*, entitled ‘*Theoria colorum Physiologica, eademque primaria*’ (in Justus Radius (ed.), *Scriptores ophthalmologici minores*, vol. 3). The original version of this (*Über das Sehn und die Farben*) had been published in 1816, following a period of not entirely harmonious collaboration with Goethe over the latter’s colour theory. Schopenhauer later played down the issue of the Latin version, saying that it could not really count as ‘breaking the silence’ between 1818 and 1835 (see *WN*, ‘Introduction’, first footnote).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

xiii

*Moral*). In it Schopenhauer argues that all previous attempts to find a theoretical foundation for ethics have failed to tally with the deliverances of experience, and puts forward his own account: it is solely the incentive of compassion residing in the characters of human beings – the incentive that impels them to seek the well-being and alleviate the suffering of someone other than themselves – that gives actions any true moral worth. And the fundamental principle that expresses the criterion of moral worth is therefore ‘Harm no one; rather help everyone to the extent that you can’, whose two halves correspond to the virtues of justice and *Menschenliebe*, or human loving kindness. Inside the essay nests a long chapter (Chapter 2) which more or less constitutes an essay in its own right: a close critical reading of the highly influential account of ethics put forward by Immanuel Kant in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and other works. Repeatedly citing passages from Kant’s argument, Schopenhauer rips it apart, rejecting the whole notion that ethics must take duty, obligation and command as its central notions, arguing against the link Kant makes between the ethical and the rational, against his exclusion of non-human animals from the ethical sphere, and complaining that Kantian ethics rests on a confection of artificial concepts rooted in nothing that corresponds to human experience.

This second essay was duly submitted to the Danish Royal Society. It was the only response they received to the question they had set – and yet it was ‘not crowned’ (nicht gekrönt), as Schopenhauer defiantly states on the title page of *The Two Fundamental Problems*. They refused to award it a prize! The grounds given for the non-crowning, published in another passage of rather rambling Latin entitled *Judicium* (Judgment), were somewhat strange. Schopenhauer published the whole of this judgment at the end of *The Two Fundamental Problems* and devoted the bulk of the 1841 Preface to protesting against and rebutting it. His outrage was boundless, bursting out of the first Preface, and resounding still in the 1860 Preface to the second edition of the essays. The Danish Society complained that the theme of the prize question ‘demanded the kind of investigation in which the connection between metaphysics and ethics would have been considered first and foremost’, but that Schopenhauer had mistakenly thought the task was to set up some principle of ethics. Schopenhauer’s devastating analysis of the original question and its preamble allows him to state ‘I have proved incontrovertibly that the Royal Danish Society really did ask what it denies having asked; and on the contrary that it did *not* ask what it claims to have asked, and indeed could not even have asked it.’ To

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

*Introduction*

demand an account of *the* connection between ethics and metaphysics would have been meaningless, because there is no metaphysics that can be assumed as a unanimous starting point. So the question would first have had to stipulate that a metaphysics be expounded, and only then that an ethics be developed from it. That would have been the business of more than a single self-contained essay, and is expressly not what the original task was: when Schopenhauer put forward a principle of ethics, he was properly answering the question. The Judgment makes further criticisms of the essay's form and substance which Schopenhauer robustly rejects as false or confused. But finally, presumably not dreaming what they would unleash, the Society added: 'Nor should it go unmentioned that several distinguished philosophers of recent times are mentioned in such an indecent fashion as to provoke just and grave offence.'

The response in both the Prefaces is torrential. 'These "distinguished philosophers" are in fact – *Fichte* and *Hegel*!' Fichte, according to Schopenhauer, was a plodding 'man of talent' whose philosophical views are easy to show up as weak and absurd; Hegel, he says, was far beneath even Fichte in ability, yet unparalleled in his audacity. Schopenhauer impugns the Danish Society's judgment and integrity using a blend of argument and rhetoric all his own. Here is a glimpse of the resultant outpouring:

If a union of journal writers sworn to the glorification of the bad, if paid professors of Hegeltry and yearning private teachers who would like to become such professors, indefatigably and with unparalleled shamelessness proclaim this very ordinary mind but extraordinary charlatan to all four winds as the greatest philosopher the world has ever possessed – then that is worth no serious attention, still less so given that the blatant intent of this miserable business must gradually become evident even to those of little practice. But when it goes so far that a foreign academy wishes to adopt that philosophaster as a 'distinguished philosopher', and even permits itself to vilify the man who honestly and unflinchingly opposes the false fame, deceitfully obtained, bought and composed out of lies, with *that* degree of emphasis that is alone proportionate to the impudent promotion and obtrusion of what is false, bad, and mind-corrupting – then the matter becomes serious. (15)

If to this end I were to say that the so-called philosophy of *Hegel* was a colossal mystification that will provide even posterity with the inexhaustible theme of ridiculing our age, a pseudo-philosophy that cripples all mental powers, suffocates real thinking and substitutes by means of the most outrageous use of language the hollowest, the most devoid of sense, the most thoughtless, and, as the outcome confirms, the most stupefying jumble of words, and that, with an absurd passing whim plucked out of the air as its core, it is devoid of both grounds and consequences, i.e. is neither proved by anything nor itself proves or explains anything, and what is more, lacking any originality, a mere parody of scholastic realism and

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

xv

of Spinozism at the same time, a monster which is also supposed to represent Christianity from the reverse side, in other words

a lion in front, a serpent behind, and in the middle a goat

– then I should be right. If I further said that this ‘distinguished philosopher’ of the Danish Academy scrawled nonsense as no mortal ever did before him, so that anyone who could read his most celebrated work, the so-called *Phenomenology of Spirit*, without having the impression that he was in a madhouse, would belong in it – then I would be no less right. (15–16)

Schopenhauer rounds off his case by inserting his own translation of several acerbic pages of fiction from the seventeenth-century Spanish author Balthasar Gracián, in which we witness a showman exhibiting a braying ass to a craven public who swear it is a splendid eagle, then a tiny man whom they are coerced into proclaiming a giant – except that once the act leaves the stage all are eager to agree that they have been seriously duped. In the second edition Preface Schopenhauer is able to say with some justification that the philosophical public of 1860, given the waning of Hegel’s influence, has likewise begun to come to its senses about the ‘distinguished philosophers’:

even though they are being sustained for a little while longer, with failing powers, by poor philosophy professors who compromised themselves with them long ago and who need them besides as material for lectures, they have nonetheless sunk very greatly in public estimation, and Hegel in particular is heading with strong strides towards the contempt that awaits him in posterity. (29)

Although the two Prefaces tell us next to nothing about the content of Schopenhauer’s ethics, they are among the best exemplars of his character and intellectual persona and worth reading for that alone.

## SCHOPENHAUER’S ETHICS IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS PHILOSOPHY

The two essays in this volume are not the only places where Schopenhauer’s ethical views are to be found. For a complete picture the fourth and final book of *The World as Will and Representation*, volume 1 (published in 1818) should be consulted, as should the numerous supplementary essays in the Fourth Book of volume 2 of that work, first issued in 1844.<sup>2</sup> The definitive shape of his ethics is really given by its first statement in volume 1 of this, his ‘main work’. But ethics is there the culminating part of an

<sup>2</sup> A short chapter in *WN*, entitled Reference to Ethics (‘Hinweisung auf die Ethik’) is also relevant, as is an essay ‘On Ethics’ (‘Zur Ethik’) included in Schopenhauer’s *PP* 2, ch. 8.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi

*Introduction*

overall philosophical system of extraordinary ambition. The four books of this work range through epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind and action, aesthetics and philosophy of art, to ethics, the meaning of life and the philosophy of religion, in an attempt to account for *the world*: the nature of our cognition or knowledge of the world and how it relates to that world itself, the nature of our existence and the existence of everything in nature, what is and is not of value in existence, the pain of the human condition and the possibility of deliverance from it. The difficulties here for the reader interested primarily in Schopenhauer's contribution to ethics are, firstly, that a whole metaphysical system has to be worked through and comprehended, and secondly that his views on free will and responsibility, action and character, moral worth, compassion, and the virtues of justice and loving kindness risk becoming lost amid a wealth of other material to which their immediate relation is not always obvious.

The essays of *The Two Fundamental Problems* were submitted anonymously to their respective academies: Schopenhauer could not refer to his earlier work nor, as he remarks, could either essay refer to the other. This had the effect of thrusting the issues of freedom and morality into the limelight unencumbered by other elements of his thought, and Schopenhauer gives a far more comprehensive and persuasive treatment of these issues than he had achieved before or ever undertook later.<sup>3</sup> Rather than introducing his ethical views as offshoots of a metaphysical world view, he had to present them on commonly agreed grounds, 'starting from facts either of outer experience or of consciousness'. So the connection of this 'psychological' basis with a more fundamental metaphysics could now be 'suggested at most in accessory fashion'. Schopenhauer presents this reversal of method as a kind of disadvantage, but for the reader who – in his day or ours – is interested in the ethical issues but not *au fait* with the metaphysical system, the essays make matters considerably easier. Meanwhile, neither essay abandons the metaphysics altogether, since, as we shall see, both manage to leave us with profound questions designed to point decisively towards it.

The briefest summary of *The World as Will and Representation* will help us here. Schopenhauer firstly allies himself with *transcendental idealism*. According to this doctrine, originally developed by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), the objects that we experience as outside of us in

<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of his supplementary essays on ethics in *WWR* 2, ch. 40, Schopenhauer states that he will not revisit the two principal subjects of freedom of the will and the foundation of morals, thus leaving himself more space for other ethical topics. He presumes that the reader wishing to address the former topics will read *The Two Fundamental Problems*.



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

xvii

space and time, causally interacting in lawlike ways, constitute a world of *appearance*, and we do not experience them *in themselves*. Empirical objects, the objects of which any subject has conscious experience, are a species of the subject's representations (*Vorstellungen*) and what this realm of objects can contain is necessarily limited, shaped by the form of the mind itself. The mind must organize its objects as related to one another in space, as contemporaneous or succeeding one another in time and as entering into regular patterns of cause and effect. This, for Kant, and for Schopenhauer, is a truth *a priori*, something we can know independently of confirmation through experience. It is a ground rule for the possibility of experience itself. So the familiar world of empirical things is a world of objects *for a subject*, which is to say a world consisting of the subject's representations, and not a world that can be regarded as existing in itself, independently of the way it appears and must appear to an experiencing mind.

For Schopenhauer, the human mind, and indeed any conscious mind, receives data through the bodily senses and structures them using what he calls the understanding (*Verstand*) or intellect (*Intellekt*). Without this structuring we would register only a conglomeration of subjective sensations, but with it we attain a picture of material objects persisting in time, occupying space and serving as the causal origins of observed changes and of our sensations themselves. However, two features that are emphasized in both the essays on ethics differentiate Schopenhauer's account of cognition quite markedly from Kant's. One is that the understanding or intellect cognizes the world in a manner that is not essentially conceptual. Adopting another technical term of Kant's, Schopenhauer maintains that what the understanding gives us is intuition (*Anschauung*), which essentially means perceptual awareness of particular objects in space and time. For Kant, the senses gave us an array of intuitions, and the understanding provided concepts under which it actively ordered the intuitions to produce an experience of a world of objects. Only creatures capable of forming concepts and making judgments could have such experience in the full sense. But for Schopenhauer animals such as a dog or a horse, who are incapable of forming concepts, are as much aware of a world of objects as any human subject: they perceive objects in space and time as we do, being simply incapable of making judgments, forming thoughts or carrying out reasoning, and hence being unable to comprehend anything more than what is immediately present in their perception.

The other, related feature that differentiates Schopenhauer from Kant is that the capacity to form and manipulate concepts discursively to frame thoughts and arguments, the capacity which for Schopenhauer is reason

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xviii

*Introduction*

(*Vernunft*), though indeed unique to human beings, confers on them no special ‘dignity’, nor has any special connection with freedom or morality. Reason’s concepts are secondary representations abstracted from the primary material given in intuition, and reason itself is merely instrumental in value: it enables us, unlike other animals, to be guided in our actions by a vast range of motives that involve thoughts about what is not present immediately in intuition. But a rationally motivated action is no more free than one motivated by fear, thirst or lust – it is just determined by a more complicated cause. And a rationally motivated action is not guaranteed to be any more morally good than one otherwise caused, for, as Schopenhauer says in ch. II, §6 of *On the Basis of Morals*, ‘Rational and vicious can combine very well, and indeed it is only through their combination that great, far-reaching crimes are possible. Irrational and noble-minded likewise co-exist very well’ (151). The demotion of reason from any foundational role in characterizing human behaviour or explaining what has moral worth, and the consequent levelling that occurs between human beings and all other animals, are vital distinguishing features of Schopenhauer’s ethics and of his philosophy as a whole.

Returning to the narrative of *The World as Will and Representation*, we find Schopenhauer maintaining that the idealist account of the world as representation, through true, is seriously inadequate. For by definition it does not tell us what we are in ourselves, nor what anything in the world apart from us is in itself. All this remains a ‘riddle’. Schopenhauer proposes to solve that riddle by claiming that the essence, the very being in itself of all things is will (*Wille*). The world that appears to us as representation is, in itself, will. Representation gives us the world as it is empirically, diverse, plural, spatio-temporal, lawlike and open to investigation. Will is what that same world and we ourselves are metaphysically – one and the same essence underlying all the many empirical appearances. We must make sense of the world and ourselves from within, not merely experience its manifestations in an ordered fashion from a standpoint detached from reality. This is the central message of the second book of *The World as Will and Representation*. Arguing from our immediate cognition of our own actions, Schopenhauer suggests that whenever we are conscious of ourselves, we are conscious of ourselves as willing something. This unique inner consciousness is to give us the vital clue to our own essence: it is that we strive towards ends. The intrinsic core of our being is will. Schopenhauer uses this term ‘will’ very widely, including in it not only desires, but actions, emotions and affects, and non-conscious or ‘blind’ processes that can be described as end-directed. Thus the will that is our essence manifests itself in our body

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

xix

and its many functions, including the brain and nervous system, with the result that the self-conscious subject of cognition around which Kantian epistemology is structured is to be explained as the result of physiology, but that physiology is ultimately explicable in metaphysical terms as the manifestation of an underlying striving force. Schopenhauer then extends this idea to the whole of nature, claiming that we can make sense of the world as such by seeing its essence as a kind of blind striving manifesting itself in multiple instances within our experience. Thus the one world is both representation and will.

In the essays on ethics this notion of the world-will is alluded to only in passing. For example in Chapter III of the *Freedom* essay Schopenhauer has arrived at the claim that there is a natural force present in things that lack cognition and merely respond to causes pure and simple; he then speculates as follows:

whether this inner condition of their reaction to external causes . . . might perhaps, if someone wanted to depart from appearance in general and enquire into what Kant calls the thing in itself, be identical in its essence with that which in ourselves we call the *will*, as a philosopher of recent times has really wanted to demonstrate for us – this I leave to one side, though without wanting to contradict it directly.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the two essays on ethics do not presuppose the claim that the world is will. We shall, however, find that certain aspects of the will-theory are vital to the essays. One is the idea that in each *individual* there is a will that constitutes his or her character or essence, underlying and partly determining his or her particular actions. Other aspects that we have already touched on are the continuity of essence between humans and all other beings, and the de-centralization of rationality, no longer the essence of the individual but merely one way in which a more fundamental will becomes manifest in certain contexts.

As *The World as Will and Representation* progresses the tone becomes more sombre. The individual's existence is dominated by will: desires and needs are incessant, shaping all our perception and understanding of the world, ends can never finally be fulfilled, suffering is ever-present, but the will drives us on to strive and want more things that can never properly satisfy us even if we attain them. Willing goes on perpetually and without final purpose: it is built into us and into the whole fabric of the world. Throughout nature one being dominates and destroys another, the world-will tearing itself apart, says Schopenhauer, because it is a hungry will and there is

<sup>4</sup> p. 55. In the edition of 1860 he adds a footnote saying 'It is evident that here I mean myself and could not speak in the first person simply because of the required incognito.'

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xx

*Introduction*

nothing for it to feed on but itself. This dark vision of existence, which has led to Schopenhauer's title as a philosopher of pessimism (though this is not a term he uses for himself), is not explicitly thematized in the essays on ethics; nor is its brighter counterpart, the temporary remedy against the life of striving and suffering that he finds in the pure, will-less consciousness of aesthetic experience (the theme of *The World as Will and Representation*, third book). However, the ethical (and metaphysical) culmination of Schopenhauer's systematic philosophy in the fourth and final book of his main work is worth considering briefly in the present connection.

If ethics in the broadest sense considers what is of value in human life, then Schopenhauer's ultimate ethical position is as follows. Although we exist as empirical individuals separate from one another and so naturally regard the good as consisting in what we can attain through the activity of our own individual wills, this is a mistaken view. When fully understood, the life of a human individual does not and cannot contain anything of true value. Worse, the existence of everything – as a manifestation of the pointlessly self-perpetuating and self-devouring will – is something ultimately to be lamented. To exist as a manifestation of will is to strive without fulfilment, and hence to suffer. Attaining an end through willing brings us nothing of positive value – it just temporarily erases a painful lack or absence. New desires flood in almost immediately to plague us with their non-satisfaction. And if no new desires arrive we are tormented by boredom. Because will is our essence, 'All life is suffering' – and consequently we need 'salvation' or 'redemption' from it. Such redemption can be achieved only by the will within us 'turning' and 'denying itself'.<sup>5</sup> Schopenhauer has argued that the notion of a 'highest good' makes no sense.<sup>6</sup> But, he says, if we wish to bring that expression back from retirement and apply it to anything, then it must be to the denial of the will: cessation of desires and wants that relate to the individual we find ourselves as, detachment of identification from this individual, elimination of one's personality, one's natural self with its in-built attachment to the ends of living and willing, and contemplation of the whole world, with all its strivings and pains, as if from nowhere within it. Calling on mystical pronouncements from diverse cultural traditions, Schopenhauer argues that only such a radical transformation, occasioned by a deep and rare knowledge of the ubiquity of suffering and the illusoriness of the individual, can restore any value to our existence. It is a matter for some debate how this vision of the worthlessness of human existence and the redemptive power of self-abolition

<sup>5</sup> See *WWR* I, §§56, 69 (Hübscher *SW* 2, 366, 472–3).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, §65 (Hübscher *SW* 2, 427–8).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

xxi

relates to what we might call the 'ordinary' ethics concerning motivation, responsibility and the moral worth of actions that Schopenhauer explores in the two essays. We shall return to this issue below.

## THE ARGUMENT OF SCHOPENHAUER'S ESSAY ON FREEDOM

Faced with the question 'Can the freedom of the human will be proved from self-consciousness?', Schopenhauer first subjects its terms to a process of clarification: 'What does freedom mean?' and 'What does self-consciousness mean?' Freedom, he states, can be physical, intellectual or moral. *Physical freedom*, the original and most easily grasped sense of the term, is simply the absence of material hindrances. So, for example, in this sense we can even speak of the free course of a stream, meaning its not being obstructed by rocks, weirs or the like. When we move on to beings that act and therefore are conceived as having a will, we can still talk of physical freedom in the same way: animals, including human beings, are physically free if there is no material hindrance to their doing what they will. *Intellectual freedom* (dealt with in an appendix at the end of the whole essay, 110–112) is present in so far as the intellect is functioning in an ordinary way, and the individual is at no abnormal cognitive disadvantage, perceiving and understanding the world correctly. We lack such freedom in a variety of cases. First, our general cognitive abilities may be seriously awry, as in 'madness, delirium, paroxysm and somnolence'; second, we may simply mis-perceive in a single instance 'in a clear cut and blameless error, e.g. when one pours out poison instead of medicine, or takes one's servant coming in at night for a robber and shoots him'. Thirdly, there can be partial lapses of intellectual freedom 'through affect and through intoxication'. Powerful feelings impressed upon us by our experience of external events can eclipse our full understanding of what we are doing. Intoxication disposes us towards affects by weakening abstract thinking. Such cases diminish our responsibility and blameworthiness, though typically in the latter case we may be blamed for the state of intoxication itself.

The main body of the essay, however, concerns *moral freedom*. Schopenhauer makes use of a notion that recurs on virtually every page of the essay, that of a motive (*Motiv*). By this he means precisely an object of cognition, an occurrent perception or thought that 'is the material of the act of will, in the sense that the act of will is directed towards it, i.e. aims at some alteration in it, or reacts to it'.<sup>7</sup> Motives can hinder acts of will just as much

<sup>7</sup> See the beginning of ch. 2 of the essay, p. 40.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics  
Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxii

*Introduction*

as physical obstacles: Schopenhauer first mentions as instances ‘threats, promises, dangers and the like’. Understanding what is likely to happen if one acts as one wills is often enough to restrain one from so acting. But in this case, unlike the case of physical freedom, there appears to be no absolute compulsion. Some individuals in some circumstances are not prevented from acting by the strongly motivating belief that they will die, for example, or that they will be tortured: their will is undeterred. So the problem of moral freedom is posed: Given what falls within the cognition of a given individual at some time, *could* they have pursued a different course of action at that time than the one they did? Could they have *willed* something different? Was their willing free? But now something strange has happened to the concept of freedom that we began with. For we said willing beings were free if nothing prevented them from acting in accordance with their will, but now it looks as if we have to answer the question ‘Can you will in accordance with your will?’, which, as Schopenhauer points out, ends in an absurd regress. To make it workable, the concept of freedom has to be modified; it then becomes equivalent to ‘the absence of all necessity in general’. This negative sense of freedom can be applied without absurdity to the will, so that the central question finally emerges as: ‘Is human willing subject to necessity or not?’

Schopenhauer next defines ‘necessary’, leaning on what he had expounded in his earliest publication, the doctoral dissertation of 1813, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*. There Schopenhauer argued that the notion of a ‘ground’ (*Grund*) was ambiguous.<sup>8</sup> It is true that ‘everything has a ground for its being as it is’. But not all grounds are of the same type. For instance, a judgment has empirical evidence or a prior judgment as its ground, the ground of a figure’s being a triangle is its having three sides, a cause is the ground of its effect, a motive is the ground of an action – and we should be careful to distinguish between the various kinds of case. However, one point on which Schopenhauer is insistent is that the relation between any ground and its consequent (that which it is the ground of) is *necessity*. And conversely the definition of necessity he uses throughout the essay is ‘necessary is that which follows from a given sufficient ground’. Now the issue has become more precise again: Do human actions follow from a given sufficient ground? If they do not, they are free; if they do, they are not free.

<sup>8</sup> In the title of *FR* the word *Grund* occurs, so that strictly, since it is all about different kinds of ground, we would be right to talk of the Principle of Sufficient Ground. But the translation ‘Principle of Sufficient Reason’ is retained here as the more recognizable, standard philosophical term.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics  
Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

xxiii

The Norwegian Society's question, then, is interpreted as asking whether self-consciousness can resolve this issue. Schopenhauer next analyses self-consciousness. His position here is that when I am conscious of myself, of my inside or interior, as he often puts it, as opposed to some object that presents itself as external to me, then I find states such as

decisive acts of will that immediately become deeds, . . . formal decisions . . . desiring, striving, wishing, longing, yearning, hoping, loving, enjoying, rejoicing and the like, . . . not-willing or resisting, and detesting, fleeing, fearing, being angry, hating, grieving, suffering pain, in short all affects and passions. (38)

All of these he classes as 'movements of the will' of different polarities, tones and intensities. We do not, he suggests, encounter ourselves as cognizing beings in our own cognition, a claim he repeats in Chapter IV of *On the Basis of Morals*:

through inner sense we cognize the continuing series of our strivings and acts of will which arise on the occasion of external motives, and finally also the manifold weaker or stronger movements of our own will, to which all inner feelings can be reduced. That is all: for the cognizing (*das Erkennen*) is not itself cognized in turn. (250)

So the self that meets us 'within' is fundamentally conative and affective, concerned with trying, striving, acting and feeling positively or negatively towards things. We might think, then, that if self-consciousness taps exclusively into the will, then it will be the prime means by which we discover the will's freedom, if it has freedom, or, if it has none, its total subjection to necessity. But no: Schopenhauer argues that, although it is an easy and almost unavoidable mistake to *think* that self-consciousness reveals the will's freedom, self-consciousness is simply incapable of deciding the crucial question. The truth is that by examining our 'inside', leaving out any considerations concerning the external world, we ascertain nothing at all about the relation between the grounds (motives) of what we will and what we will itself.

The ordinary person recognizes the following as true: 'I can do what I will.' And it is this that the ordinary person – and many a philosopher who is also prone to the same error – takes to be freedom of the will. But freedom of *doing* is crucially different from freedom of *willing*. This is Schopenhauer's central insight. If you had willed to turn to the right, and were not restrained, paralysed, drugged and so on, then you would have done so; equally, if you had willed to turn to the left, you would have done so. 'I am free', says the inexperienced thinker, 'because it is up to me what I do, it just depends on my will, and that I can know in self-consciousness.'

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxiv

*Introduction*

But this tells us nothing about whether we could equally have willed to turn to the right or willed to turn to the left. Suppose on a particular occasion I willed to turn to the left and did so: *could* I equally well have willed to turn to the right? We cannot know this on the basis of self-consciousness alone, Schopenhauer claims, because here we reach a kind of bedrock:

If we now say: ‘But your willing itself, what does that depend on?’ then the person will answer out of self-consciousness: ‘On nothing at all but me! I can will what I will: what I will, that I will.’ . . . [P]ressed to the extreme here, he speaks of a willing of his willing, which is as if he spoke of an I of his I. We have driven him back to the core of his self-consciousness, where he encounters his I and his will as indistinguishable, but nothing is left over to judge them both. (44–5)

This is the burden of Schopenhauer’s succinct second chapter: it is natural to feel that we are conscious of our will as free, but that is really an illusion since all we can know in self-consciousness is that we can do what we will. As he comments, that answers the question that was set. Can the freedom of the human will be proved from self-consciousness? No it cannot. But Schopenhauer seeks to strengthen his case further. What if we look beyond self-consciousness? If we find from examining our cognition of the external world that there is no such thing as a willing free from necessity, then we would not just be contingently unable to prove freedom of the will from self-consciousness; rather we would learn that it is *impossible* to have evidence of freedom of the will in self-consciousness. It is impossible for us to be inwardly conscious of something that simply does not exist anyway.

This shift from self-consciousness to ‘consciousness of other things’ gives rise to the longest chapter of the freedom essay, Chapter III, in which Schopenhauer examines what we can know through our cognition of the world of external objects, and specifically whether we ever encounter anything occurring without necessity, without a sufficient ground. The short answer is again in the negative. Nowhere in the objective world is there an exception to the rule that whatever happens, happens necessarily as the consequent of some ground. So there is no free will in the world of our outer experience, the intuited or empirical world. In addition to holding this as a universal principle that can be known a priori, Schopenhauer seeks to establish a continuity throughout nature, by examining in turn inanimate nature, plants, animals in general and finally human beings. At every point in this taxonomy there is causality at work. Schopenhauer distinguishes sheer cause and effect, which operates at the level of physics, then stimulus and response, to which plants and animals are susceptible,



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

xxv

then motive and action, the sphere of creatures with minds that can cognize the world and provide mental representations that function as motives for their willed behaviour, then finally rational motive and action, the unique province of human beings. Rationality occurs where a creature has the capacity to develop concepts in addition to mere intuitions of the here and now. When we have concepts, we can make judgments, think about past and future, make inferences and act upon deliberation. Because of the complexity of thought and action in this final case, and because the connection of actions with their causes is often quite remote, we are tempted to see human action as of quite another kind from the simple cases of cause and effect. But human action, as part of what occurs in the natural world, is as much subject to the necessity of consequent following on ground as any other kind of event. Action brought about by rational deliberation is not different in respect of its necessity from a non-rational animal's moving upon seeing its prey, or from a plant's moving upon the stimulus of sunlight, or even from one billiard ball's moving upon impact from another. In a bravura passage Schopenhauer imagines a stretch of water lying in a pond and thinking to itself that it *could* rise up in a jet, rush down in a waterfall and so on, but that it is freely resting where it is. It would be no different if a man were to think that he *could* be doing all sorts of daring things X, Y and Z, 'but am going home with just as much free will, to my wife'.

So Schopenhauer has argued that since all motives, whether rational or not, are a species of causes, they give rise to our willed action with necessity. To complete the picture, however, he has to give some account of what it is that the motives operate upon. And here he turns to the notion of *character*. In explaining the behaviour of anything when causes exert an influence on it, we must presuppose that the constitution of the thing, of whatever kind it is, interacts with the cause to produce the necessary effect. To use an example similar to some of Schopenhauer's own, the heat of the sun produces effects on water, wax, growing fruit and human skin, but while the heat remains the same, the difference in the effects depends on the nature of the thing affected. The effect of motives on human action similarly depends on the character of the individual human being. Schopenhauer is quite certain that this character is individual – no humans have the same character – that it is something discovered empirically, even for the person whose character it is, that it is inborn, and that it is constant and never changes. He produces anecdotal evidence for these latter claims, some from popular sayings, some from poets and dramatists, some from authorities in classical antiquity. By this means he at least establishes that it has often

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics  
Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxvi

*Introduction*

been believed that character is individual, inborn and unchanging, if not that it genuinely is so. But even if his case is less than fully convincing, the overall picture is not altered: the actions of an individual human being are determined by a combination of motives that enter his or her cognition, together with the particular character upon which they impact. So, taking a person who acted in a certain way on a certain occasion, if we imagine that same person, character unchanged, having the same thoughts and experiences in the same circumstances, then we must conclude that their action would be just the same again. In this sense they do whatever they do necessarily.

There is some room for moral improvement in Schopenhauer's view: we can teach people new motives, by enlarging their knowledge of the world and enabling them to understand better both their own characters and the situations in which they act. If the same person in the same circumstances has different cognitive states, then they may well act quite differently. But what Schopenhauer rules out is that their character has changed:

no moral influence reaches further than the correction of cognition, and the undertaking to remove the character faults of a human being through talking and moralizing and thus wanting to re-shape his character itself, his intrinsic morality, is just the same as the proposal to transform lead into gold by external influence, or to bring an oak tree, by careful tending, to the point of bearing apricots. (72)

Schopenhauer also calls this intrinsic unchanging character the individual's *will*. It is opposed to the intellect, the malleable medium of cognition, and constitutes the core, the very being of the person him- or herself. This conception of the self is also carried through, as we shall see, to the essay *On the Basis of Morals*.<sup>9</sup>

Having answered the Prize Question head-on with his examination of self-consciousness and elaborated reasons why the human will could not possibly enjoy any absence of necessity, Schopenhauer moves into another gear in Chapter IV of the essay, which he entitles 'Predecessors'. It is a display of comprehensive scholarship and literary sensitivity – both hallmarks of Schopenhauer's persona as much as his stubborn argumentative style and intolerance of nonsense. From faint intimations of the problem of free will in Aristotle (though in all the ancients proper awareness of it is absent), to the defining Christian debates in Augustine and Luther, then on to a number of more obscure early modern thinkers through to Hobbes, Spinoza, Hume, Priestley, Voltaire, Kant and Schelling, with contributions

<sup>9</sup> Schopenhauer's most comprehensive treatment of the will–intellect relationship is to be found in *WWR* 2, ch. 19.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics  
Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

xxvii

from Shakespeare, Schiller, Walter Scott and a recent edition of *The Times* thrown in, Schopenhauer portrays a protracted debate about free will continuing through European culture and culminating in the very view he has expounded: all human actions proceed with necessity from a combination of their motives and their character.

However, the final chapter of the essay on freedom takes us in a different and more challenging direction:

If in consequence of our presentation so far we have entirely removed all freedom of human action and recognized it as thoroughly subordinate to the strictest necessity, we have now been led in that very process to the point where we will be able to grasp *true moral freedom*, which is of a higher kind. (105)

What is unsatisfying about the account so far is its exclusion of the fact that we *feel responsible* for what we do, and not in an obscure or trivial way; rather we have an ‘unshakeable certainty that we ourselves are *the doers of our deeds*’. So unshakeable is this sense of ourselves that even the conviction that determinism is true could not remove it. Even the reader wholly convinced by Schopenhauer’s theoretical arguments and examples will not try to duck responsibility for his or her actions on the grounds that they followed necessarily from his or her occurrent motives and character. This seems an accurate picture of our attitude to our own actions. There are a number of routes one could pursue from this point. Perhaps our ‘certainty’ of being responsible for our deeds is an insuperable illusion; perhaps it is an attitude more central to our self-understanding than any commitment we could have to the objective standpoint from which our actions are seen as determined, so that the truth or falsity of determinism should matter less to us than is commonly thought.<sup>10</sup> Schopenhauer, however, has a third alternative: the unshakeable certainty is not an illusion, we really are responsible for our deeds, and so must in some sense really be free; but because determinism is true of everything that occurs in the empirical realm of space and time, we must regard our particular actions as not free. Schopenhauer negotiates this predicament with the help of two distinctions. He distinguishes first our actions from our self, or our doing from our being, and secondly the empirical realm from the transcendental.

For all his previous argument, Schopenhauer has not shown that there is an absolute necessity attaching to the occurrence of any particular human action. Suppose that someone is hungry and steals an enticing-looking apple from a market-stall. It is not written into the laws of the universe

<sup>10</sup> As argued by P. F. Strawson in ‘Freedom and Resentment’, in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974), 1–25.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxviii

*Introduction*

that such an event must take place here and now: rather, it is just because the motives and the circumstance worked upon *this human being* in particular that this act of stealing took place:

quite another action, indeed the action directly opposed to his own, was after all entirely possible and could have happened, *if only he had been another*: this alone is what it depended on. *For him*, because he is this one and not another, because he has such and such a character, no other action was indeed possible; but in itself, and thus objectively, it was possible. So the *responsibility* he is conscious of relates only provisionally and ostensibly to the deed, but fundamentally to *his character*: it is for *this* that he feels himself responsible. And it is for *this* that others hold him responsible . . . The deed, along with the motive, comes into consideration merely as evidence of the character of the doer, but counts as a sure symptom of it, by which it is discovered irrevocably and forever. (105–6)

For the second of the two distinctions mentioned Schopenhauer leans heavily on Kant, who had offered to show that freedom does not contradict the principle of causal determination throughout nature.<sup>11</sup> We can regard ourselves in two different ways: as empirical beings who are part of the world of nature, and as moral agents. Kant's idea is that we can preserve the sense of ourselves as moral agents if we consider ourselves as being more than what we appear as empirically – that is, if we consider what we are in ourselves, something we can grasp only in pure thought of the intellect, not in experience. This will allow us to speak not just of our *empirical* character, but also of our *intelligible* character. The latter is what we can think of ourselves as being in ourselves, beyond what we are in the realm of appearance. Since beyond that realm there is no space, time or causality, our intelligible character is uninfluenced by nature and can be regarded as freely initiating courses of events without being part of them.

Schopenhauer accepts Kant's distinction between empirical and intelligible characters, proclaiming it 'among the most beautiful and most profoundly thought products of this great mind, and indeed of human beings ever' (107), and modifies it for his own purposes, treating it in a realist manner: my intelligible character, for him, is that single real essence of mine that underlies all my particular actions and manifests itself in them all alike. So Schopenhauer infers from the undeniable fact that we *feel* guilty about what we have done that we must be free, but because we cannot be free with respect to our empirical manifestations, we must be free with respect to our real underlying character: 'Where *guilt* lies, there must *responsibility* lie also: and since the latter is the sole datum from which

<sup>11</sup> See *Critique of Pure Reason*, A332–558/B360–586.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87140-2 - Arthur Schopenhauer: The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics

Edited by Christopher Janaway

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

xxix

the conclusion to moral freedom is justified, *freedom* must also lie in the very same place, that is in the *character* of the human being' and therefore

we have to seek the work of our *freedom* no longer in our individual actions, as the common view does, but in the whole being and essence (*existentia et essentia*) of the human being himself, which must be thought of as a free deed that merely presents itself for the faculty of cognition, linked to time, space and causality, in a plurality and diversity of actions. (108)

Schopenhauer's solution, then, is that we are empirically determined, but transcendently free, and hence justifiably feel responsible for what we are. How the metaphysics of something existing (and acting) outside of space, time and causality will work out is not made clear here. We shall return to this issue briefly in the final section of this Introduction.

## THE ARGUMENT OF ON THE BASIS OF MORALS

The second of Schopenhauer's essays on ethics, despite being the one that failed to win a prize, is an equal, if not greater, achievement. It combines an account of why ethics has allegedly never been set on a secure footing, a diagnosis of the stagnation and malaise of early nineteenth-century ethics in particular, a detailed and probing critique of Kant's moral theory, reflection on the ethical doctrines of several of the world religions, and an original account of the incentives of egoism, malice and compassion, the latter presented as the sole foundation for all behaviour that is evaluated as morally good.

Schopenhauer argues that in the past ethics could count upon support from religious dogma and so could at least appear to be firmly grounded, but that since Kant's influential 'destruction' of philosophical theology and proposal to ground theology in ethics rather than the other way round, theological doctrines no longer have the persuasive power required to give authority to any ethical theory. Kant's own ethics has come to be the orthodoxy for the past sixty years at Schopenhauer's time of writing, and so this is what 'must be cleared away before we embark on another path' (121). Consequently the first major chapter of the essay (Chapter II) is an extensive demolition of the Kantian edifice – though Schopenhauer warns us not to skip over this as a merely negative exercise, but to consider the critique of Kant as an essential preparation for his own positive views that follow in Chapter III.

Kant's primary error, according to Schopenhauer, is to conceive of ethics as fundamentally a matter of imperatives, of oughts, duties and laws. In

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxx

*Introduction*

asking for a re-orientation of ethics away from these notions, Schopenhauer's position resembles that taken by Elizabeth Anscombe in a paper from the 1950s that has come to be regarded as important in re-generating interest in virtue ethics.<sup>12</sup> Kant simply assumes from the outset that it is legitimate to talk of a moral law and of absolute obligations placed upon human beings, obligations which hold even though no one may ever have acted upon them or willingly entered into them. Schopenhauer complains first that ethics must start from what is observed to happen in human behaviour; and second that the idea of absolute laws or commands is a transparent hangover from the Judaeo-Christian notion of the Ten Commandments, made even more obvious by Kant's occasional retention of phrases such as 'thou shalt'. This is a serious problem because in general Kant proposes to give ethics a grounding wholly independent of theology. Later, when we find Kant attempting to give rational justification to our idea of God on the grounds of his ethics, Schopenhauer retorts that he resembles a magician 'having us find an object in the place he had cleverly slipped it into before' (130). For Schopenhauer one cannot speak of laws without a foundation in specific human institutions, and cannot speak of an ought without its being conditioned by some reward or punishment. An unconditional or absolute ought is even a contradiction in terms. So, if we really wish to stand on ground free of tacit theological assumptions, we must reject Kant's fundamental conception of ethics from the start. Here there is a clear foreshadowing of elements of Nietzsche's critique of Judaeo-Christian morality.

Schopenhauer pictures Kant as obsessed with the distinction between the a priori and the empirical. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant had used this distinction to make 'the most brilliant and influential discovery' in his revisionary account of metaphysics (133); now he is determined to apply it to ethics, and to banish everything empirical from a foundational role, thus removing, in Schopenhauer's eyes, any power from his moral philosophy:

For morals has to do with the *real* acting of human beings and not with aprioristic building of houses made of cards, to whose outcomes no human being would turn in the seriousness and stress of life, and whose effect, therefore, in face of the storm of the passions, would be as great as an enema syringe at a raging fire. (145)

Even Kant's own followers have not appreciated the rigour with which Kant intends to proceed: they tend to say that the Kantian moral law is a 'fact of

<sup>12</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Philosophy* 33 (1958), 1–19. A more recent criticism of the centrality of obligation in ethics is Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), ch. 10.