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### **Compassion and Its Superiority to Egoism**

In this paper, I will present Schopenhauer's conception of compassion and explain the way in which Schopenhauer believes compassion is superior to egoism. I will admit straightaway that Schopenhauer's explication of compassion is difficult to penetrate for reasons that will become evident later in this paper. However, this is not to say that it is *impossible*, so my goal for this paper is to shed as much light as I can on exactly what Schopenhauer might mean by compassion by honing in on what I find to be the most plausible interpretation. After delineating this interpretation, I will present Schopenhauer's metaphysical basis for compassion, which will then reveal the sense in which Schopenhauer finds compassion to be superior to egoism. Finally, I will evaluate the force of Schopenhauer's understanding of compassion, bringing attention to certain weaknesses in his metaphysical argument on top of which his entire theory of compassion rests.

To bring clarity to Schopenhauer's conception of compassion, I will begin by describing what compassion *is not*. Schopenhauer explains that "There are just three fundamental incentives for human actions; and it is only through the arousal of them that any possible motives whatsoever have effect" (201). These incentives are egoism, malice, and compassion. I am choosing to begin with defining egoism and malice for two reasons. The first is that, because this list of incentives is exhaustive of all possible incentives, by strictly defining what compassion is not, we have in a sense, described what it must be. We will have brought clarity to the precise gap in human incentive in which compassion fills. This will make the defining characteristics of compassion more clear. Second, egoism and malice are more readily comprehensible. Thus, I am in some sense trying to set a firm conceptual foundation so that we may then approach a more complex idea, this idea being compassion.

Egoism, as Schopenhauer explains, is the "chief and fundamental incentive in a human being, as in an animal", consisting of "the urge to existence and well-being" (190). The critical point to add, here, is that for the egoist, this 'urge' applies to themselves exclusively. Thus, for the egoist, every object of their

experience is revealed to them in specific relation to their own interests. Schopenhauer explains “each one makes himself the mid-point of the world, relates everything to himself, and with everything that happens at all... he will relate it first to *his* interest, however small and indirect it may be, and think about that ahead of everything else” (190). We are all well acquainted with this phenomenon, unless we consider ourselves to be some extraordinary exception (saintly, enlightened, etc.). Assuming we are not exceptions, introspection reveals how we constantly relate the content of our experience back to our own well-being – when we meet a new person, our first internal instinct is to evaluate what bearing this person may or might have on us; when we hear of a natural disaster, we are inclined to wonder if anyone whom we are close to, whose relationship promotes our well-being, has been affected; and even when we engage in generosity, we consider how those generous acts will influence how others perceive us, or we feel that we have cleansed our guilt, or hope that we have engendered some sort of good karma. One might resist this claim and contest that sometimes we truly find ourselves engaging in what appear to be selfless acts. This may be the case, which I will account for later in this paper. But the point here is to emphasize just how deeply rooted and pervasive egoism is as an incentive. Though it is not necessarily our *only* incentive, it bears itself even where it is not immediately recognizable. This is incredibly significant for Schopenhauer, who goes as far to claim that “there is no greater contrast than that between the high and exclusive concern that each one has for his own self and the indifference with which as a rule all others regard this very self; as he does theirs” (191). For Schopenhauer, our default mode is one of complete and utter self-absorption.

This self-absorption leads us into self-overvaluation, which is an additional condition of the egoist. The relation of all content of experience to our own well-being causes us to disproportionately weigh the significance of our own selves in relation to the world. Schopenhauer describes that “he (the egoist) finds himself as the owner of all reality and nothing can be more important to him than himself. But whereas in its subjective aspect his self presents itself with colossal magnitude, in the objective aspect it shrinks down to almost nothing, namely around 1/1,000,000,000 of humanity now living” (191). Although anyone can intellectually recognize their objective insignificance, the egoist inherently

drastically overvalues himself as it pertains to his pure intuitive understanding (one might say ‘subconsciously’). In consequence, the egoist “regards himself alone as real and regards the others in some measure as mere phantoms” (191). Although the egoist can theoretically recognize that others must be like him (ie. suffer like him, love like him, overvalue themselves like him), he lacks the deep intuitive understanding of the full extent to which the humanity of others exists exactly in the same way as his own. In the case of discovering another person in the midst of suffering, an egoist may help the sufferer, but the distinguishing characteristic of the egoist is that he helps the sufferer for the egoist’s own well-being; his will does not attach its aim to the well-being of the sufferer. The sufferer’s suffering only moves the egoist’s will in relation to the egoist’s well-being.

Thus, considering both self-absorption and self-overvaluation, we have characterized the rather dramatic self-oriented subjectivity within which the egoist lives. It is important to recognize that egoism operates within the very core of our perception. Egoism is not theoretical, nor a conscious choice, but rather fundamental to our intuitive grasp of experience.

Why is it that egoism is so pervasive as an incentive for our willing? Schopenhauer explains that “this ultimately rests on the fact that each is given to himself *immediately*, while the others are given only *mediately*, by way of the representation of them in his head: and immediacy asserts its right” (191). In other words, we are conscious of ourselves by way of the immediate affectations of our will: corporeal pain, corporeal pleasure, love, hate, sadness, joy, etc. These feelings are presented to us *immediately* and directly; there is no interpretation, inference, or some other delay before they are felt. However, everything else in our world beyond self-consciousness is relayed to us through cognition (representation). Thus, we seem only to be able to access an understanding of the humanity of another by cognizing it, by sensory cues from which we can *infer* that they are experiencing something similar to what we experience directly and immediately. When a hot iron is pressed to my skin, the burning pain is indubitable and absolutely immediate. There is nothing to realize or figure out; I know I am suffering. If, however, I see a hot iron pressed to the skin of another, in some sense I must realize that the other is suffering from burning pain, perhaps by observing their screaming and crying, before I can become aware

of their suffering. In other words, recognizing our own suffering is *experiential*, while recognizing the suffering of others is typically *inferential*. Thus, because consciousness of other people must be given to us through our layer of cognition, through which our consciousness of everything beyond ourselves becomes *mediate*, we consequently become absorbed with and overvalue that to which we are more vividly and urgently acquainted, which is ourselves.

In a word, we might say the egoist is *self-interested*. But, is it possible to be conscious in such a way that is *self-disinterested*? In other words, can our will, even for a moment, detach its ultimate aim from our own well-being and attach itself to the well-being of another? Schopenhauer's answer is yes. As it turns out, the other two fundamental incentives, malice and compassion, are both instances of *self-disinterest*.

One might already wish to contest "But how is this possible? If we can only be mediately aware of the well-being of another, and are immediately aware of our own well-being, there seems to be some sort of immense leap that must occur for our will to truly attach itself solely to the well-being of another." This contestation is entirely reasonable, thus alluding to the difficulty Schopenhauer must overcome to prove his definition of compassion. I will present Schopenhauer's attempt to resolve this contestation upon explaining his understanding of compassion later in this paper.

Before I do, I will provide Schopenhauer's understanding of malice. Schopenhauer devotes a rather brief treatment to malice, since it is of little concern in his work in establishing a ground for morality. Malice, as will become obvious, clearly is not a locus for moral goodness. Also, regarding the topic of this paper, which is egoism and compassion, understanding malice is only of instrumental value in truly being exhaustive of the fundamental human incentives.

Malice occurs when the ultimate aim of our will, for any duration of time, is in relation to the well-being of another, more specifically to the *minimization* of their well-being. In other words, under malice our aims are not self-interested, but rather solely interested in maximizing the pain and suffering of another. As Schopenhauer puts it, "the sufferings and pains of others are an end in themselves" (194). While, if an egoist harms someone, it is conditional on the sense that doing so will bring the egoist

advantage, the malicious person harms someone devoid of any condition relating back to themselves but rather solely on the incentive to bring harm to the other.

Having defined egoism and malice, we are left only with compassion. Schopenhauer provides a list of assumptions central to his philosophy before defining compassion, some of which I will explain now in order to properly define the boundaries which compassion must fall within. Schopenhauer writes “every action relates to a being receptive to well-being and woe, as its final end” (198). In other words, action is not possible unless it is motivated by some sort of relation to the well-being of some entity. In egoism, this is the egoist’s own well-being. In malice, this is the minimization of the victim’s well-being. Thus, in order to truly diverge from both egoism and malice to enter into compassion, we must find that the will attaches to an ultimate aim that is different from those just mentioned. This notably implies no relationship to one’s own well-being can exist whatsoever as the motive for a compassionate act, otherwise this would be an egoistic act. Schopenhauer writes “egoism and *moral worth* of an action (compassionate action) totally exclude one another” (198).

Let us briefly consider what this implies given my previous explanation of the great depth and resonance of egoism. If we are to break from egoism, even momentarily, then our sense of identification with another must be at least equally immediate, vivid, and urgent of a feeling as our own affectations are. Our will cannot simply detach itself from our own well-being based on some theoretical idea, nor in an attempt of will (since this would just be willing in accord with what *we want*, thus by definition not in accordance with the well-being of another). So, what we are looking for must be a profound shift in the very core of our perception of reality.

From these grounds, now we can move into a definition and understanding of compassion.

Compassion, for Schopenhauer, is the willing of the well-being of another with absolutely no relation to one’s own well-being, in which “another’s suffering in itself and as such *directly* becomes my motive” (232). In an act of compassion, our will aims exclusively at the betterment of *another’s* well-being, or more specifically, at the removal of their suffering. However, given the grounds I have provided thus far, clearly this means that in order to overcome egoism and actually do a compassionate action, I

must will another's well-being "quite immediately, as immediately as I otherwise do my own" (200). If this truly were the case, then I would necessarily feel another's suffering "along with him," as Schopenhauer puts it. While the egoist's recognition of another's suffering is *inferential*, someone struck with compassion recognizes the suffering of another in such a way that is *experiential*. This implies yet another consideration, which is that in order to suffer along with someone else, then "this requires that I *be identified with him* in some way, i.e. that the total distinction between me and the other, on which my egoism precisely rests, be removed at least to a certain degree" (200). Otherwise, my self-consciousness will reign supreme. Thus, in acts of compassion, other people are no longer 'mere phantoms' of cognition, but rather, according to our intuitive understanding, they seem to possess as much reality as we ourselves do. Of course, this seems difficult to believe given the immediacy with which we are *self-conscious* as compared to the mediacy with which we are conscious of all others as mere objects of our cognition. However, despite this difficulty, Schopenhauer insists "the process analyzed here is not one that is dreamt up or plucked out of the air, but a wholly real and indeed by no means a rare one: it is the everyday phenomenon of *compassion*" (200).

Of course, this explication does not satisfy the reader. We are still left with many questions, such as "What does it really mean to 'suffer with someone', or to be identified with them?" "Is this experience even possible?" Consequently, I will first proceed by clarifying how we might interpret the experience of compassion, then I will follow by providing Schopenhauer's argument on the metaphysical basis which allows for the possibility of compassion.

Schopenhauer anticipates confusion from his readers, writing "But then how is it possible that a suffering that is not *mine*, that does not afflict *me*, should nonetheless become a motive for me, should move me to acting, just as immediately as only my own suffering otherwise does? (218)" To this, he answers "by my *feeling it as well, feeling it as mine*, yet, not *in me* but *in another*" (218). It is not immediately obvious what Schopenhauer means by this, however I will present the interpretation which I find most plausible.

Clearly, a compassionate experience of another's suffering is not inferential, but rather experiential. Hence, "*feeling it as well, feeling it as mine.*" This seems to imply first that the compassionate agent genuinely experiences suffering, thus it is vivid, urgent, and immediate like one's own suffering typically is. It seems nonsensical to conceive of *truly* experiencing suffering, "*feeling it as well*", devoid of the vividness, urgency, and immediacy which defines all other instances of suffering. However, there seems an additional component of Schopenhauer's understanding here, which is that the vivid, urgent, and immediate feeling of the compassionate agent retains a phenomenological similarity, or perhaps identity, with the suffering of the sufferer. Otherwise, we would not be "*feeling it (the suffering) as well*", but rather we could be feeling any kind of suffering. Thus, there must be some realm of similarity within which the phenomenology of both participants, the compassionate agent and sufferer, must fall within. Schopenhauer does not give us much explanation beyond this in regards to the degree or nature of phenomenological similarity. He seems actually to assume an *exact* similarity, since he gives no explanations besides strong phrases such as "*feeling it as well*", which he offers no attempt in tempering or clarifying.

Considering this, we can also understand what Schopenhauer means in saying that, in moments of compassion, I suffer "*not in me, but in another.*" Despite the immediacy of phenomenological experience of the sufferer's suffering for the compassionate agent, he remains aware that this negative affect he experiences is not his own. Instead, the compassionate agent's negative affect is intuitively understood as *revealing* the suffering that is being experienced by the sufferer, or *in* the sufferer. In an analogy, it is as if we could imagine suffering as broadcasting some sort of frequency. The compassionate agent tunes into this frequency, which translates the experience of the sufferer's suffering in its full phenomenology, however it is still clear to the compassionate agent that he is the one tuning in and the sufferer is the true source of the broadcast. The point here is that, for Schopenhauer, the dynamic of the communication remains clear: one person is the true sufferer, and the other is the receiver of the communicated suffering. As Schopenhauer puts it, "we feel his pain as *his* and do not imagine that it is ours" (219).

One might contest that, under this interpretation, it is unclear how the compassionate agent actually gains access to the sufferer's suffering in the first place. In response, one might posit, as Nietzsche does, that Schopenhauer is really suggesting a two-step process: first, an inference from what cognition shows us about the sufferer (ie. that he is crying about his girlfriend breaking up with him) to the suffering itself (feeling the loss of romantic love); second, an evocation through the recollection and imagination of the compassionate agent of the phenomenological character of this kind of suffering (recalling how I felt when my girlfriend broke up with me). On the surface, this seems like a plausible explanation of how the suffering of one person could enter into the consciousness of another. However, this view seems to downplay the significance of *identifying with another* under Schopenhauer's view.

For Schopenhauer, the critical leap from egoism to compassion lies in the fact that "that the barrier between I and not-I is removed for the moment: only then does the other's business, his needs, his distress, his suffering immediately become mine. Then, I view him no longer, as empirical intuition nonetheless gives him, as something foreign to me... but I suffer as well *in him*, despite the fact that his skin does not enclose my nerves" (218). Compassion is predicated upon an alteration in our intuitive grasp of *self* in which we become directly acquainted with another person, thus causing his affectations to be felt just as vividly, immediately, and urgently within myself. Evidently, there is no room in this view for inference nor imagination as Nietzsche suggests, just as I need not make any inference nor use my imagination to realize my own suffering.

If sharing the phenomenology of suffering is explained by *identifying with another*, then we finally are left to ask, "Well, how do we truly become identified with another in a way that is truly so intimate, direct, vivid, etc.?" Here, Schopenhauer explains "This process, I repeat, is mysterious: for it is something of which reason can give no immediate account and whose grounds are not to be ascertained on the path of experience" (218). Schopenhauer believes that, ultimately, the process of compassion in its entirety cannot be expressed through language and reason. More specifically, he finds that the shift in our grasp of self when we *identify with another* lends itself to no explanation. One might be dissatisfied with this account, as Nietzsche seemed to be, however as I now move into a delineation of Schopenhauer's



metaphysical basis for compassion, I believe it will become more clear that Schopenhauer's view of compassion truly leans on the mystical, on the transcendent and inexplicable. Thus, the current lack of explanation should not be considered a shortcoming, but rather fundamental to Schopenhauer's entire philosophical outlook on compassion.

I will turn now to Schopenhauer's argument for the metaphysical basis of compassion. In doing so, I will resolve two issues that are currently demanded by this paper: providing support for the apparent leap that Schopenhauer makes in claiming that we can in fact *identify with another* and demonstrating the way in which Schopenhauer finds compassion superior to egoism.

A metaphysical basis is critical to Schopenhauer's understanding of the compassion. He writes "the explanation of the possibility of this highly important phenomenon is not so easy, nor to be attained by the purely psychological route... It can turn out only metaphysically" (203). Thus, we can recall Nietzsche's interpretation of compassion, which was purely psychological and simply cannot stand under Schopenhauer's framework. Instead, we move to the realm of metaphysics.

Schopenhauer begins his metaphysical investigation by reinforcing the fundamental difference between our grasp of reality under egoism and under compassion. Under compassion, a person's understanding is typified by "making less of a distinction than everyone else between himself and others" (249). However, under egoism, this distinction is "great enough... that to gain a small advantage to himself he will use great harm to others as a means" (249). With this in mind, Schopenhauer frames his metaphysical investigation with the question "whether this last construal of the relation between one's own and someone else's I that lies at the basis of the actions of the good (compassionate) character is an erroneous one and rests on an illusion, or whether this is instead the case with the opposing construal on which egoism and malice stand" (249). In other words, Schopenhauer believes that by exploring the *metaphysical* relation between people, either egoism or compassion will be shown to rest on a valid understanding of human relations, while the other will be exposed as resting on illusion.

Of course, the relation understood by egoism is *empirically* justified. Schopenhauer explains that "The *distinction* between one's own and someone else's person appears to be an absolute according to

experience” (249). It seems obvious given my everyday experience that I am separate from all other people who I become conscious of *mediately* through cognition. However, we must realize that “the cognition that we have of our own self is by no means exhaustive and clear down to the ultimate ground” for “the cognizing is not itself cognized in turn” (250). In other words, we can imagine cognition as a flashlight shining outwards, but which can never illuminate *itself*, the entity actually doing the cognizing. Thus, we must not assume that what we cognize in the empirical realm holds true on the metaphysical realm. Instead, we must realize that, in fact, our empirical understanding sheds absolutely no light on our metaphysical essence. Schopenhauer continues “our inner *essence in itself*, the very thing that wills and cognizes, is not accessible to us: we see merely towards the outside, inside it is dark. Consequently the acquaintance we have with ourselves is by no means a complete and exhaustive one, but rather very superficial, and for the greater part, the principal part indeed (metaphysical part), we are unknown to ourselves and a riddle” (250).

This, then, casts doubt upon our egoistic understanding and opens the door to the possibility that our compassionate understanding is actually founded upon metaphysical truth, namely that each person’s essence is possibly “one and identical in all” (203).

Schopenhauer proceeds with an argument on the etiology of plurality. Schopenhauer proposes that plurality and numerical difference of beings rest exclusively on *time* and *space*. He explains that “it is possible through these (space and time) alone, since the many can only be thought and represented either as alongside one another (space), or as after one another (time)” (250). Aside from the terms presented to us by time or space, we have no means of differentiating between the objects of our consciousness. Thus, where there is time and space, there too is plurality. And where time and space are absent, there can be no plurality.

Now, Schopenhauer points out that time and space are merely faculties of our cognition. They provide the fundamental form through which we interpret the world, however this does not imply that they in any way determine the way the world is *in itself*. Schopenhauer argues “space and time are forms of our faculty of intuition (cognition), belong to it and not to the things cognized through it, and so can

never be a determination of things in themselves, but rather pertain only to the *appearance* of them” (251). Thus, because time and space exist only in our cognition and are foreign to the things *in themselves*, plurality must also be foreign to things *in themselves*. If plurality is foreign to things *in themselves*, then we must conclude “consequently in the countless appearances of this world of the senses it can really be only one, and only the one and identical essence can manifest itself in all of these” (251). Therefore, we must recognize that all people, as well as all possible objects of consciousness, must necessarily spring forth from a singular metaphysical essence. In the realm of appearance, we see things as distinct and separate, but in the metaphysical realm, things *in themselves* are truly all one and the same.

Considering this conclusion, we can better understand the “mysterious” process by which we are able to *identify with another* in moments of compassion. Such moments of compassion consist of “*one individual’s immediately recognizing himself, his own true essence, in the other*” (253). Thus, for Schopenhauer, a person stricken by compassion, by some mysterious process, comes to an intuitive understanding of the metaphysical identity between himself and another who is suffering. In a sense, he is overcoming the limits of his cognition by taking an intuitive glimpse at the world as it is *in itself* by recognizing himself within the other and the other within himself. Thus, in a moment of compassion, we are able to transcend our *immediate* acquaintance with our empirical selves and *mediate* acquaintance with empirical other because we transcend in our *understanding*, in our fundamental perception of our reality. We quite literally move beyond empirical knowledge and access transcendent knowledge. Schopenhauer claims that the knowledge that “‘My true, inner essence exists in every living thing as immediately as it reveals itself in my self-consciousness to myself alone.’ – It is this knowledge... that erupts as *compassion*” (254).

The process by which we actually gain intuitive access to this knowledge, of course, must remain mysterious and inexplicable given that, by definition, transcendent experience is beyond the forms of empirical cognition and thus beyond expression in language and reasoning.

Now, we are able to fully understand how compassion is superior to egoism in Schopenhauer’s view. We have found that it is egoism which rests on illusion and compassion which rests on a valid

understanding of human relations as they really are *in themselves*. As Schopenhauer puts it, “if, accordingly, plurality and difference belongs solely to mere *appearance*, and if it is one and the same essence that presents itself in everything that lives, then the construal that removes the distinction between I and not-I (compassion) is not the erroneous one: rather the one opposed to it (egoism) must be” (253). In this sense, compassion possesses an *epistemic* superiority over egoism given that it expresses a profound and transcendent truth, the unity of all things *in themselves*, to which the understanding of egoism entirely opposes.

This concludes my interpretation of Schopenhauer’s conception of compassion and his argument for the *epistemic* superiority of compassion over egoism. I will conclude this paper by addressing a point of contention with Schopenhauer’s metaphysical arguments, which will consequently challenge his overall conception of compassion. Note that this objection is not intended to be presented as a knockdown argument, but rather merely as revelatory of potential weak points in Schopenhauer’s philosophy that might warrant further investigation.

Recall that Schopenhauer’s explanation of compassion truly does rely on his metaphysical arguments. As mentioned earlier, Schopenhauer writes “the explanation of the possibility of this highly important phenomenon is not so easy, nor to be attained by the purely psychological route... It can turn out only metaphysically” (203). More specifically, Schopenhauer accounts for the possibility of our making the mysterious leap from an egoistic perspective to one in which we *identify with another* solely based on two factors: that we observe in experience that compassionate acts do in fact occur, quite frequently actually, as well as that what seems to mysteriously occur during compassion aligns exactly with what *must be the case* metaphysically, thus, leaving the door open to the notion that we do in fact gain access to a transcendent form of understanding upon *identifying with another*. Without Schopenhauer’s metaphysics, the apparent epistemic leap which occurs in compassion loses all grounding. Therefore, by casting doubt upon his metaphysics, we cast doubt upon Schopenhauer’s entire conception of compassion.

I intend to cast doubt on the very premise by which Schopenhauer begins his metaphysical investigation. I believe one could argue that it is entirely meaningless to consider that one form of understanding can align with metaphysical truth while another cannot. In other words, Schopenhauer predicates his metaphysical investigation on the notion that he will establish that either compassion or egoism rests on truth, the other an illusion. However, it seems this formulation of the problem mischaracterizes how we must understand the world *in itself*.

Schopenhauer understands that things *in themselves* are transcendent. In other words, they exist beyond the forms in which we understand the world provided to us by our cognition. Fundamental to the form of our own understanding is the discrete separation of the objects in consciousness as well as the concepts we form to relate such objects. In other words, all separation, all *duality* or contrast, is native to our cognition, but not applicable on the metaphysical realm. Thus, let us reconsider the conclusion to Schopenhauer's argument on the etiology of plurality: "consequently in the countless appearances of this world of the senses it can really be only one, and only the one and identical essence can manifest itself in all of these" (251). The terms "one" and "identical" here are descriptive of metaphysical truth, thus they must in some way go beyond the possibility of our logically grasping them. They must notably *not* be conflated with our empirical conceptions of "one" and "identical," which necessarily must be predicated upon an implicit understanding that these terms also mean "not-two" or "not-different". The point here is, that once Schopenhauer proves plurality does not exist in the metaphysical realm, we must be extremely careful not to fill this void of non-plurality with plurality's *empirical* opposite, our *empirical* conceptions of "identity" or "one". Doing so would actually to conceptually remain in the realm of plurality.

Yet, despite the fact that we should not do this, this is exactly what Schopenhauer does! He does so quite explicitly actually. By using metaphysical "identity" to delegitimize egoism, Schopenhauer implies that our empirical sense of separateness is incorrect given our metaphysical "identity." But, this is an attempt to make a relation in which one term, the metaphysical one, exists beyond all conception of relations. We cannot compare empirical "separateness" to metaphysical "identity". They are incompatible types. Applying a logical comparison to a metaphysical notion is like trying to apply a numerical

comparison to an apple. It is entirely meaningless to say that the number “10” is greater than or less than an apple. In this sense, we cannot use our knowledge of metaphysical “identity” to prove egoism incorrect. Such an attempt to compare an empirical concept with a metaphysical concept (its almost problematic to even say ‘metaphysical concept’, but this is the best I can do) is in fact utterly meaningless.

In discussing metaphysics, which is inherently to try to understand that which our cognition blocks us from understanding, it is far too easy to lose sight of the limitations of our knowledge, to try to say that which cannot truly be said.

Therefore, I propose that Schopenhauer becomes tangled up in his own game. He shows that the metaphysical realm is not *dual*, yet he applies an understanding predicated upon *duality* onto the metaphysical realm. He identifies the invariable limits of our rational understanding, but then attempts to rationalize beyond them. Even if Schopenhauer’s conception of compassion is correct, meaning that we do actually intuitively access transcendent knowledge, I believe it lacks the metaphysical foundation which Schopenhauer considered to be critical evidence in support of his conception. Thus, I conclude with the door open to Schopenhauer’s conception of compassion, however the path toward proving this conception, and consequently compassion’s epistemic superiority to egoism, is entirely unclear.

*All quotes in this essay derive from Schopenhauer’s Prize Essay on Basis of Morals as published within The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics.*