

VIRTUE AND HAPPINESS IN SCHOPENHAUER'S ETHICS

VIRTUD Y FELICIDAD EN LA TEORÍA ÉTICA DE SCHOPENHAUER

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RESUMEN: En este trabajo me propongo examinar el tipo de conexión que Schopenhauer presuntamente establece entre virtud y felicidad en el contexto de su filosofía moral. El autor de *El mundo como voluntad y representación* describe en efecto a los agentes virtuosos como verdaderamente felices, dado que experimentan en forma constante una satisfacción interna por sus buenos actos, la cual procede a su vez de la armonía que experimentan respecto de todo aquello que les rodea. Esta asociación entre virtud y felicidad, con todo, puede parecer paradójica, puesto que Schopenhauer –siguiendo a Kant– asume como punto de partida de la reflexión ética la separación tajante entre felicidad y moralidad. Considero que una estrategia general para disolver esta paradoja consiste en adscribir a Schopenhauer dos sentidos diferentes con que emplea el concepto de felicidad. Voy a proseguir aquí esta estrategia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: hedonismo, conciencia empírica, «mejor conciencia», carácter moral, tranquilidad.

ABSTRACT: The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the sort of connection that Schopenhauer allegedly establishes between virtue and happiness within his moral philosophy. The author of *The World as Will and Representation* describes virtuous agents as truly happy, since they constantly experience an inner contentment for their good deeds, which also proceeds from their sense of amity with everything around them. However, this association between virtue and happiness strikes us as paradoxical, since Schopenhauer –following Kant– departs

in his ethical inquiry from a sharp distinction between happiness and morality. I think a general strategy to dissolve this paradox is to ascribe to Schopenhauer two distinct senses in which he employs the concept of happiness. I will follow here this strategy.

KEYWORDS: hedonism; empirical consciousness; «better consciousness»; moral character; tranquility.

1. INTRODUCTION

I would like to examine in this paper the complex relation Schopenhauer seems to establish between virtue and happiness at the core of his moral philosophy. This task might look striking and even paradoxical at a first glance, since the german philosopher explicitly denies such connection from the very start: in his view, ethics has nothing to do with happiness and should not be concerned with this matter either. Nevertheless, one can conclude from a closer reading of his writings, that in spite of that rejection, the question of happiness plays a central role in his ethical theory. How then to explain this apparent contradiction? I think this contradictory impression can be plausibly removed if we take into consideration two important ideas held by Schopenhauer himself: firstly, that he excludes happiness from ethics *only* when considered from the stance of moral motivation, so that we can reasonably expect to find other perspectives from which happiness admits to be analyzed in the context of his moral thought –for example, he traces an express relation between the moral character of an agent and the kind of happiness that she or he is able to experience–; and secondly, that Schopenhauer does not seem to advance a single conception of happiness. In my opinion, his philosophical system confronts us with two rival conceptions of it. Consequently, if this hypothesis is correct, we can say that Schopenhauer excludes happiness from ethics when it is understood in one sense rather than in the other.

Given these assumptions, this paper will be structured in three different sections: the first one will be dedicated to examine the reasons why Schopenhauer contrasts sharply between prudence and morality, and hence, opposes happiness to virtue. To this respect, he follows Kant in a considerable way, although he does not have the same set of reasons. In a second stage, I will attempt to disclose those alternative conceptions of happiness advanced by the philosopher of the will. Once we gain a grasp of this issue, we shall be able to understand in what sense happiness is excluded from ethics but in what other sense it plays a significant part in it. And finally, I will try to shed some light on the special kind of relationship that in Schopenhauer's eyes exists between the fact of being virtuous and that of being happy. Within this frame, he explicitly admits that the morally good character, *i.e.*, the compassionate person, experiences in herself an inner contentment precisely because of her being virtuous. In this sense, happiness can be conceived as the result of noble actions. But then we need to raise a

further question: ¿is it possible to think, in schopenhauerian terms, and conversely, that happiness can promote virtue? Even when he does not clearly address this question, there are elements that allow for an affirmative response. In order to analyze this topic, I will focus on Schopenhauer's narrower sense of morality, as he calls it¹.

2. PRUDENCE VERSUS MORALITY: THE KANTIAN INFLUENCE

Even when Kantian moral philosophy has not greatly influenced Schopenhauer's own ethical conception, it can be said that in one relevant respect the latter follows the former: in his acute distinction between prudence and morality. Kant –asserts Schopenhauer– possesses the great merit of having rid ethics of all *endaimonism*² and also the credit of having proved that the kingdom of virtue does not belong to the empirical world³. A common belief spread among many modern moral philosophers is that human beings are naturally egoistic creatures, thus one of their main concern is the question of how such creatures are able to perform altruistic actions, since morality seems to depend on the individual's capacity to transcend his exclusively self-regarding interests in order to consider those of others. For this reason, Kant and Schopenhauer share the view according to which actions performed out of self-regarding motives are void of moral worth. Given that both philosophers also think every individual's principal care is no other than the personal seeking of well-being, they come to exclude this sort of incentive from the moral realm. Hence, they establish a clear separation between prudential and moral motives.

In conformity with the preceding remarks, we find among Kant and Schopenhauer's moral writings, a criticism to ancient eudaimonistic systems, for they assume uncontroversially as the object of ethical theory the individual's happiness. Yet according to both philosophers, this is a wrong starting point for ethics: in their opinion, the universal pursuit of happiness has nothing to do with morality, basically because it is grounded on a self-centered desire, while morality requires quite the opposite, namely, the disinterested concern for others. In this direction, Kant stated in his *Second Critique* that «morality in itself must never be treated as a *doctrine of happiness*, i.e., as an instruction for coming to partake of happiness»⁴. Schopenhauer accords completely with this statement and in some occasions he even expresses himself in very Kantian terms. This is the case when he tries to illustrate the maximal tension human beings sometimes experience between the solicitude of morality and that of subjective de-

¹ See Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume 2, Dover Publications: New York, 1969, p. 589.

² See Schopenhauer, Arthur, *Prize Essay on The Basis of Morals*, in *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, Oxford University Press: New York, 2010, p. 134.

³ See Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume 1, Dover Publications: New York, 1969, pp. 523-524.

⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Hacket Publishing: Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2002, p. 165.

sire-satisfaction. Let us refer the following passages in which such coincidence makes itself evident.

In his *Groundwork* Kant declares:

The human being feels within himself a powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty –which reason represents to him as so worthy of the highest respect– in his needs and inclinations, the entire satisfaction of which he sums up under the name of happiness.⁵

With pretty similar words and undoubtedly immersed in Kantian spirit, Schopenhauer holds in his essay *On the Basis of Morals*:

It has always followed that the human will is always directed to its own well-being, which in sum is comprehended under the concept *happiness*, the striving for which leads one in quite another way from that which might indicate morals.⁶

These passages clearly show that both Kant and Schopenhauer think of the personal pursuit of happiness as a hostile force to moral requirements. Consequently, the overcoming of this powerful incentive presents itself as a condition for a morally praiseworthy action. With reference to this, we need to formulate the following questions: Why the desire of happiness constitutes a menace to moral life? What are the reasons Kant and Schopenhauer adduce to distinguish sharply between happiness and virtue? I have mentioned above that even when they accord in formulating this sharp distinction, they don't do it exactly for the same kind of reasons. In other words, Schopenhauer does not follow Kant completely in this respect. I will attempt to outline next these differences, though in a brief manner, given the limited purposes of this paper.

So far, we have seen that in Kant and Schopenhauer's view one's own motivation for happiness does not belong to moral territory; hence the moral motive must be of another sort. This is one of the other regards in which they do not show agreement, since the former identifies it with respect for the moral law, while the latter with the sole incentive of compassion. Leaving this question aside, I would like to adumbrate now the reasons Kant provides to reject happiness as the principle of morality, with the aim of establishing then to what extent Schopenhauer follows him.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the main argument Kant displays against the erection of happiness as a moral principle is based on its empirical character. If we determine ourselves to act with the purpose of happiness in mind, we are never able to precise *a priori* if that course of action will be effectively linked with happiness, actually with pleasure –as Kant ex-

⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Cambridge University Press: New York, 2011, p. 39.

⁶ *Prize Essay on The Basis of Morals*, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

plicitly holds⁷—. Such a thing can only be determined *a posteriori*; hence it cannot prescribe an action with necessity and become a practical law. Also related with its empirical conditionality, Kant argues that the concept of happiness is extremely vague (*ein so unbestimmter Begriff*)⁸ and for this motive nothing definite can be prescribed on its basis. Still, this is not the only line of reasoning Kant provides in order to separate the respective provinces of happiness and morality.

He seems to set forth a second reason to reinforce such separation, supported this time on teleological grounds. Thus, happiness cannot be stated as neither a final end nor the highest good, because if that were the case, nature would have assigned pointlessly reason to human beings; so that the accomplishment of the aforesaid end is more suitable to instinct than to reason in Kant's view⁹. Since for him we are entitled to presuppose some kind of purposiveness in nature, we are entitled to think that we are furnished with reason with a certain object, specifically, that of producing good will, becoming in this manner moral agents. Yet the attainment of such goal can only be thought as an infinite and progressive task. On this basis, Kant also needs to postulate a teleological development in history.

If we consider the prior objections Kant raises against happiness from a moral point of view, we can easily recognize that Schopenhauer bases his own criticism on none of them. He would not have accepted neither the first nor the second Kantian arguments. Regarding the first one, this is because he rejects any form of both prescriptive and *a priori*-grounded ethical theory. To this respect, he could not have found compelling the idea that happiness must be exiled from moral territory *because of its empirical conditionality and therefore its incapacity to set up practical laws*. In relation to the second Kantian objection, he would not have been able to accept it either, for the philosopher of the will does not think there is a specifically human end nor he concedes it is essentially connected with the perfection of rationality. In addition, he also denies that history evolves teleologically, guided by some kind of intelligence. Accordingly, to say that happiness cannot constitute a legitimate moral aspiration *because it does not correspond itself with our proper end as human beings* does not make sense in Schopenhauer's eyes.

Since he did not align at all with the previous Kantian objections, we need to ask what Schopenhauer really meant when saying that «Kant has the great merit of having purged ethics of all eudaimonism». There must be some sort of reason he found convincing in Kant's attempt to distinguish sharply between prudence and morality. This reason seems to be no other than the affiliation established between happiness and egoism—or «self-love» in Kantian terms—. In his *Second Critique*, this latter employs as synonym expressions «the principle of

⁷ See *Critique of Practical Reason*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁸ See *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, *op. cit.*, p. 65; see also *Critique of Practical Reason*, *op. cit.*, p. 38 and *Critique of Judgement*, Hacket Publishing: Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1987, p. 317.

⁹ See *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

self-love» and the «principle of *one's own happiness*»¹⁰. And more precisely in his *Anthropology*, Kant characterizes the *moral egoist* as someone who reduces all ends to himself and who simply determines his will in accordance with happiness rather than with duty¹¹. Hence, there appears to be an immediate association enclosed by the concept of happiness and that of egoism, and this constitutes *per se* an ulterior motive to exclude the former from morality. This is a third objection we can find in Kant's theory and it is for sure the only one Schopenhauer encounters entirely satisfactory, for he is especially concerned with the question of egoism –even to a greater extent than Kant–. Actually, he considers egoism as «the primary and most important...power against which the moral incentive will have to struggle»¹² and he even describes it as something «boundless» and «colossal»¹³.

Along with egoism, Schopenhauer also recognizes malice or cruelty as other anti-moral powers¹⁴, but he points out the former as the most pervasive feature in human nature. In accordance with this idea, he characterizes morality in his main work as something straight opposed to the natural will, which is in itself «absolutely egoistic»¹⁵; for this reason, he comes to assert that «the absence of all egoistical motivation is thus *the criterion for an action of moral worth*»¹⁶.

3. TWO RIVAL CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS

Up to this point, Schopenhauer has identified egoism with an anti-moral force. However, we have not yet mentioned the way in which he understands such concept, being a question of the utmost importance, since he defines egoism as the drive to existence and *well-being* or *happiness*¹⁷. Every creature is in consequence naturally inclined to promote its own gratification, but Schopenhauer sees in this a menace to morality, given that individuals exclusively concerned with their own well-being are extremely prone to harm others, and therefore, to perform unjust actions. This is the main reason why an agent's desire for happiness is by no means able to involve moral worth. To this respect, it is declared that virtue itself follows a right opposed direction to that of happiness¹⁸.

¹⁰ *Critique of Practical Reason*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹¹ See Kant, Immanuel, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006, p. 18.

¹² *Prize Essay on The Basis of Morals*, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-206.

¹⁵ See *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

¹⁶ *Prize Essay on The Basis of Morals*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

¹⁸ See *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

In order to understand this antagonism, we need to inspect more closely the concept of happiness Schopenhauer has in mind when he confronts it with the concept of virtue. Given that he has defined egoism as a natural attribute of human beings, which ultimately consists in the constant impulse to one's own well-being, we can say that the first conception of happiness advanced by Schopenhauer is given in the frame of empirical conscience and we can properly call it «hedonistic». In his *Early Manuscripts*, he characterizes as such the attitude consisting in the affirmation of the temporal consciousness¹⁹. Subsequently, from the natural standpoint, each individual tends to think of happiness as a satisfactory state attained by the fulfillment of desires. Schopenhauer offers a quite clear definition regarding this point: «the successive satisfaction of all our willing is what we think of through the concept of happiness»²⁰.

Nevertheless, it is known that Schopenhauer qualified happiness as something impossible, deceptive, even as an «inborn error», given the impossibility to fulfill the entirety of one's own wishes. Our essence as will condemn us to be never satisfied, to be never contented in a durable manner by desire-satisfaction. To express this idea, Schopenhauer employs an eloquent analogy: «a wish fulfilled is like the alms given to a beggar; today he receives them so that tomorrow he may again feel hungry»²¹. We can though raise an objection to this assumption: we can consider the case of successful people, those who have fulfilled all their wishes, so there is no need nor want left to satisfy. Still, Schopenhauer has a counterargument: when someone lacks an object, when there is nothing to strive for, then this individual is trapped by boredom. Yet boredom, as Julian Young remarks, presupposes a second-order-willing: even when there is no state of affairs in the world we will to achieve, we *wish* that there were such state of affairs²². And according to Schopenhauer, to be a willing subject, means to be consumed by a tireless striving, and hence, by pain.

The willing subject is thus trapped in a vicious cycle: he longs for happiness and tends to it by means of desire-satisfaction, because he wrongly thinks that a wish fulfilled will bring him happiness, but after its accomplishment he realizes he is not happier than before, that the intended happiness was only illusory. Despite this disappointment and far from renouncing to his wishes, the willing subject is seduced by a new desire which puts him in motion again, so that he restarts the same cycle. Within this context, the kind of happiness an individual imbued with desire is able to experience is solely negative and extremely ephemeral:

All satisfaction, or *what is commonly* called happiness, is really and essentially always negative only, and never positive. It is not a gratification which comes to us originally and of itself, but it must

¹⁹ See Schopenhauer, Arthur, *Manuscript Remains. Volume 1*, Berg Publishers: Oxford, 1988, p. 74.

²⁰ *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 634.

²¹ *Manuscript Remains. Vol. 1*, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

²² See Young, Julian, *Schopenhauer*, Routledge: New York, 2005, p. 211.

always be the satisfaction of a wish. For desire, that is to say, want, is the precedent condition of every pleasure; but with the satisfaction, the desire and therefore the pleasure cease; and so the satisfaction or gratification can never be more than deliverance from a pain, from a want.²³ [Emphasis mine]

According to the preceding remarks, we can summarize the central features the conception of happiness outlined in the frame of natural consciousness possesses: 1) it is hedonistic, since it aims at pleasure through wish-fulfillment; 2) it is negative, for pleasure cannot be sensed directly, but rather in a mediate way, as the temporal cessation of pain; 3) it is deceptive, because the expected gratification is by no means lasting, but extremely fleeting; 4) it presupposes the affirmation of one's own will, and therefore, it involves egoism.

In virtue of this depiction, it has been said that Schopenhauer's doctrine of pessimism is about earthly happiness, natural man's exclusive good²⁴. I am not wholly convinced about the correctness of such a claim, though I am not going to discuss here Schopenhauer's presumed pessimism, which is a highly problematic topic. Instead, I would like to remark that he seems to offer an alternative conception of happiness, so that the first and «pessimistic» one is just a part of the whole picture. Actually, he describes certain human experiences in which «true happiness»²⁵ is attained. In my opinion, a central theme in Schopenhauer's practical philosophy is the providing of a criterion which allows us to distinguish *genuine* from *merely apparent* happiness. In this regard, the path he follows does not differ substantially from the one followed by ancient eudaimonistic philosophers, who used to start their ethical inquiries by reflecting on common beliefs concerning happiness with the purpose of purifying them through philosophical examination. After this inspection, they ended up discovering that the content of true happiness or *eudaimonia* did not coincide, at least completely, with common sense beliefs, as for example the latter use to identify happiness with power and wealth while ethical reflection with virtue.

Schopenhauer shows us the same procedure. If we pay attention to the way he articulates words when referring to the hedonistic account of happiness, he employs impersonal expres-

²³ *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

²⁴ See Atwell, John, *Schopenhauer. The Human Character*, Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1990, p. 175.

²⁵ Following Barbara Neymehr (see her «Pessimistische Eudaimonologie? Zu Schopenhauers Konzeptionen des Glücks», in *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 77, 1996, pp. 133-165), I have decided to keep the term «happiness» to refer to this kind of genuine experience that contrasts with the deceptive one typical of natural awareness, though Schopenhauer does not usually employ this term in the frame of «better consciousness». Rather, to allude to this alternative state of consciousness, he prefers to use a set of terms such as «blessedness», «blissful state», «peaceful bliss», «quietness», «serenity». In german, this contrast is given by the terms *Glück* and *Seeligkeit*. In Schopenhauer's view, *Glück* or *happiness* is tied to the sphere of willing, and hence to suffering, dissatisfaction, affliction; while *Seeligkeit* or blessedness is associated with the sphere of unwilling, and hence to quietness, peace, *i.e.*, a state in which a more constant deliverance from pain is attained. Taking into account these remarks, I think that with proper caution, we can point out the aforesaid contrast by using the expressions «happiness» and «true or genuine happiness», where «true or genuine happiness» equates to «blessedness», «blissful state», «peace of mind».

sions such as: «*what is commonly called happiness*»²⁶ («Alle Befriedigung, oder *was man gemeinhin Glück nennt*»)²⁷; «the successive satisfaction of all our willing is what we think of through the concept of happiness»²⁸ (Die sukzessive Befriedigung alles unsers Wollens aber ist, *was man durch den Begriff des Glückes denkt*)²⁹. In contrast with these expressions, in some other passages he employs the term «*true*» happiness, and what is most important, he precises what he understands by it, as in the following lines: «without *peace* and *calm*, *true* well-being is absolutely impossible»³⁰ («*ohne Ruhe* aber ist durchaus kein *wahres Wohlsein* möglich»)³¹; «so long as we are the subject of willing, we never obtain *lasting happiness* or *peace*»³² («solange wir Subjekt des Wollens sind, wird uns nimmermehr *dauerndes Glück*, noch *Ruhe*»).³³

These passages suggest some important things: in the first place, that Schopenhauer admits the existence of true happiness; secondly, that he identifies it with inner peace or tranquility; and finally, that the attainment of such a state presupposes the transcendence of empirical consciousness, which implies two things: a correct comprehension of things and a transformed attitude to the world, with especial regard to sentient beings; for this reason, it involves an ethical transformation. This conception –let us call it the «non-hedonistic account of happiness»—meets the exact opposed conditions manifested in the hedonistic account, insofar as: 1) the subject is no longer inclined to seeking pleasure by way of desire-satisfaction; 2) happiness seems not to be merely reduced to a negative state, since it is described as a disposition in which positive emotions are felt, such as equanimity, inner contentment, calmness; 3) the aforesaid concept is no longer represented as a delusive or deceiving goal, for it supposes a «better consciousness»; and 4) it does not involve egoism, on the grounds that it does not implicate the affirmation of one's own will, at least not in the same extent that natural consciousness shows.

Already in his *Early Manuscripts*, Schopenhauer holds that the source of *true happiness*, which is built on solid ground, remains foreign for empirical consciousness³⁴. And also in a highly relevant excerpt, he asserts the following: «Very moderate willing is more easily satisfied; it can go on always without exhaustion; *it is in part a denial of life and therefore the way to happiness*» [Emphasis mine]³⁵.

²⁶ *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

²⁷ Schopenhauer, Arthur, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 1, Cotta Insel: Stuttgart/Frankfurt, 1960-1965, p. 438.

²⁸ *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 634.

²⁹ *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 813.

³⁰ *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

³¹ *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

³² *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

³³ *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

³⁴ *Manuscript Remains*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 273. It is worth noting here that Payne translates the german word *Seeligkeit* as «happiness»; «blessedness» or «blissfulness» could have also been good candidates, even better options.

Accordingly, the path to true happiness consists in *willing less*, or even better, in *unwilling*. There are certain forms of life in which this kind of happiness is experienced in a stable manner: in a considerable way, in the life of those who have acquired character and those who devote themselves to theoretical life; even in a greater extent, in the lives of virtuous people, reaching its highest expression in the lives of saints and ascetics, according to Schopenhauer. All these forms of life have in common, though in different degrees, certain renunciation to the will to life. Hence they involve redemption from the natural world, *i.e.*, from suffering, which proceeds from our attachment to the will. In the following, I will only concentrate on the connection we can trace between happiness and virtue in the frame of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy.

4. BEING VIRTUOUS AND BEING HAPPY

In his *Aphorism zur Lebensweisheit*, Schopenhauer stipulates that from an eudemonological point of view, there are some goods that are by its nature much more important than others in face of our happiness. Among them, he includes health, intelligence, temperament and *moral character*³⁶. By the end of Chapter II, he asserts that the excellence of character has an immediate and direct influence upon happiness and he refers there to section 22 of his *Prize Essay on the Basis of Morals*³⁷. Then in this section, we find a clear relation established between virtue and happiness –understood this latter in the second sense outlined above– and also its reverse, between vice and unhappiness.

Both good and bad characters are described in opposite terms: they are said to inhabit different worlds because of their different perceptions of it. While egoist or evil characters perceive a thick partition between themselves and others beings, the virtuous glimpses the profound unity that links all sentient creatures. For this reason, in both types of characters we find the predominance of distinct ways of knowing: the bad character perceives the world on the grounds of the *principium individuationis* and hence is trapped by illusion, by the belief that plurality really exists and that individuals are separate entities, whereas compassionate agents show a «better consciousness» based on an intuitive knowledge of the world³⁸. In Schopenhauer terms, they make less of a distinction between themselves and others³⁹. Such an attitude constitutes precisely the condition for a morally good behavior and reveals itself as a certain sort of practical wisdom⁴⁰.

³⁶ See Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer: The Wisdom of Life: Volume Eight*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, Electronic Classics Series, 2005, p. 6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁸ *Prize Essay on The Basis of Morals*, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

Now then, the way of knowing expressed by a virtuous character shows itself in «a whole manner of consciousness and mood»; from this follows that:

... his natural relation with everyone is friendly: in his innermost being, he feels himself related to all beings, immediately participates in others' well-being and woe, and confidently presupposes the same participation on their part. From this grows a profound *inward peace* and that *confidence, calm, contented mood* because of which everyone near him feels good.⁴¹ [Emphasis mine]

This passage reveals the second conception of happiness we have previously identified, according to which true happiness consists in equanimity or inner peace, as in this case concerns virtuous characters, those who predominantly perform just, benevolent, generous actions out of compassion. As known, Schopenhauer recognizes compassion as the only moral incentive in so far as it is other-regarding and is based on a correct metaphysical comprehension of the world. Thus, the compassionate agent is able to assist others, even to the extent of self-sacrifice, because she knows –though obscurely– the other is not really other, but rather «I once more». In consequence, the good character transcends the empirical standpoint along with its two correlative aspects, namely: egoism and the way of knowledge tied up to the forms of space, time and causality.

Given all these assumptions, we can see that the kind of happiness experienced by morally good agents, meet the four conditions that true happiness requires:

1. The virtuous character, when performing an action out of compassion, does not act for the sake of her own well-being; on the contrary, she seeks the other's well-being. To this regard, it is evident that this latter does not seek to promote her own happiness, for she does not aim to satisfy her own willing while helping others in need.

2. From the prior remark follows that the line of conduct shown by noble agents does not reflect by any means a hedonistic account of happiness. In this sense, we can understand why Schopenhauer says that «the inner nature of virtue will show itself as a striving in quite the opposite direction to that of happiness, which is that of well-being and life»⁴². Even though, we have seen that he describes virtuous agents as truly happy, given the inward peace they experience as a result of their disposition and state of consciousness. We face then a paradoxical conclusion: even when good characters do not act for the sake of their own happiness, they encounter it as the result of their noble acts, which are grounded ultimately on their friendly disposition towards everything around them. On the other hand, this species of happiness, in the measure that has been identified with tranquility, seems not to be merely negative, at least for three reasons: a) given that it has nothing to do with the satisfaction of subjective desires, it cannot be conceived as the deliverance from pain one *momentarily* expe-

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁴² *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

riences when fulfilling a certain desire; b) on the contrary, the calm disposition of virtuous agents is described by Schopenhauer as a *constant* disposition, as a *stable* mood and state of consciousness; c) finally, it seems *positive emotions* are felt within this condition, in the sense that are *directly* experienced by the agent, such as confidence, peace, contentment.

3. Given that tranquility is felt in a stable manner, it contrasts sharply with happiness in the hedonistic sense, which Schopenhauer characterizes in terms of a deceiving, illusory goal, precisely because it assumes a certain belief: the common but *mistaken belief* that we can attain happiness by way of satisfying the entirety of our desires. Unlike this, the equanimity experienced by noble characters is grounded on, and explicable by, the *better understanding* they possess of the nature of the world, in comparison with those still trapped in the phenomenal point of view. Accordingly, Schopenhauer seems to hold that a correct insight into the nature of things has a positive effect upon us, in providing equanimity, a quieter of the will.

4. To the extent that true happiness must be understood as conflicting with the hedonistic account, in which the satisfaction of one's subjective wants plays a central role, the former will be non-egoistical. This is fundamental to understand in what sense Schopenhauer is allowed to introduce happiness in the core of his moral philosophy. The virtuous agent is happy even when she does not seek happiness, or better said, does not act having in mind her own happiness. Rather, it seems her happiness comes from her interior, namely: her nobility of character, which has been pointed out by Schopenhauer as a quality that by itself makes us happy.

A last point I would like to examine concerns the relation Schopenhauer gives the impression to establish between virtue and happiness. We have already seen that the excellence of character is considered by him as an attribute that makes its holder immediately happy. This claim is not at all clear, and Schopenhauer does not provide an explanation of it. Maybe what he is trying to say is that, since virtuous agents are in possession of a better understanding of the world, namely, an insight into the unity of all beings, this kind of knowledge provides them an inner contentment, for they feel amity and a deep connection with everything surrounding them. Hence, they feel at home in the world, and from this sense of community grow their inward peace. In addition, there is also a further reason that explicates the good character's peace of mind: they are in possession of what Schopenhauer calls an «approving conscience»⁴³. By this is meant that the performance of noble actions leaves on the agent a mark of internal satisfaction, while actions of injustice and unkindness provoke just the opposite.

So far, virtue is certainly seen by Schopenhauer as a source of contentment; in other words, as the *cause* of the good character's happiness. This causality seems to go even further: virtuous agents are not only themselves happy but can also actively promote the other's well-being. Given the fact that they are inclined to feel compassion to their fellows, they don't remain in-

⁴³ *Prize Essay on The Basis of Morals*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

different to their pain or distress. Then, when assisting those in need, compassionate individuals contribute to their happiness, precisely because they release them from pain. To this respect, Rousseau's words are very appropriate, which Schopenhauer quotes: «what is it to wish that a person may not suffer, but to wish that he may be happy?»⁴⁴.

On the other hand, good character's happiness seems also to reinforce their virtuosity. In this sense, *happiness can also be seen as a certain cause for virtue*. Schopenhauer does not admit this directly, but he makes a claim that can be interpreted in this direction: «indeed, the more happy our own circumstances, the more our consciousness contrasts its own happiness with the situation of the other, the more responsive we are for compassion»⁴⁵. According to this affirmation, it can be said that the virtuous character's happiness makes them more receptive to other's suffering, stimulating or enhancing even more their natural disposition to making good to others.

5. CONCLUSION

It is somewhat ironical that in despite of Schopenhauer's criticisms of Kant for reconciling virtue with happiness in his doctrine of the highest good⁴⁶, he himself appears to ground a central connection between both concepts at the core of his moral theory. My general strategy for supporting this claim was to show that there are two recognizable and distinct senses of «happiness» in Schopenhauer's philosophy: the hedonistic account and the non-hedonistic account. Given that the hedonistic account necessarily presupposes egoism, it is impossible by principle to reconcile it with morality. Accordingly, we can only bring together virtue and happiness in the frame of a non-hedonistic conception, one that implies that the good agent does not act for the sake of her own happiness. On the contrary: the noble character experiences authentic happiness *precisely because she is not primarily concern with her personal well-being*. For in Schopenhauer's opinion, when someone frees herself from personal concerns and cares, she is able to reach peace of mind and equanimity, a kind of state which I have considered here as one of «true happiness».

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁴⁶ *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 524. See also *Prize Essay on The Basis of Morals*, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

