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“The Poison in the Snake’s Fang”: Schopenhauer on Malice

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Running Head (RH): Schopenhauer on Malice

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Abstract: Schopenhauer is one of the few philosophers in the history of Western ethics to dedicate sustained critical attention to the nature, extent, and phenomenology of malice. Yet while other aspects of Schopenhauer's moral psychology have received significant attention, his nuanced account of malice is under-explored. This paper attempts to remedy this oversight. It argues that Schopenhauer defends a unified and hierarchical account of moral vice in which malice is a *sui generis* motive, the pinnacle of immorality, and far more pervasive in the human psyche than typically recognized. Moreover, it is argued that part of the significance of Schopenhauer’s account lies in how his idiosyncratic conceptual framework allows him to philosophically capture many widespread beliefs about malicious persons — particularly the view that malice is best explained in terms of the agents own inner-suffering. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer’s views about malice raise a number of interpretive puzzles, which the paper subsequently aims to elucidate and solve.

List of Keywords: Schopenhauer, Malice, Egoism, Moral Psychology, Cruelty

> “it was part of my plan to take this murky side of human nature into account first, a feature in which my path certainly diverges from that of all other moral theorists and becomes similar to that of *Dante*, who leads us first into hell”
>
> - Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morals*, §14

1. Introduction

In the cult film *Reservoir Dogs* a group of hired outlaws commit a diamond heist that goes horribly wrong. They kill a number of innocent people in a shootout with the police that spills onto the street. Back at a safe-house, two of the crew—Mr. White and Mr. Pink—reflect on what just happened, and console themselves by claiming that their own actions—the heist, and their use of lethal force to escape arrest—were taken purely out of self-interest. Mr. Pink says: “I don’t want to kill anybody. If I gotta get out that door and you’re standing in my way, one way or the other you’re getting out of my way,” to which Mr. White concurs: “that’s the way I look at it. The choice between doing ten years and taking out some stupid m**********r ain’t no choice at all.” They explicitly contrast their actions with those of another in their crew: Mr. Blonde. They are shocked at the particular brutality of Mr. Blonde, who they claim executed store employees *en masse* during the heist for what appears to be only pleasure, despite it ruining the job and putting the crew (and thus, himself) in jeopardy. So apparently sadistic and reckless were the actions of Mr. Blonde that Mr. White and Mr. Pink repeatedly question his sanity. Their analysis of Mr. Blonde’s character is later vindicated when he arrives at the safe-house with a police officer whom he has taken hostage, and, in the most famous scene of the film, proceeds to gleefully torture while singing and dancing to the tune of *Stuck in the Middle With You*. Before he doing so, Mr. Blonde says to the police officer that he doesn’t care “what you know or don’t know. But I’m gonna torture you anyway, regardless. Not to get information. It’s amusing to me to torture a cop.”

It seems plausible that there are two distinct types of moral vice on display here. On the one hand, Mr. White and Mr. Pink value their self-interest above anything else, to the extent that they are prepared to steal and to kill purely in order to meet this end. In doing so, they seem to possess a number of vices associated with a wholly self-centred worldview (e.g. cold indifference to suffering, injustice, greed, conceit). By contrast, Mr. Blonde's motives and dispositions seem to be of a fundamentally different kind. He is not *indifferent* to the wellbeing of others, but rather takes the suffering and woe of others to be a source of pleasure. Their pain is the *end* which his actions aim to meet, even to the extent that doing so is often in conflict with his own self-interest. Mr. Blonde does not seem to be merely selfish and uncaring; he possesses the vice of *malice*.

In the history of western ethics, the nature of malice—and moral vice more broadly—is comparatively under-explored by philosophers. An exception to this trend is Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer dedicated significant portions of his magnum opus *The World as Will and Representation* (*WWR*), as well as his 1840 essay *On the Basis of Morality* (*OBM*), to the explicit study of the fundamental roots of vice. There, we find Schopenhauer defending a moral psychology comprised of three chief incentives [*Triebfedern*], present in varying degrees in all human beings: (1) Compassion [*Mitleid*], the desire for another's wellbeing; (2) Egoism [*Egoismus*], the desire for one's own wellbeing; and (3) Malice [*Bosheit*], the desire for the misfortune of another.[i] The latter two incentives are the fundamental roots of moral vice, and their conceptual distinction is what grounds Schopenhauer's sensitivity to the kind of intuitive ethical classifications in the example above. He writes that while *egoism* "can lead to crimes and misdeeds of all kinds"—e.g. Mr. White's and Mr. Pink's robberies and killings—"the harm and pain of others that is thereby caused is merely a means for egoism, not an end, and thus occurs only accidentally." But in the case of *malice* "the sufferings and pains of others are an end in themselves and achieving them is a pleasure" (e.g. Mr. Blonde's killings). It is for this reason, Schopenhauer argues (controversially, as we shall see), that malice is not only of a psychologically different class, but is *morally worse* than egoism: it "constitute[s] moral badness raised to a higher power" (*OBM* 194/*Werke*, 4:200). This is

why we intuitively differentiate between Mr. Blonde and the rest of his crew: he manifests the *pinnacle* of evil.

While egoism has received considerable analysis in the history of philosophy, both as a psychological thesis and a normative thesis, Schopenhauer is somewhat unique in his sustained critical consideration of the nature, extent, phenomenology, and possible manifestations of malice in human conduct. Nevertheless, although there has been growing attention to Schopenhauer's moral philosophy and especially his examination of compassion in recent years,[ii] his investigation into the vices associated with malice remain a well of insight relatively untapped in Schopenhauer scholarship. This is all the more surprising given that Schopenhauer's own methodology reflects the importance he places on the study of malice and its associated vices. Far from an after-thought or a loose-end to address once a unified account of moral virtue has been established, Schopenhauer *begins* with a systematic study of moral vice and its pervasive presence in the human psyche, at least partly as a means of demonstrating "how hard the problem is of discovering an incentive that could move a human being to a way of acting opposed to all those inclinations that are deeply rooted in his nature" (*OBM* 194/*Werke*, 4:201).

In contrast to some commentators who have claimed that Schopenhauer "says very little about malice,"[iii] the aim of this paper is to elucidate and disentangle what I argue is a nuanced and multifaceted conception of malice in the network of his moral psychology. Given that this will be the first sustained critical analysis focusing on Schopenhauer's conception of malice, my task will necessarily be partly synoptic. Nevertheless, the paper also seeks to bring out some interpretative puzzles, as well as to offer some solutions. My central thesis is that Schopenhauer defends a unified and hierarchical account of moral vice which maintains the integrity of the distinction between egoism and malice, and that this position is both historically and philosophically significant. Moreover, it will be argued that many widespread beliefs about malicious persons are captured by his (in some ways) idiosyncratic conceptual framework. For example, I will show that Schopenhauer's account of the human agent as a fundamentally ceaseless striving or 'will', and that

this striving is the source of suffering, provides him with the means to explain the propensity toward malice in terms of the agent's own mental anguish. This account puts an interesting new spin on an ancient view, well-attested to by Plato, that vice and unhappiness are intimately connected, and that people are moved to malicious actions when they are themselves tormented by suffering.

2. Malice and Egoism: A Difference in Kind

Our first task is to map out Schopenhauer's conception of malice in more fine-grained detail. A suitable way to begin is by way of contrast with egoism. Schopenhauer holds egoism—that is, the motive of self-preservation and personal wellbeing—to be the "chief and fundamental incentive" (*OBM* 190/*Werke*, 4:196) in humans and non-human animals, and the "natural perspective" which is "essential to everything in nature" (*WWR*, 1:358/*Werke*, 2:392). In line with his broader metaphysical characterisation of the world's essence in terms of an ever-striving and blind 'will', each phenomenal manifestation of this will as an apparent 'individual' finds itself to be a "microcosm equal in value to the macrocosm" (*WWR*, 1:358/*Werke*, 2:392). Egoism is not only ubiquitous in nature as the default perspective for sentiment life, but it is also the dominant incentive: "Egoism is colossal: it towers above the world. For if the choice were given to any individual between his own destruction and that of the world, I do not need to say where it would land in the great majority" (*OBM* 190/*Werke*, 4:197).

It is from the root of egoism that Schopenhauer takes an associated cluster of vices to be derived, including "greed, gluttony, lust, self-interest, meanness, covetousness, injustice, hard-heartedness, pride, haughtiness etc" (*OBM* 194/*Werke*, 4:201). These vices can manifest in different actions and in varying degrees: "we see [egoism] everywhere before our eyes, in matters both great and small; sometimes we see it in its terrible aspect, in the lives of great tyrants and villains and in wars that devastate the world, and sometimes in its ridiculous aspect, where it is the subject of comedy and is particularly evident in self-conceit and vanity" (*WWR*, 1:359/*Werke*, 2:392–93). In his analysis of the pervasiveness and moral vacuity of egoistic actions, Schopenhauer does not differ much from

the likes of Hobbes, La Rochefoucauld, and numerous others — a fact Schopenhauer recognizes (*WWR*, 1:359/*Werke*, 2:393). However, where he does differ is in the principled distinctions he aims to draw between these types of vice and those derived from the related, but importantly different incentive of malice.

Whereas the egoistic person aims at their own wellbeing, and can even "completely ruin another person's happiness or life in order to increase his own well-being by some insignificant amount," the malicious person aims at the suffering of another: he or she "quite disinterestedly [*ganz uneigennützig*] tries to hurt and harm others in the absence of any personal advantage" (*WWR*, 1:359/*Werke*, 2:393).[iv] To return to the example from *Reservoir Dogs*, Mr. White and Mr. Pink are prepared to harm others if it is perceived as a necessary means to their self-preservation or wellbeing. They don't get anything out of such harm, and may even regret it, but it does not significantly stand in the way of what they want to achieve. Mr. Blonde, however, acts *for the sake* of the harm his victims endure, even if it risks his own preservation. For him, "sufferings and pains of others are an end in themselves and achieving them is a pleasure" (*OBM* 194/*Werke*, 4:200). Schopenhauer sums up the two dispositions' difference by assigning them respective essential maxims: "The maxim of the most extreme egoism is: 'Help no one; rather harm everyone if it brings you advantage'…The maxim of malice is: 'Harm everyone to the extent that you can'" (*OBM* 194/*Werke*, 4:200).

One might be tempted to suggest that because malicious persons get something out of their actions—i.e. pleasure—that this is really just a form of egoism after all. However, this seems to presuppose too crude a conception of egoism. The issue here essentially shares the form of the classic attempt to reduce all altruistic acts to self-interested motives, according to which any pleasure accrued in helping others is postulated as the ultimate *motive* for the act. As has been often pointed out since Joseph Butler's famous critique of psychological egoism, however, in order to experience pleasure in helping others one must as a precondition genuinely care about the wellbeing of the other, after which the pleasure in helping them is better understood as a *byproduct* of the act,

not the fundamental aim of it. In the correlative case of malice, one must genuinely have a prior interest in the subjective state of another—namely: their suffering—in order to subsequently feel an after-effect of pleasure in causing them harm, and this is what distinguishes them from the mere egoist. More will be said on this point in section 6.

As with egoism, Schopenhauer postulates a cluster of specific vices derived from the root of malice: "malevolence, envy, ill-will…schadenfreude, prying curiosity, calumny, insolence, petulance, hatred, anger, treachery, guile, vengefulness, cruelty etc" (*OBM* 194/*Werke*, 4:201). Since Schopenhauer considers malice to be the root of Schadenfreude—joy in witnessing the suffering of others (more about which will be said in section 4)—this demonstrates that malice need not be pleasure in *being-the-one-to-cause* harm, but can be pleasure in harm to others more broadly. Again, Schopenhauer is attentive to the subtle ways that vices such as Schadenfreude, as well as others derived form malice, can manifest, and in varying grades: "The same ground of malice can express itself in *one* people in the crude characteristics of murder and cannibalism, and in *another* subtly and softly, in miniature, through court intrigues, tyrannies and petty cabals of all sorts: the essence is the same (*WWR*, 1:396/*Werke*, 2:436).

Schopenhauer appears to postulate two explanations for this which ought to be more explicitly distinguished. First, he postulates a *spectrum* of malice. At the one, relatively benign end, there are traces of malice in habits of insolence, carping criticism of others (especially of a moral kind), and even mild ridicule and poking fun: "Even our very frequent gratuitous teasing and practical joking stems from this source" (*PP*, 2:195/*Werke*, 6:228). At the other, more overtly wicked end, there is outright cruelty [*Grausamkeit*], which for Schopenhauer is the maximal expression of malice. This would include the viciousness expressed through torture, murder, bloodsports, sabotage, and so on: the "genuine cruelty, the thirst for blood that is so often seen in history, in the Neros and the Domitians, in the African Deys, in Robespierre, etc." (*WWR*, 1:391/*Werke*, 2:430).

The second explanation for the variety of manifestations of malice, Schopenhauer argues, concerns not the differing degrees of the motive present in different characters, but rather the

conditions which may or may not allow its full expression. He often emphasizes the irrelevance of external circumstances in appraising character, holding that what prevents more of the tremendous harm we usually associate with malicious acts is not so much an absence of the motive, but the circumstances malicious people find themselves in. Some, like Nero, for example, had the resources to easily inflict great harm, while others are restricted by a lack of opportunity, physical or intellectual weakness, fear of reprisal, practical and material obstacles, and so forth. As Schopenhauer put this point:

> Accompanying the limitless egoism of our nature, however, is yet another supply of hatred, anger, envy, rancour and malice, more or less present in every human breast, stored up like the poison in the snake's fang and waiting only for the opportunity to unleash itself, in order to then rant and rave like an unchained demon. If no great occasion can be found for this, then ultimately he will use the smallest, insofar as he magnifies it with his imagination (*PP*, 2:194/*Werke*, 6:227)

So it is both (a) the spectrum of malice, and (b) its malleability to different circumstances, which underpin Schopenhauer's view as to malice's breadth of expression, and why malice cannot be dismissed as a rare, psychological peculiarity.

Schopenhauer's texts are littered with penetrative analyses across the entire spectrum of malice. His diagnostic finesse—especially in uncovering the nuances of malice lurking under the surface of the more routine human interactions, etiquette, rituals, and institutional norms—is comparable to its more famous association with Nietzsche. In a great many cases, this type of analysis is no easy feat. Schopenhauer appears to entertain at least three types of epistemic limits that explain why.

First, there are significant limits to determining the operation and degree of each moral incentive in both the actions others take and even those we take ourselves (*OBM* 196/*Werke*, 4:203). While not endorsing a total scepticism about the knowledge of one's own motives, and the motives of others—a position which Schopenhauer recognizes would collapse much of the project of ethics (*OBM* 196-197/*Werke*, 4:204)—he does accept a notable degree of psychological opacity that

requires sensitivity, adroitness, and experience if chameleon-like motives such as malice (and egoism) are to be accurately detected.

Second, humans suffer from confirmation biases which can obscure the real operation and degree of incentives that constitute another's character. Passions such as love and hatred prejudice our judgements and evaluations, often to the extent that "we see nothing but faults in our enemies and merit in our loved ones, whose very flaws seem lovable to us" (*WWR*, 2:229/*Werke*, 3:244). In all matters, including judgements of others' character, a "set and accepted hypothesis gives us hawks' eyes for anything that confirms it, and blinds us to anything that contradicts it" (*WWR*, 2:229/*Werke*, 3:244).[v]

Lastly, malicious motives are often hidden behind explicitly moral platitudes and ethical decoration. The more subtle forms of malice might be expressed through a professed sense of justice as an excuse to destroy the reputation of an established enemy, or perhaps just for the pleasure of witnessing and/or causing the downfall of someone in a (typically greater) position of power.[vi] 'Witch-hunts' and 'moral crusades' of this form are no-doubt amplified in the contemporary domain by social media, but Schopenhauer was keenly aware of the broader phenomenon of how "prudence and politeness cast their cloak" over ill-will [*Uebelwollen*] and spitefulness [*Gehässigkeit*], making malice often difficult to identify (*OBM* 192/*Werke*, 4:199).

3. Malice as Pervasive and Innate: Against the Pathological Abnormality Reading

The last section indicated that Schopenhauer distinctively takes malice to in fact be a common feature of human life,[vii] even if its manifestations at the extreme end of its spectrum are atypical. Malice—like the other two moral incentives of egoism and compassion—is, for Schopenhauer, present in everyone in some degree (*OBM* 194/*Werke*, 4:201; *PP*, 2:194/*Werke*, 6:227). Furthermore, as we have just seen, Schopenhauer takes malice to be expressed in a variety of ways, due to the degree of the motive present in an individual's character, and/or external circumstances.

But Schopenhauer also goes on to stress the particularly *human* nature of malice, claiming that "No animal ever tortures merely to torture, but mankind does this and this constitutes the *devilish* character that is far more wicked than the merely animal," thus, concurring with Arthur de Gobineau's dictum that mankind is "the evil animal *par excellence*" (*PP*, 2:195/*Werke*, 6:228).[viii] As anyone with cats may observe, this claim may well be false if interpreted as holding that *only* humans can be malicious. But it may be plausible if interpreted in terms of the degree of malice, given the presence of comparatively complex cognitive apparatus in the human psyche. This will become clearer in later sections of the paper.

It follows from Schopenhauer's broader conception of character that malice, like all dispositions, is innate: "the difference of characters is inborn and ineradicable. The malicious man's malice is born in him as the venomous teeth and venom sac are in the snake; and he can alter it no more than the snake" (*OBM* 235/*Werke*, 4:249).[ix] This does not mean that patterns of behaviour cannot be changed at all. On the contrary, this can be done with improved instrumental reasoning and greater self-knowledge about one's proclivities and their intensities.[x] Nevertheless, this type of behavioural change will have limits: "One can show the egoist that by giving up small advantages he will attain greater ones; or the malicious man that causing someone else's sufferings will bring greater sufferings upon himself. But one will not persuade the egoism itself, the malice itself, out of anyone – any more than one can persuade the partiality to mice out of a cat" (*OBM* 240/*Werke*, 4:255).

It is precisely the *pervasiveness* and *innateness* of malice that together underlie part of Schopenhauer's broadly Hobbesian justification for the state (*OBM* 188/*Werke*, 4:194; see also *WWR*, 2:593/*Werke*, 3:663).[xi] Whether Schopenhauer's political commitments can be justified on the basis of his moral psychology is the subject for another paper. But it is worth situating Schopenhauer's empirical claims about malice in the context of a traditional debate in contemporary psychology surrounding its potentially pathological status.

After the extent of the horrors of the Second World War had become apparent, there was understandable interest in the question of what drove multiple people to commit such atrocities.

How could we explain the unspeakably cruel acts of Waffen-SS Obersturmführer Oskar Dirlewanger, for instance? Dirlewanger commanded a battalion of SS soldiers largely comprised of convicted criminals—mostly poachers who could help hunt partisan resistance groups—who, at Dirlewanger's command, systematically extorted, embezzled, raped, and committed wanton acts of violence against civilian populations across much of Eastern Europe during the course of the war. Dirlewanger participated in the Wola massacre of 1944, in which 40,000–50,000 polish men, women, and children were slaughtered, most of them over the course of only two days. Even before the war, Dirlewanger was a known violent drunk and child molester. As one historian has commented: "in all the theatres of the Second World War, few could compete in cruelty with Dirlewanger."[xii]

Building on elements of 'degeneration' theories of criminal behaviour from the 19th century, some who studied Nazi war criminals and were involved in the Nuremberg trials were inclined to think that such (seemingly) uniquely wicked acts must derive from something psycho-pathological, and may perhaps be the result of brain trauma or abnormality. In line with an "established medical tradition" that "links malice to brain injury,"[xiii] this neurological perspective was exactly the one taken to assess the actions of Robert Ley immediately prior to the Nuremberg trials. Ley was head of the German Labour Front from 1933–1945, and in this role procured mass slave labour and organized the assassination of labour union leaders. After his suicide, Ley's brain was examined for damage to the frontal lobes—thought to be crucial for the faculties of empathy—in an attempt to explain his behaviour, though with inconclusive results.[xiv] This psycho-pathological reading of malice is tempting in the case of the most vicious of crimes, perhaps because they are indeed rare (*PP*, 2:192–93/*Werke*, 6:225). Consider again, for example, Mr. White and Mr. Pink's astonished reaction to the actions of Mr. Blonde, whom they describe as "insane," a "madman" and a "psycho." The psycho-pathological reading may also be the more comfortable theory to believe: most people aren't capable of such cruelty, it is only really these rare and damaged exceptions, and so the nobility of human nature is preserved.

By contrast, Schopenhauer appears to resist the psycho-pathologising of malice as a medical abnormality, instead advocating an alternative position according to which malice is a common and natural component of human psychology that, under the right circumstances, will manifest in a degree relative to the varying intensity of the motive in a person's character. For Schopenhauer, malice—which he identifies with 'radical evil'—is built into the underlying structure of the human psyche, and "at the heart of every person, only waiting for the opportunity to rant and rave" (*PP*, 2:195/*Werke*, 6:228).[xv] Schopenhauer vindicates this view via his metaphysics of the will, which we shall come to in section 6. But for now, it is illuminating to see how his view of malice occupies an interesting middle ground in the debate. Schopenhauer stands in opposition to the psycho-pathological view of moral evil as an uncommon disorder, but also in opposition to the view of moral evil as lacking any distinctive psychological feature, instead being at least in large part defined in terms of outcome (i.e. harm caused), and a product of a variety of possible motives. A version of the latter view is epitomized in Hannah Arendt's description of the 'banality of evil,'[xvi] according to which evil *acts* can be committed by regular people, without those people necessarily having evil *intentions*. Contrary to our tendency to consider evil persons as sadistic villains wholly alien to the average Joe, on Arendt's view dutiful obedience to entrenched principles of conduct, as well as an inability or unwillingness to empathize with the perspectives of others, routinely leads bland and unexceptional bureaucrats to commit heinous crimes with unperturbed proficiency.

Schopenhauer's own account reflects Arendt's claim as to the capacity of ordinary people to commit horrific acts. Both Arendt and Schopenhauer would be unsurprised by the historian George Kren's and psychologist Leon Rappoport's conclusion pertaining to the psychology of Nazi war criminals like Dirlewanger: that "the overwhelming majority of SS men, leaders as well as rank and file, would have easily passed all the psychiatric tests ordinarily given American army recruits or Kansas City policemen."[xvii] Nevertheless, Schopenhauer sharply diverges from the banality thesis' rooting of evil acts in thoughtlessness. The *intention* to cause harm for the sake of it—even if this ordinarily manifests in relatively benign forms (e.g. practical jokes, teasing)—is *solely* what

informs his conception of "the human being" as "at bottom a wild, horrible animal" (*PP*, 2:192/*Werke*, 6:225). Recall his claim that the relative rarity of the more virulent manifestations of malice is often simply to do with mere circumstance: "the spitefulness of our nature would perhaps make everyone into a murderer eventually if it were not endowed with a proper dose of fear to hold it at bay" (*PP*, 2:196/*Werke*, 6:229). For Schopenhauer, then, malice is neither a pathological abnormality nor banal: it is ubiquitous in human nature, in varying degrees, with its most harmful forms often contained only by fear of punishment.

Because of their shocking nature, let alone their frequent association with psycho-pathological traits, it may be tempting to characterize the most extreme acts of malice as merely impulsive and therefore intrinsically irrational. While Schopenhauer can hold that many instances of malice could be plausibly characterized this way, he claims that malice is not necessarily irrational in the sense that such acts are always un-calculated lashings-out or involve poor means-end reasoning. On the contrary, he claims that "malice is perfectly compatible with reason, and in fact only really becomes terrible in conjunction with it" (*WWR*, 1:546/*Werke*, 2:612). Sound practical reason will enable malicious characters to maximize the aggregate harm they can cause over longer periods of time and/or in intensity.

4. From Egoism to Malice: The Proximity of Evil

So far we have brought to light Schopenhauer's reasons for holding egoistic actions and malicious actions to be different in kind, and that the latter are pervasive and innate. Despite holding this view, Schopenhauer nevertheless acknowledges that both egoism and malice appear to stem from the same type of perspective, according to which one considers oneself a distinct individual inhabiting a world populated with other distinct individuals. They both "show the magnitude of the *distinction* we make *between ourselves and others*" (*OBM* 242/*Werke*, 4:257).[xviii] For Schopenhauer, this outlook embodies a cognitive error: that of failing to recognize the common underlying essence of everything as 'Will', and maintaining the illusion of individuality that

constitutes merely the phenomenal world of appearances. The deeper metaphysical unity of all things—a comprehension of which is followed by a collapse of the 'self and other' distinction—is, for the egoist and malicious agent, still obscured. He sometimes draws this similarity in stronger terms. For example: "hatred and malice are *conditioned by* egoism and that these are based on cognition caught up in the *principium individuationis*" (*WWR*, 1:405/*Werke* 2:447 - emphasis mine). Note that one does not need to accept Schopenhauer's brand of transcendental idealism to grasp the core claim here. Schopenhauer's idiosyncratic metaphysical framework entails that the malicious person and the egoistic person share a common *epistemic* defect. But the idea can be retained in more neutral terms as a *moral* defect: the malicious person and the egoistic person both fail to recognize the interests of others as carrying any significant normative weight, where this can be cashed out in various ways.

The fact that egoism and malice "stem from a *single* root" (*WWR*, 2:625/*Werke*, 3:700) is the reason why Schopenhauer believes intense self-concern to tread very closely to malice, with the former disposition being easily capable of morphing into the latter. As an indicative example, Schopenhauer considers the types of "satisfaction or pleasure" that can be experienced in "the sight or description of other people's suffering" (*WWR*, 1:346/*Werke*, 2:377). He quotes the second book of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*:

> It is a joy to stand at the sea, when it is lashed by stormy winds,
> To stand at the shore and to see the skipper in distress,
> Not that we like to see another person in pain,
> But because it pleases us to know that we are free of this evil.

While Schopenhauer agrees that pleasure can be experienced in this way, he thinks that there is only a subtle difference between the pleasure in knowing one is *free* from a certain kind of suffering that one witnesses—call this 'contrastive pleasure'—and pleasure *in* the suffering that one witnesses. The latter is the phenomenon of "Schadenfreude," which Schopenhauer describes as "simply theoretical cruelty" (*OBM* 194/*Werke,* 4:200). As he goes on to say of contrastive pleasure: "this

type of pleasure, through such indirect recognition of our well-being, lies very near the source of true and positive malice" (*WWR*, 1:346/*Werke*, 2:377). It is seemingly for this reason, as he puts it elsewhere, that "the burning egoism that fills all beings…often transforms into malice" (*OBM* 231/*Werke*, 4:245);[xix] — a point to which I shall return in section 6.

But there may be better contemporary examples to support Schopenhauer's point about the alleged fine line between Schadenfreude and contrastive pleasure. One is the case of reality TV shows that parade the desperation and vulnerability of individuals in various ways, and gameshows involving embarrassing and often painful tasks given to contestants in competition for prizes. Such forms of entertainment have been hugely popular in a variety of countries, for instance: *Takeshi's Castle* (Japan); *Fear Factor*, (USA); *Big Brother* and *I'm a Celebrity…Get Me Out of Here!* (UK).[xx] The different types of pain the contestants put themselves through is intended to be funny for the audience at home. However, it is not clear whether the pleasure derived by the audience is decisively explained in terms of contrastive pleasure (i.e. 'boy, I'm glad that's not me!'), or in terms of Schadenfreude (i.e. pleasure in witnessing the humiliation and degradation of others). Following Schopenhauer, one might suspect that this uncertainty indicates that the two forms of pleasure under consideration are indeed uncomfortably close to one another.[xxi]

5. What Makes Malice the Greatest Moral Evil?

The fact that the malicious person and the egoistic person share a common epistemic defect—i.e. maintaining a sharp distinction between oneself, and of others—poses a potential problem for Schopenhauer's position insofar as he evidently wants to rank malice as *morally worse* than egoism. His ethics aspires to not only a *unified* account of vice anchored in the fundamental incentives of malice and egoism, but also a *hierarchal* account. He claims, for instance, that malice and its associated cluster of vices "constitute moral badness raised to a higher power" (*OBM* 194/*Werke*, 4:200).[xxii] But this looks difficult to establish purely on the standard interpretive basis of remaining stuck in the *principium individuationis*.[xxiii] Sandra Shapshay has made precisely this criticism,

writing that if the moral ranking of malice below egoism “depended on the lack of monistic-metaphysical insight, it would be hard to see why the malicious person would be the worse character, for *both the egoist and the malicious person lack this insight: They would, unlike the compassionate person, both fully accept the ontological distinction between individuals*.”[xxiv] Again, those unsympathetic to Schopenhauer’s metaphysical framework can express the problem in closely related terms: *both* the egoist and the malicious person think of others’ interests as lacking significant normative weight, and conceive of their own interests as wholly independent of others’.[xxv]

If this criticism is sound, Schopenhauer might be able to say that egoists have a fundamentally different character to malicious people, but he would not be able to say that malicious people are any *worse*, morally, than egoists. Given that Schopenhauer, as we have seen, is explicitly committed to a hierarchy of vice, there seem to be three options available from here:

(a) *deny* that malice is morally worse than egoism, and so Schopenhauer is wrong to attempt ranking them.

(b) *accept* that malice is morally worse than egoism, but that Schopenhauer *cannot* account for this.

(c) *accept* that malice is morally worse than egoism, and that Schopenhauer *can* account for this.

The problem with the first option, (a), is that it is highly counter-intuitive. We do seem to reserve our highest moral condemnation for acts of cruelty, where another’s suffering is the pleasurable end, even when no observable benefit to the agent is present. An enormous literature produced by distinct human cultures has operated with the intuitively ingrained distinction that Schopenhauer is attempting to philosophically capture. To return to the case with which we began, it does seem that while all crew members are morally at fault, there is something especially unsettling and repugnant about Mr. Blonde, to the extent that even Mr. White and Mr. Pink are outraged by his behaviour. A defender of (a) might try and account for this by holding that acts of malice only offer the

appearance of uniquely potent evil because such acts are rare, and our acute horror at them merely tracks the shock and surprise at something so atypical. However, we have already seen how malice is itself not a rare phenomenon for Schopenhauer. While malicious acts of the most extreme form—e.g. torture and murder—may be uncommon, subtler acts on the milder end of the spectrum of malice are routine. This matters for the following reason. Consider and compare an act of this kind done from an egoistic motive—for example: a lie about a co-worker to prevent their promotion—and the same act done from a malicious motive. I contend that even in these more common circumstances, the original intuition about the greater moral badness of malicious acts does not seem to diminish.

It seems that (a) is improbable, and that Schopenhauer is right to attempt to identify egoism and malice as conceptually *and* evaluatively distinct phenomena. The remaining choice, then, concerns whether Schopenhauer is entitled to this ranking within the boundaries of his philosophical framework. A natural place to start when defending Schopenhauer on this score is with his claim that malice, not egoism, is the "direct opposite of compassion" (*OBM* 215/*Werke*, 4:225). Malicious actions are, as Alistair Welchman has put it, "the *inverse* of compassionate actions" in their aims.[xxvi] Since compassion is the only source of moral worth, its opposite, the argument might go, will be the root of true immorality, and not mere egoism. To appreciate this claim, it is necessary to identify the *common* epistemic position that the malicious person and the compassionate person, paradoxically, share.

How could people who morally contrast as sharply as, say, Florence Nightingale and Caligula, have anything in common psychologically? Consider again the egoist: they act *in spite* of others' wellbeing when it is to their advantage, failing to assign any normative weight to other persons because they lack any interest in the other *as other*. But this lack of concern for the substantiality of others' experience is, crucially, completely alien to both the compassionate person *and* malicious person. In both cases, the hedonic state of the other is very important to them. The compassionate person is motivated to alleviate the suffering of the other, while the malicious person is motivated to

cause or exacerbate it: we know the latter by "the sign that is essential to them, their having the suffering of others as their end" (*OBM* 197/*Werke*, 4:204). In this respect, the malicious person is thought to be the pinnacle of moral perniciousness insofar as they don't just see others as mere things "lacking reality" (*WWR*, 1:390/*Werke*, 2:429), as the egoist does, but they take an interest in you *as you*, which requires a certain degree of cognitive empathy in comprehending your woe, and it is exactly this woe which motivates them to act in the ways they do. Because of the *diametrically opposed* nature of malicious dispositions and those dispositions at the fundamental root of moral worth (i.e. compassionate ones) despite their common recognition of otherness, Schopenhauer substantiates a ranking of vice.

The sense of 'otherness' under consideration here requires nuance if it is not to be too hastily dismissed as inconsistent. The compassionate person and the malicious person both recognize the *empirical* other as an individual with their own interests, but only the former transcends the ultimate illusion of individuality and possesses genuine *metaphysical insight* into the essential unity of all beings, if only intuitively.[xxvii] As Colin Marshall has pointed out, the malicious person is (ironically) in a *better* epistemic position than the egoist at the level of *empirical* existence insofar as they maintain "a commitment to others' reality" and do not see them as a mere 'thing.'[xxviii] But they are in a *worse* epistemic position than the egoist in so far as they maintain much stricter boundaries between persons at the most fundamental level:

> This *distinction* [between persons] is so great in the eyes of the malicious person, that to him someone else's suffering is immediately a pleasure, which he therefore seeks out without any further advantage of his own, indeed even contrary to it. The same *distinction* is still great enough in the eyes of the egoist that to gain a small advantage to himself he will use great harm to others as a means (*OBM* 249/*Werke*, 4:265; see also *WWR*, 2:621/*Werke*, 3:695)

To drive this point home, imagine a case where an egoist and a malicious agent are selected to participate in a version of the Milgram experiment. In this social experiment, participants are

instructed by an authority figure to administer what they believe are increasingly painful electric shocks to a 'learner' in another room. Both the egoist and the malicious agent follow instructions, but while the egoist does so because he doesn't care for the pain of the 'learner', the malicious agent does so precisely because he is enjoying that pain. However, unlike the egoist, finding out that the 'learner' was a paid actor and not in pain at all would presumably be a tremendous disappointment for the malicious agent.[xxix] This is precisely because the malicious agent maintains cognitive empathy—of a potentially highly sophisticated kind—in recognizing the other *as* an other with real subjective experiences; a point that has been recognized in contemporary studies of empathy.[xxx] In this respect, the compassionate person and the malicious person are remarkably close, perhaps uncomfortably so, in their deep orientation towards otherness; a feature alien to the egoist. In conjunction with the claim in section 3 that the most monstrous of malicious people need not be either 'inhuman' nor beyond the bounds of intelligibility, an interesting implication of the above is that compassionate persons are best placed to empathize with them and understand their reasoning. This would explain, in the *Reservoir Dogs* case, why egoists like Mr. White and Mr. Pink are completely unable to comprehend Mr. Blonde's actions, with Mr. Pink, for instance, asking in astonishment: "Could you believe, Mr. Blonde?!," to which Mr. White replies: "that was the most insane f****** thing I've ever seen."

It seems, then, that Schopenhauer has the means within his framework to legitimate the common intuition that malice is morally *worse* than egoism. This can be cashed out with or without his metaphysical monism. Florence Nightingale sees you as a common sufferer and is moved to help; Caligula sees you as sharply distinct (potential) sufferer and is moved by that status to cause you pain; the egoist sees you as an obstacle or tool at worst, and background clutter at best.

6. Malice as Born From Suffering

"cruelty is fed, not weakened, by tears" - Tacitus

The final aspects of Schopenhauer's examination of malice I wish to consider are his explanations of what moves people to malice, and the deeper phenomenology of malicious acts. There is a widespread view—expressed in a variety of folktales, myths, literature, and historical narratives from a number of distinct cultures across different periods, as well as in Plato's *Republic*—that malicious persons themselves are always, in some sense to be determined, (i) tortured by inner-suffering; and that (ii) this inner-suffering is essential to the explanation of why such persons commit malicious acts.

One example may be the character of Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*. On one reading, Iago is a Machiavellian schemer who enjoys causing pain, sabotaging Othello and bringing him to ruin, all while revelling in the suffering he brings about and his ability to do so. But Iago also suffers profoundly: he feels betrayed by his initial friend Othello in being overlooked for military promotion; he is intensely jealous of Othello and Casio in virtue of their greater nobility and magnanimity; he subsequently feels inadequate in relation to them; and he has a seemingly insatiable drive for power, propelling him to yearn for ever more. Or consider again the SS commander Oskar Dirlewanger. Dirlewanger committed unspeakable atrocities, not least ordering and partaking in mass executions in Eastern Europe, sometimes by firing squad, sometimes by locking his victims in barns and setting them on fire.[xxxi] Yet Dirlewanger was also crippled by the traumas of warfare. In WWI he was seriously wounded six times, and yet more times during WWII. He had unruly and perverse sexual interests, an impassioned character quick to violence and confrontation, as well as irrepressible alcoholism. One biographer has reflected that his trauma in WWI, for instance, was causally responsible for the tactics of "terror warfare" he deployed in later service, writing that "his amoral personality, with his alcoholism and his sadistic sexual orientation, was additionally shattered by the frontline experiences of the First World War and its frenzied violence and barbarism."[xxxii]

Schopenhauer clearly thinks that this widespread view of malicious characters gets something importantly right. He endorses the first claim, (i), in his generalisation that "the facial expressions

of highly evil people bear the stamp of inner-suffering: even if they achieve external happiness, people like this always look unhappy, except when they are caught in some momentary glee or are acting insincerely” (*WWR,* 1:390/*Werke*, 2:429). This conditional is important. In *Reservoir Dogs*, Mr. Blonde, for example, is always portrayed as cheery, carefree and jovial, as well as sadistic and cruel. Schopenhauer would insist that this appearance is superficial, and conceals a more complex psychological state.[xxxiii] The same passage goes on to justify what explains the correlation, suggesting that Schopenhauer not only is generally sympathetic to there being an intimate connection between malicious persons and their profound unhappiness, but that this is a causal relation: their malicious acts are a *product* of their inner-misery (i.e. the second claim, (ii), is true). He claims that their inner-misery “is absolutely and directly essential to them, and it ultimately gives rise to the selfless pleasure they experience in the suffering of others, a pleasure that is not a function of mere egoism; this is true *malice* and increases to the point of *cruelty*” (*WWR*, 1:390/*Werke*, 2:429).

It is important that claims (i) and (ii) are not conjectural or merely possible explanations for malicious acts, in Schopenhauer’s view. On the contrary, he offers the resources to provide a principled explanation for malice and inner-suffering being “inseparable” (*WWR*, 1:391/*Werke*, 2:429)—resources rooted in his broader conception of human (and all sentient) willing. Here is Schopenhauer’s most detailed explanation of the relation:

> in someone in whom the appearance of the will rises to the point of exceptional malice, there will necessarily arise an excess of inner suffering, eternal unrest, incurable pain. He will try indirectly to find the relief that is not accessible directly; to be specific, he will try to mitigate [*mildern*] his own sufferings through the sight of other people’s, which he also recognizes to be the expression of his own power. The suffering of others now becomes for him an end in itself, a sight that he glories in: and thus arises the appearance of genuine cruelty, the thirst for blood that is so often seen in history, in the Neros and the Domitians, in the African Deys, in Robespierre, etc. (*WWR*, 1:391/*Werke*, 2:430)

There are a number of independent claims in this passage to disentangle, which together constitute Schopenhauer's argument for both (i) and (ii). To best appreciate them, it is necessary to recall Schopenhauer's minimalist conception of sentient life as essentially just perpetual willing or striving [*Streben*] which tends toward's the preservation and promulgation of the species. The experience of the world for sentient creatures is merely an amalgamation of struggles, producing psychological tension and pressure [*Drang*] in the restless push-pull of (often conflicting) desires.

The first step in the argument for the essential relation between inner-suffering and malice, defended at various points in Schopenhauer's corpus, is that this willing/striving necessarily involves some degree of suffering [*Leiden*] in virtue of the painful lack [*Mangel*] that striving intrinsically seeks to satisfy. This is in addition to the subsequent pain of prolonged and thwarted striving typical of many endeavours. Moreover, that the more intense our willing, and the longer our striving goes unsatisfied, the more intense that suffering is. As Schopenhauer puts this with regard to the especially consuming degree of willing in malicious persons: "violent and profuse willing always entails violent and profuse suffering" (*WWR*, 1:390/*Werke*, 2:429), and "the more violent the will, the more glaring the appearance of its conflict, and consequently the greater the suffering" (*WWR*, 1:422/*Werke*, 2:468). But because sentient beings essentially are willing/striving, the *lack* of (sufficiently demanding) goals also causes a painful "empty longing" (*WWR*, 1:347/*Werke*, 2:379), where the entity's own essence becomes an "intolerable burden" to it (*WWR*, 1:338/*Werke*, 2:368). This phenomenon of boredom is, according to Schopenhauer, "certainly not an evil to be taken lightly." On the contrary, he claims that it will "ultimately etch lines of true despair onto a face" (*WWR*, 1:339/*Werke*, 2:369). Between the two poles of striving and boredom, then, the "fundamental tone" of sentient life, on Schopenhauer's view, is one of "anxiety and concern" (*WWR*, 1:400/*Werke*, 2:441), and a "terrible pressure of the will" (*WWR*, 1:220/*Werke*, 2:231).[xxxiv]

The second step in the argument is that experiencing suffering naturally produces a need to mitigate it, and that causing and/or witnessing the suffering of another happens to be an effective

means of doing so (at least temporarily). The pain of excessive striving is the best explanation for the "thirst for blood that is so often seen in history" (*WWR*, 1:391/*Werke*, 2:430), and, in the case of boredom, what provokes people to "pick a quarrel, hatch a plot, or get [themselves] involved in fraud and all sorts of depravities, only to put an end to the unbearable state of peace" (*PP*, 1:386/*Werke*, 5:469; *PP*, 2:264/*Werke*, 6:468–69).[xxxv] Before exploring this second claim in more detail, a previous objection threatens to resurface, and ought to be addressed head on.

Claiming that malicious acts are best explained in terms of a need to find relief from one's own suffering needs to be approached with care in the case of Schopenhauer's broader moral psychology, because it puts *prima facie* pressure on his explicit intention to keep egoism and malice conceptually distinct. For if cruelty to others is really about reducing one's *own* suffering, this cruelty looks ultimately instrumental to self-interest, and malice then looks less like a *sui generis* motive. It is exactly this concern that has led Julian Young to interpret malice, at least as it appears in *WWR*, as "an unobvious *species* of egoism."[xxxvi] Focusing on passage §65 quoted above, Young attempts to make sense of Schopenhauer's account of malicious persons having the woe of another as the 'final end' of their actions by restricting this talk of 'ends' only to events external to one's own psychology: "For the unhappy sadist, the pain of the other is an 'end in itself' in the sense that there is no further change *in the outer world* to which it is a means. The intended change, rather, is a purely internal one."[xxxvii] Young considers this a more plausible interpretation of Schopenhauer's claims because otherwise, he argues, *WWR*, 1 §65 leaves us with a glaring contradiction: that malicious people have the suffering of others as an 'end in itself' *and* that they ultimately act in ways that cause others' suffering *for the sake of* alleviating their own inner-pain. But the philosophical cost for this allegedly more consistent position is collapsing any strict malice/egoism distinction that Schopenhauer elsewhere commits himself to. On Young's view, the malicious person is just an extreme type of egoist, since their acts of cruelty are ultimately instrumental to the ('internal') end of minimising one's own pain. The pain of others is only an 'end in itself' relative to the 'outer world'.

However, there may be other plausible ways of thinking about the basis for malicious persons' acts which evade this cost. An initial attempt to do so may take an expressivist line: perhaps Schopenhauer holds not that malicious persons act *for the sake* of their minimising their own suffering, where others are merely seen as opportunities to meet this end, but rather that malicious acts *express* an excess of suffering. On this view, acts such as torture would be understood on a hydraulic model according to which the acts of violence against the victim are expressive of the deep inner-pain of the tormentor, which in being expressed is reduced. In crying, for example, one does not necessarily cry *in order to feel better*, even if crying does in fact have this effect. Rather, one cries *because one is in pain*, and as a result feels better. By analogy, on this account, X is tormented by excessive willing and this pain expresses itself causally in hurting others, which happens to sooth X. This has the benefit of explaining the intrinsic relationship Schopenhauer takes there to be between inner-suffering and malice, without postulating self-soothing as the *end* of malicious acts, which would appear egoistic. Moreover, the notion of expressiveness is surely central to Schopenhauer's view generally—the will expresses itself as representation in a multitude of ways—and so this conceptual framework is far from alien to his customary philosophical approach.

Nevertheless, this expressivist account of malice cannot be the whole story. First, merely expressive acts (such as crying) do not have ends at all, yet in the key passage from *WWR*, 1, §65 above, Schopenhauer uses language to describe the malicious person's psychological state that appears wholly teleological: he writes that they will "*try* indirectly to find the relief" from their suffering which "is not accessible directly; to be specific, he will *try* to mitigate his own sufferings through the sight of other people's" (*WWR*, 1: 391/*Werke*, 2:430 - emphasis mine). Admittedly, it is contentious how strongly Schopenhauer conceives of 'trying' as a conscious effort to attain a goal, for which others' suffering is a mere means. The word he uses for "try" in this passage is *sucht*, which may equally be translated as 'seeks' or 'looks for'. All of these translations may have a stronger or a weaker connotation of conscious teleological activity depending on the context, not to

mention the routine metaphorical usages of these terms (e.g. that 'it looks like it's trying to rain', or 'the ball is looking for the back of the net'). Nevertheless, resting a *wholly* expressivist reading entirely on this possibility offers a highly strained interpretation of passages which more naturally lend themselves to a teleological reading. Indeed, it is difficult to make sense of Schopenhauer's insistence on the nature of malice as 'disinterested'—i.e. as attaching intrinsic value to another's suffering—without the postulation of ends. A second problem for the wholly expressivist account is that the paradigmatic example given of an expressive act given above (i.e. crying) is not a suitable analogy for the case of malice. Crying is (typically) not under any volitional control, whereas cruelty (typically) is. This makes it harder to construe of malicious acts as not aiming at anything in particular, despite happening to produce a soothing effect.

Yet the expressivist approach has merits which, I believe, offer partial resources for a plausible account of malice as a *sui generis* motive, while retaining the claim that malicious acts are explained by inner-suffering. I propose the following: while acts of harm to others may start out as wholly expressive (i.e as lashings out) and can also be a means of satisfying an explicit aim to self-soothe (i.e. they are egoistic), such acts *become* truly malicious when the agent's inner-suffering both causes and just *happens* to be mitigated by harming others, but where the end of their action has evolved into the other's suffering *as such* — they come to see others' suffering as an intrinsically valuable goal. On this interpretation, malice remains a special case of the falsity of psychological egoism insofar as it is an interesting redeployment of Butler's defence of altruism we addressed in section 2: truly malicious persons have the other's suffering as their goal, the attainment of which happens to sooth their inner-misery as a *byproduct* in virtue of its expression.

In one passage from a later work which revisits the topic of malice, Schopenhauer does suggest such a view. In reaffirming his point that malice is explained by inner-suffering, the precise account now has a subtle but significant difference. He writes that "it is the will to life which, embittered more and more by the constant suffering of existence, seeks to alleviate its own agony by causing the agony of others. In this manner, however, it *eventually develops into* actual malice and cruelty"

(*PP*, 2:196/*Werke*, 6:229 - emphasis mine). One way of reading this version of the claim is that causing the agony of others can initially be a mere means of alleviating one's own pain, which remains egoistic. Nevertheless, this type of behaviour can easily *morph into* malice-proper, in which causing others' suffering is desired as an end in-itself, 'disinterestedly', whether it mitigates suffering or not. Note that we have already acknowledged in section 4 how Schopenhauer more generally holds that "egoism…often *transforms* into malice" (*OBM*: 231/*Werke,* 4:245 - emphasis mine), on account of their both stemming from the same kind of epistemic defect. The suggested case of the means to the mitigation of suffering (acts of harm) somehow *becoming* the end-in-itself for malicious persons would thus merely be a special instance of Schopenhauer's broader view. Unfortunately, Schopenhauer does not offer a detailed account of this specific transformation. Developing such an account in full is beyond the remit of this paper, but at least a part of such an account would likely involve the *habitual* nature of acts of harm to others gradually producing a taste for cruelty itself.

Nevertheless, what my suggested interpretation offers is a *developmental* and *hybrid* account of malice according to which malice-proper is (i) *partly* expressive of the agent's inner-suffering (i.e. their pain causes them to harm, which happens to sooth them); (ii) *partly* teleological in retaining an end, where this end has developed from a desire to sooth via the means of cruelty, into a desire for cruelty in-itself. Hence, this account speaks to Schopenhauer's claims that malicious acts are produced by inner-suffering and at least temporarily mitigate that inner-suffering, while preserving his distinction between malice and egoism. This is because while their suffering is the trigger for realising the pressure-valve which manifests in malicious acts, this only explains the mechanism for producing the physical act, and retains the end the malicious agent pursues as the other person's misery. For the purposes of clarity, this point might be made in Aristotelian terms: with egoistic acts, the agent's own pleasure (i.e. relief from suffering) is the final cause; with malicious acts, the agent's own pleasure (i.e. relief from suffering) is merely the efficient cause, expressed in the act of harming — the final cause is the other's pain.

Although somewhat reconstructive, this interpretation would have the benefits of offering a nuanced and plausible analysis of the different motivations for immoral behaviours; one not inconsistent with Schopenhauer's texts, while maintaining the integrity of his bifurcation of egoism and malice as fundamentally distinct motives.

7. Malice as Both Mitigating and Causing Inner-Suffering: a Fourfold Relation

The question of *how* malicious acts help to "mitigate [*mildern*]" the agent's own suffering is still open. I shall now argue that Schopenhauer appears to identify at least three ways that malicious acts can achieve this, and which ought to be disentangled. Moreover, that Schopenhauer also postulates a fourth relation between malice and inner-suffering which runs in the opposite direction: cruelty towards others nevertheless ends up *producing* inner-suffering of a different kind entirely — the pain of guilt. Let us consider each in turn.

One of the ways Schopenhauer thinks causing another's suffering can mitigate one's own suffering is grounded in the general and plausible psychological principle that "the sight of other people's suffering alleviates our own" (*WWR*, 1:391/*Werke*, 2:430).[xxxviii] This may be because conceiving of our suffering as 'unexceptional' may smother a tendency to otherwise despair at the 'unfairness' of what is perceived as our own unique misery. Alternatively, it may be because in causing or witnessing another's *greater* suffering makes one realize how much worse one's position could relatively be. Whichever way the principle is cashed out, when the malicious person who is tortured by "the extremes of a violent will" (*WWR*, 1:391/*Werke*, 2:431)—e.g. a Mr. Blonde, a Dirlewanger, or an Iago—commits acts intent on harming others' as an end, it is by way of comparison that he consequently "mitigate[s] his own sufferings through the sight of other people's" (*WWR*, 1:391/*Werke*, 2:430).

A second (and generally less acknowledged) way that *WWR*, 1, §65 suggests malicious acts can mitigate one's own suffering is in how one recognizes the specific *causing* of another's suffering "to be the expression of his own power [*Macht*]" (*WWR*, 1:391/*Werke*, 2:430). In overpowering

another—physically or mentally—one becomes conscious of one's own causal efficacy.[xxxix] Overcoming resistance to one's will may not always require relishing in the suffering of the overpowered; agents can experience their successful agency in this way whereby the overpowered is a mere means to that end. Indeed, this kind of experience may not even require interaction with a sentient subject at all — weightlifting or striking a punching bag can produce pleasurable feelings of causal efficacy. However, the types of cases Schopenhauer has in mind can plausibly take a malicious form, whereby the suffering of the overpowered is not merely instrumental but *constitutive* of the pleasure in the use of one's powers. The audience member who asks a penetrating and stifling question to the speaker in a Q&A, for example, may feel pleasure purely in an awareness of their intellectual superiority in that moment. But it is equally plausible that the audience member could take pleasure in the fact that the speaker feels painfully embarrassed, self-conscious, and humiliated in not being able to respond to the question, and *having caused* this pain to the speaker is part of what explains the audience member's pleasurable feeling of power.

This may well be a reasonable as an account of some human motivations, but it is curious as a view endorsed by Schopenhauer insofar as it is *prima facie* at odds with his official view as to the negativity of pleasure (i.e. that pleasure is only ever experienced as a *relief* from pain: see *WWR*, 1:345-46/*Werke*, 2:376–78; *WWR*, 2:590/*Werke*, 3:659–60). Unlike the first way that malicious acts can mitigate suffering—by way of comparison of one's own with others'—pleasure in an awareness of one's powers looks to be a positive pleasure, that is to say: a pleasure not constituted by the cessation of a pre-existing pain. In at least two other passages, Schopenhauer appears to again acknowledge this type of pleasure, lending support to the form of malice-as-mitigation-of-suffering presently being considered. For example, although speaking of *Kräfte* rather than *Macht*, he writes that "there is really no other pleasure than the use and feeling of our own powers" (*WWR*, 1:332/*Werke*, 2:360), and later develops the point explicitly:

> making, producing something, be it a basket or a book; seeing a work of our own hands grow daily and finally reach its completion makes us immediately happy. . .To labour and

> fight against resistance is a human need, as digging is for moles. The stagnation produced by the contentment of a lasting pleasure would be unbearable to us. Overcoming obstacles means the full enjoyment of our existence. . .struggling with them and winning makes us happy (*PP*, 1:386/*Werke*, 5:468)

There may be ways of reconciling this view with Schopenhauer's official position on the negativity of pleasure.[xl] But of present concern is that this proposed link between malicious acts and a pleasurable feeling of power is, it would seem, an interesting form of self-soothing by way of *distraction*. One suffers from a tormenting involuntary propulsion towards a variety of ends, and causing another to suffer makes one pleasurably conscious of one's powers, and the vulnerability of the other to one's whims. This pleasure soothes the malicious agent insofar as it is a temporary interruption of a pattern of misery grounded in uncontrollable and acute willing.

Elsewhere, Schopenhauer appears to acknowledge a third possible relation between malice and inner-suffering in terms of the latter's mitigation. He explicitly recognizes the ability of *suppressed* willing to produce a more nuanced type of psychological torment through (a form of) resentment. Taking "malicious slander" as a common manifestation of the motive, he writes that malice "becomes fully visible in outbursts of anger which are for the most part many times in excess of what provokes them," and that they "could not come forth so strongly had they not, like gunpowder in the rifle, been compressed as long-harboured hatred brooding on the inside" (*OBM* 192–93/*Werke*, 4:199). The pleasure in malice, in this case, would be in the *release* of bottled-up and frustrated desires for revenge which cannot immediately manifest, and may not need to be directed at the guilty culprit (*PP*, 2:526–27/*Werke*, 6:623-24; *WWR*, 1:391/*Werke*, 2:431).

Earlier we noted that, on Schopenhauer's view, malicious persons are those that suffer deeply on the inside as a result of an unruly and/or suppressed will, and that this suffering is what provokes them to harm others, which happens to self-soothe, *at least temporarily*. This temporal qualifier is important because Schopenhauer also recognizes a fourth relation between malice and inner-suffering worth acknowledging. This form of inner-suffering does not explain *why* people act

maliciously, but instead arises after the fact. This is a "completely different and distinctive pain" (*WWR*, 1:392/*Werke*, 2:431) associated with malice. It is a pain expressive of the "*pang of conscience*" (*WWR*, 1:392/*Werke*, 2:431): even the most evil person will suffer from remorse in moments after their deeds. As with the case of joyful cruelty discussed earlier,[xli] Schopenhauer probably overreaches here. His point is perhaps most plausibly rendered as an empirical claim about a frequent state of affairs, rather than a conceptual claim. Not only is an intrinsic relation between malicious acts and remorse difficult to verify, but there is positive evidence against it in cases of psychopathic personality disorders. Nevertheless, the claim is still a bold one: Schopenhauer is adamant that seemingly remorseless sadists—Mr. Blonde, Iago, Dirlewanger, and so on—will typically have periods of private, torturous guilt as a result of their malicious acts.

Schopenhauer's explanation of why this is typically the case is both interesting for its own sake and distinctive in the history of western philosophy. This painful sting of conscience is, he claims, an approximation of a genuine metaphysical insight. However much a person sees "his own person as utterly distinct and separated from everyone else by a wide gulf," conscience suggests a deep suspicion that our distinctiveness is ultimately illusory, and thus that the "evil person" is "not only the tormenter but the tormented as well." When the facade of individuality periodically dissolves, the malicious agent "must pay for pleasure with misery, and all the suffering that he considered only as a possibility, in fact concerns *him*" (*WWR*, 1:392/*Werke*, 2:432). There is pain, here, not only in the quasi-mystical insight that the object of one's malice shares one's same underlying essence, but also in the subsequent recognition that one is completely chained by the will—the cause of one's suffering—and remains stuck in the illusory nothingness of empirical reality:

> In the violence with which the evil person affirms life, a violence that presents itself to him in the suffering he imposes on others, he estimates how far he is from abandoning and negating that very will, which is the only possible redemption from the world and its miseries. He sees the extent to which he belongs to the world, and how tightly he is bound

up with it: his *recognition* of the sufferings of others was not able to move him: he is cast into life and the *feeling* of suffering (*WWR*, 1:394/*Werke*, 2:433–34)[xlii]

Again, while much of this claim is elucidated within the framework of Schopenhauer's metaphysics and his highly contentious account of eternal justice [*ewige Gerechtigkeit*] (see *WWR,* 1:377–84/*Werke*, 2:414–21), it need not be. The key points can be retained independently of his metaphysics. First, that malicious persons typically suffer not only from the force of their willing, but also from the remorse—no matter how sparse—in carrying out harmful actions, and this could be grounded in the fact that others' interests and moral value are not so sharply distinct from one's own. The malicious person realizes that his agony and "the agony of those he has oppressed" are "so closely entwined" (*WWR*, 1:393/*Werke*, 2:432). Second, the malicious person is aware, on some level, of their greater distance to psychological peace compared with those who don't desire others' suffering. A mere egoist can have a more tolerable, relatively quiet life with some luck in circumstances and solitude, but a malicious person needs someone else to make suffer, and will always additionally face the resistance of that someone.

This section has identified a fourfold relation that Schopenhauer holds between malicious agents and their inner-suffering; three of which are intended to explain why people are *moved* to acts of malice in terms of mitigating the agent's own suffering, and the remaining relation is intended to explain a typical *result* of malicious acts for those that perform them. A key lesson from this analysis is that for Schopenhauer, while malice is a common phenomenon when considered across its entire spectrum (see section 2), there is a distinct sense in which he nevertheless considers it to be an *extreme* condition. It is one in which an excessive pressure to strive—"the extremes of a violent will" (*WWR*, 1:391/*Werke*, 2:431)—structurally embeds forms of suffering into the human condition.

8. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to elucidate the nuances of Schopenhauer's conception of malice, and how it fits into his broader moral psychology. I have argued that, for Schopenhauer, malice is a categorically different motive in kind to egoism, from which a distinct set of associated vices can be derived. Moreover, conceiving of malicious acts on a spectrum, and whose full expression depends on external circumstance, allows us to see why malice is not *in itself* a rare phenomenon, but in fact one pervasive in the human psyche across all times and cultures. It is partly the pervasiveness and power of malice (and egoism) that pressures Schopenhauer into considering acts of compassion—the basis of moral virtue and praiseworthiness—to be near-miraculous events. This view also informs Schopenhauer's resistance to the pathologising of malice as a medical abnormality of sorts. Against certain interpretations, I have argued that Schopenhauer does have the resources to rank malice as morally *worse* than egoism, in line with our intuitions. In the final sections of the paper, I have argued that the widespread belief about an inner-suffering of malicious persons is endorsed and sustained by principle by Schopenhauer in a sophisticated and phenomenologically rich manner hitherto unrecognized. In disentangling the numerous relations between malice and suffering that Schopenhauer, on my interpretation, identifies, it is evident that many of his psychological observations anticipate themes taken up and developed by Nietzsche. For example: (1) the distinctive feeling of power in overcoming obstacles to our will and the conscious awareness of our causal efficacy; (2) the subtle manifestations of cruelty, especially those lurking behind apparently moral motives; (3) the phenomenon of *ressentiment* as pent-up, frustrated willing that has no external outlet to discharge itself. The extent and depth of these connections, as well as developing Nietzschean lines of objection to Schopenhauer's analysis of malice, are topics ripe for exploration in future scholarship. Finally, and in line with numerous present-day readers of Schopenhauer, I have suggested that many of his insights can be retained or reformulated along naturalistic lines, making his moral psychology potentially fruitful for engagement by most contemporary philosophers who may not accept his metaphysical commitments.[xliii]

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[i] At *WWR*, 2:622/*Werke*, 3:698, Schopenhauer identifies a fourth incentive “in the interest of systematic consistency”: a desire for one’s own misfortune. But since he explicitly associates this with ascetic value and not moral value, it won’t directly concern us here.

[ii] e.g. Cartwright, “Schopenhauer on the Value of Compassion”; Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics*; Hassan, *Schopenhauer’s Moral Philosophy*, “Schopenhauerian Virtue Ethics”; Marshall, “Schopenhauer on the Content of Compassion”, “Schopenhauer’s Five-Dimensional Normative Ethics”.

[iii] Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer*, 147.

[iv] Jason Baehr refers to this phenomenon—where the object of malice is another person’s welfare—as “personal malevolence.” He writes that “a person can be malevolent” in this sense “simply on account of his orientation toward other persons, for example, by opposing another person’s wellbeing” (“Epistemic Malevolence”, 193). Baehr distinguishes this from “impersonal malevolence.” The latter, which is broadly the Thomistic account of malice, occurs when the object of malice is the good *as such* (e.g. Satan in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* aims to do what is evil *because it is evil*). Schopenhauer’s account of malice seems to exclusively concern the more substantive “personal malevolence” described by Baehr.

[v] See also *OBM* 143/*Werke*, 4:140.

[vi] Nietzsche was especially perceptive about the latter in institutions of punishment. There, one enjoys “the pleasure of having the right to exercise power over the powerless without a thought…the enjoyment of violating: an enjoyment that is prized all the higher, the lower and baser the position of the creditor in the social scale, and which can easily seem a delicious titbit to him, even a foretaste of higher rank.” Nietzsche describes this as the “*right of the masters*,” where “at last he, too, shares the elevated feeling of being in a position to despise and maltreat someone as an ‘inferior’”. In such a case, the “compensation” for a perceived harm is constituted by “a warrant for and entitlement to cruelty” (*On the Genealogy of Morality*, 41).

[vii] Cf. Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics*, 149.

[viii] As Alistair Welchman indicates, Schopenhauer’s contention that humans can be “devilish” (i.e. malicious) is likely a tacit response to Kant’s view that humans, unlike devils, are incapable of ‘disinterestedly’ harming others (see “Evil in Schelling and Schopenhauer”, 162).

[ix] See also *WWR*, 2:248/*Werke*, 3:266.

[x] See especially Murphy, “Acquired Character”.

[xi] Notice, however, an interesting development of the Hobbesian view. For Hobbes, the state's function is to prevent harm for each citizen, to the extent that is possible, by harnessing the fear of reprisal, where this harm is primarily caused by egoism and the contingent material circumstances humans find themselves in (e.g. with finite resources and rough equality with others). Schopenhauer's view, though, appears even bleaker: not only will egoism produce harm for standard Hobbesian reasons, but *irrespective* of contingent material conditions, people will cause harm from *malice* too. Hence, the state is justified by its ability to curb two sorts of pervasive violent behaviour via the threat of punishment.

[xii] Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 241–42.

[xiii] Dimsdale, *Anatomy of Malice*, 72.

[xiv] Dimsdale, *Anatomy of Malice*, 79–84.

[xv] Evil and malice are related, but not necessarily identical. For a detailed analysis of evil which differs from Schopenhauer's conception of it purely in terms of intent, see Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*. Card postulates two distinct components—intention and consequence—the intersection of which amount to genuinely evil acts.

[xvi] Arendt, *The Banality of Evil*.

[xvii] Kren & Rappoport, *The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behaviour*, 82.

[xviii] See also *WWR*, 1:389–90/*Werke*, 2:428–29.

[xix] See also *PP*, 2:191–99/*Werke*, 6:223–33.

[xx] The latter especially, and other *celebrity* editions of these shows, again evoke Nietzsche's idea of the pleasure that the '*right of the masters*' brings, particularly when one makes suffer a person higher in the social rank (see fn. 6).

[xxi] Another case to consider in support of this view might be Schopenhauer's treatment of revenge, which he appears in his later writing to analyse through a curious mix of *both* "pride, or vanity"—outgrowths of egoism—and malice (*PP*, 2:526-527/*Werke*, 6:624; cf. *WWR*, 1:391/*Werke*, 2:430–31).

[xxii] See also *OBM* 197/*Werke*, 4:204.

[xxiii] One might put the point this way: failing to appreciate the metaphysically derivative character of individuation might explain why agents become immoral without constituting the bad-making feature of their actions. In other words, failing to pierce through the *principium individuationis* can be sufficient for immorality, but this need not imply that every feature of one's actions is explained by this fact. What makes malice bad, may be something else about it, even if it shares an epistemic failing with egoism that enables immorality. This is what essentially leads some, such as Shapshay, to offer alternative accounts for the ranking. However, since Schopenhauer himself attempts to ground a ranking on an epistemic basis, it is worth seeing whether he has the means to do so, and I explore this possibility in this section.

[xxiv] Shapshay, "Was Schopenhauer a Kantian Ethicist?", 180.

[xxv] Shapshay's own solution to the problem of ranking vice in the way Schopenhauer wants to is to take the recognition of inherent value—*not* the recognition of metaphysical unity—to be the defining criterion of moral worth: "if the key insight is the axiological one I have been urging, then there is room for the malicious person to be worse than the egoist. Perhaps, for example, the egoist sees others as having *less* inherent value than himself, whereas the malicious person sees others as really *lacking all* inherent value, as being truly worthless" ("Was Schopenhauer a Kantian Ethicist?", 180–81). But aside from worries about textual support for this interpretation, it isn't clear that the malicious person need always think persons lack *all* inherent value, nor that the egoist must always think persons have *some* (albeit always less) inherent value than themselves.

[xxvi] Welchman, "Evil in Schelling and Schopenhauer", 162 - emphasis mine.

[xxvii] Schopenhauer holds that abstract philosophical knowledge—something probably only restricted to a relative few—is not a requirement for compassion, and that knowledge of the metaphysical unity of all beings which gives rise to it can be a result of "intuitive cognition [*anschauenden Erkenntniß*]" (see *OBM* 232/*Werke*, 4:246; *WWR*, 1:397/*Werke*, 2:437). Thus, compassion can still be considered an "everyday phenomenon" (*OBM* 200/*Werke*, 4:208), as Schopenhauer says.

[xxviii] Marshall, "Schopenhauer on the Content of Compassion", 786.

[xxix] My thanks to Colin Marshall for suggesting the use of this thought-experiment to explain the point.

[xxx] See Throop & Zahavi, "Dark and Bright Empathy".

[xxxi] Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 241–42, 304.

[xxxii] Stang, "Oskar Dirlewanger: Protagonist der Terrorkriegsführung", 67.

[xxxiii] One may justifiably think Schopenhauer's claim is overly ambitious here, and that he too hastily dismisses the possibility of joyful cruelty, that is: the possibility of brute pleasure-in-cruelty without any inner-suffering, of the kind Nietzsche, for example, was keen to diagnose, particularly in the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality*. As well as being a more natural and obvious analysis of characters like Mr. Blonde, the alleged superficiality of happy malicious persons looks to be unfalsifiable: such persons either look unhappy, or if they don't, they must be hiding something. So perhaps rather than a conceptual claim, Schopenhauer should restrict point (i) to a more modest empirical claim about the frequency of association between malice and inner-suffering.

[xxxiv] On this issue, Sean Murphy has raised an interesting point in discussion: given Schopenhauer's claims that deep personal suffering is instrumental to ascetic resignation (e.g. *WWR*, 1:406–9/*Werke*, 2:448–52), isn't the malicious agent—perpetually full of especially potent inner-torment—better placed than anyone to achieve salvation? While it isn't possible to fully explore this here, Schopenhauer in one place adds nuance to the instrumental link between suffering and salvation, suggesting that certain *kinds* or *degrees* of suffering are not suited to an ascetic end. Recalling the character of Cardinal Beaufort in *Henry VI*, Schopenhauer writes that here "Shakespeare puts before our eyes the

horrible end of a reprobate who dies full of despair, since neither suffering nor death can break a will whose violence extended to the most extreme wickedness. The more violent the will, the more glaring the appearance of its conflict, and consequently the greater the suffering" (*WWR*, 1:422/*Werke*, 2:467–68).

[xxxv] The claim that malice is *essentially* tied to particularly intense willing may create some difficulty for Schopenhauer's explicit observation as to the maliciousness of children (see *PP*, 2:195/*Werke*, 6:228). This issue of course calls for substantial engagement with the empirical literature in child psychology. But it seems plausible that children can painfully will intensely, as the phenomenon and frequency of tantrums would suggest.

[xxxvi] Young, *Schopenhauer*, 176 - emphasis mine.

[xxxvii] Young, *Schopenhauer*, 177.

[xxxviii] See also *PP*, 2:191-199/*Werke*, 6:223–33.

[xxxix] This point is picked up by Nietzsche, where he uses it to challenge Schopenhauer's claim that malice aims at the suffering of another as an end in itself. See *Human, All Too Human*, §103.

[xl] For example, it has been helpfully suggested to me that the pleasure in awareness of one's powers could be derived from the temporary alleviation of existing death anxiety and fear of persistent vulnerability that Schopenhauer routinely draws attention to.

[xli] See fn. 33.

[xlii] Following from the point discussed in fn. 34, Schopenhauer here goes onto express a more conservative position on the instrumental relation between inner-suffering of malicious persons and salvation. On the specific pain of their guilt, he writes that "It is an *open question* whether this suffering will ever break and overcome the violence of his will" (*WWR*, 1:394/*Werke*, 2:434- emphasis mine).

[xliii] I am grateful to audiences at NOVA University of Lisbon, the online Schopenhauer Workshop, the Work in Progress seminar at Cardiff, to whom I presented early drafts of this paper. I am particularly indebted to the following for their insightful comments and suggestions: Sean Murphy, Colin Marshall, Bernard Reginster, Anneli Jefferson, Panos Paris, Sandy Shapshay, Alessandra Tanesini, Jakob Norberg, Jonathan Mitchell, Chris Janaway, Sophie Archer, Lucy Osler, Mary Edwards, and the two anonymous reviewers.