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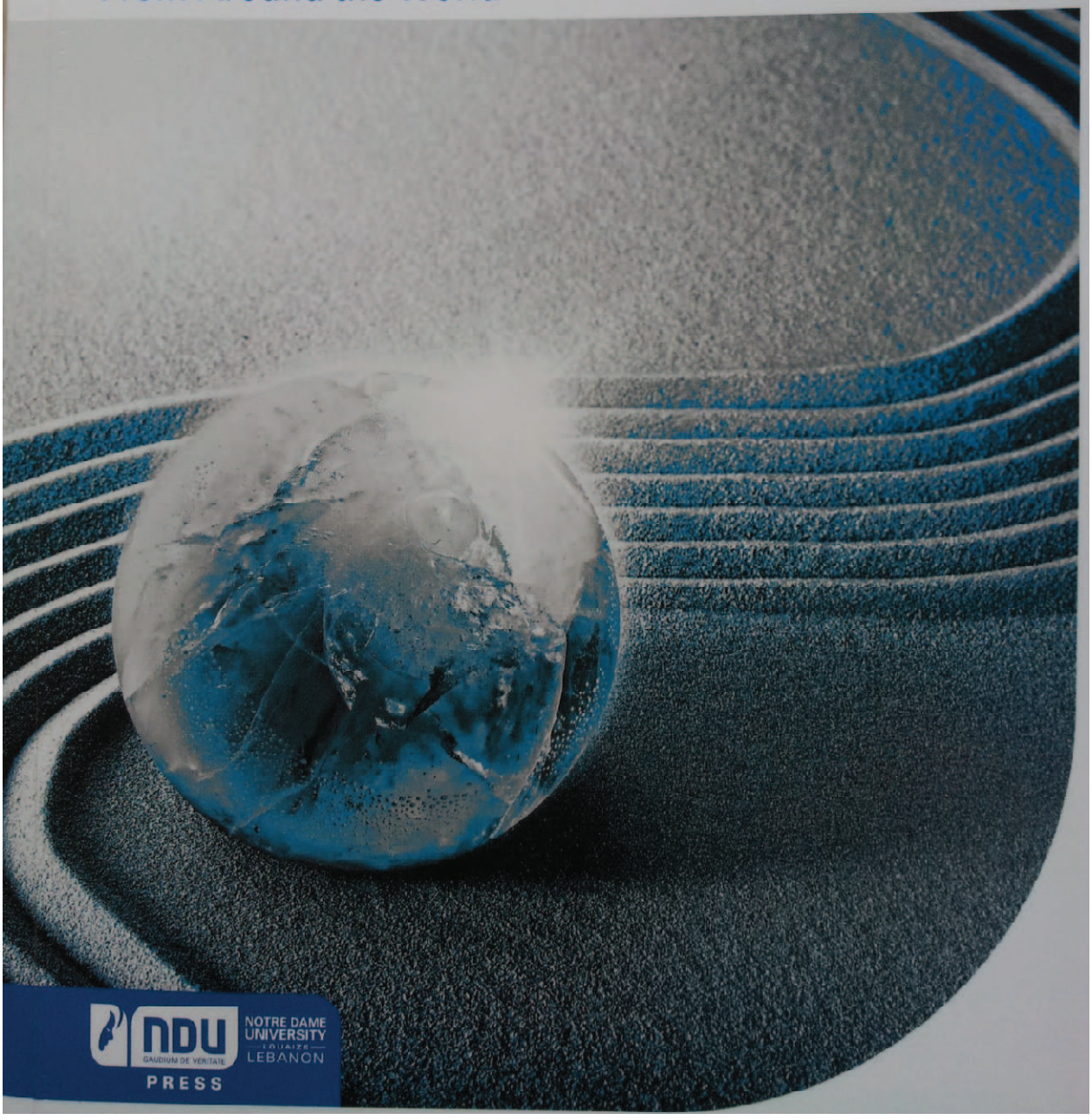
Edward J. Alam

COMPASSION AND FORGIVENESS

Religious and Philosophical Perspectives From Around the World



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From Around the World

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Compassion and Catharsis

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Introduction

This paper explores how compassion can lead to emotionally purifying experiences from a philosophic-anthropological perspective. My hypothesis is that compassion via catharsis can result in forgiveness, provided that an adequate understanding of or for compassion is employed. The investigation begins by briefly dealing with the etymology of compassion by comparing Greek, Latin, English, and German related terms. The second section focuses on Aristotle's understanding of compassion. According to his *Poetics* and his *Politics*, compassion in the context of Art implies therapeutic values. The third and the fourth sections elucidate Arthur Schopenhauer's account on compassion and that of Friedrich Nietzsche respectively. While for Schopenhauer, compassion is an important value for the foundation of Ethics; Nietzsche contrastingly holds that compassion rather multiplies misery. A fifth part attempts to synthesize these different standpoints on compassion and tries to elucidate how compassion via catharsis may lead to forgiveness.

Etymological Backgrounds of Compassion

The English term compassion developed from the Latin 'compassio', a composite of 'cum', meaning 'together', 'with' and 'passio' denoting 'suffering', 'affect', and 'emotion'. Compassion translated

into German is 'Mitleid', a composite build from 'mit' (with) and 'leiden' (suffering), having exactly the same meaning as (and based on) the Latin root of compassion. The Latin compassio is itself a translation from the Greek 'sympatheia', a composit of 'syn', meaning 'together' and 'pathos'/'pathae' meaning adversity, misfortune, suffering, affect, feeling, emotion, and desire. On the one hand, 'Mitleiden' can mean to reduce someone's suffering by sharing a bit of the experience of suffering with the person who is primarily suffering. This is a kind of secondary suffering that takes part in the suffering of the primary sufferer, which at the same time lightens the suffering of the primary sufferer to a certain extent. On the other hand, 'Mitleiden' can also mean to suffer additionally to the primary sufferer, whose suffering is not even (significantly) reduced by the secondary sufferer's compassion. The first meaning is also reflected in the German word 'Teilnahme' or 'Anteilnahme' (participation, condolence, sympathy), which literally translates into English as 'taking part', especially in someone's suffering by sharing a part of the suffering or the burden. This reading of the concept compassion could be explained in an allegory. It is as if someone helps another person carrying a heavy load. Two negative issues, the (divided) heavy load, the shared carrying of the load, can be seen as a positive gesture: the sharing of a burden is something positive, both of the persons involved can potentially win from such a situation. Friedrich Nietzsche, as we will see later, despises such an interpretation, which would sound to him like a sermon. He sees compassion rather in the light of the second meaning. An allegory for that interpretation would be, for example, a person trying to pull out another person from a swamp, but, in the course of that, getting stuck himself. Both persons suffer together, but neither is better off due to the common suffering. From a utilitarian perspective the former understanding of compassion might maximize utility; the latter perspective reduces overall usefulness.[1]

1- Except if the two people now stuck in the swamp are both very bad characters.

A similar case would be if the primary sufferer is not aware of the compassion of the secondary sufferer, e.g., if someone watching television is compassionate towards someone or a group who does not know the secondary sufferer. But as we will see in Aristotle's *Poetics*, even such kind of compassion, which the primary sufferer is not aware of, can be therapeutic for the secondary sufferer. The Greek word 'eleos' – employed in the phrase 'eleos kai phobos' (pity and fear) in the Aristotelian *Poetics* – can mean compassion, pity, sympathy, sorrow. The context of this notion in the Aristotelian *Poetics* and its relation with compassion and catharsis will be focused on in the next section.

Aristotle's Poetics: 'eleos': cathartic pre-, re-, or with-suffering

Plato criticizes the Sophists for instrumentalizing compassion in order to manipulate emotions for rhetorical purposes. On the contrary, according to Aristotle's Poetics, compassion or pity in the context of art implies therapeutic values. Plato problematizes art from an ontological and from an ethical-educational perspective. For Plato, Art has a very low ontological status, because the artwork as representation is only a copy of something in our world. But since the things in our world are themselves only representations of ideas, the artwork is a copy of a copy and thus can only be of a very low ontological status and hence is quite far removed from truth. Educationally and ethically the artwork might mislead people by representing something that is not appropriate for the recipients of artworks, an unjust suffering hero, for example. Aristotle, however, does not agree with Plato in regard to the value of artworks. Tragedy can be of a high value and even of therapeutic value, since it may purge negative emotions by the arousal of "eleos kai phobos", 'sorrow and fear', or 'pity and fear'. "A tragedy", so Aristotle, […] is the imitation of an action […] with incidents arousing pity and fear, thereby accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions".(2)

2- Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449 b 22-31, http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1974.

Since this study aims to answer the question on how compassion via emotionally purifying or spiritually refining experiences may lead to forgiveness, Aristotle's therapeutically, or more precisely homeopathically, inclined understanding of tragedy is important. In the tragic play, pity and fear are aroused and purgation of the *same* (gr. homoios) or similar ("such") emotions is accomplished by these emotions. Due to this therapeutic implication Aristotle must have had a homoeopathic effect of tragedy in mind. This account is developed in detail elsewhere.[3]

A clear understanding of what he means by catharsis can be achieved by employing an example taken from therapeutic settings. Vertigo may be cured (and has been cured) by gradual exposure of clients to increasing heights. Provided the assumption is right, that a kind of negatively connoted (pre-)exposure to height has occurred in the pathogenesis of a client that triggered vertigo, carefully repeated re-exposure in safe settings may cure (and has cured) vertigo. Two aspects in the therapeutic procedure seem to be crucial: the (careful, gradual) re-exposure and the safe setting. A therapist or a friend, for example, can make settings 'feel' safe. Also virtual technology systems can be employed as safe environments, which only simulate exposure (to increasing height for example), but do not expose to the real threat they simulate. The re-experience of a negative experience (height) takes place in a safe setting, which adds a positive aspect to the experience. The positive experience in a safe setting may gradually undermine and finally purge the negative former experience. From a therapeutic standpoint re-experience as re-traumatization is to be avoided. Therefore, an ideal distance is essential for the 'healing' process. Distance can be achieved by distancing devices that gradually and carefully re-expose in therapeutic settings, employing art related components such as in expressive therapies that involve music, drama, play, or sandplay.

3- Meinhold, Roman, *"Catharsis and Violence: Terrorism and the Fascination for Superlative Destruction". Boleswa Journal of Philosophy, Theology and Religion.* Vol. 3, No.3, 2012, pp. 172-184.

A similar process can take place in settings involving the experience of art. A tragedy in a film, for example, in the death of a character, confronts the audience with a negative phenomenon. Nevertheless, this simulated death (which is 'safe' since it does not really pose a threat to the audience) may lead to a re-experience of emotions related to death in a secure setting. The safety of the setting may be related to the venue, the audience, especially persons who accompany the re-experiencing person, and the experience may be aesthetically enhanced by the beauty and sophistication of the film. All those aspects provide positive experiences which in the end may, in a way, 'counterbalance' the negative experiences made before in the first exposure setting.

The phenomenon of compassion, not only in the context in the world of art but also in a social setting, has potential for cathartic experiences if the person (B), who has compassion or empathy for another person (A), who experiences or experienced something tragic, is in a relatively safer setting than the primarily suffering person (A). The compassion, co-suffering, or *with*-suffering of the person who secondarily suffers (B) may provide positive experience in this situation to the primarily suffering person (A). The interesting aspect is that the situation might provide cathartic experiences for both primary (A) and secondary sufferer (B), since the being together and the sharing of the negative experience has positive implications for both. The primary sufferer's suffering is alleviated by the compassionate gestures or simply presence of a partaking person. The secondary pre-, with-, or re-suffering might be cathartic for the compassionate person as well.

The German Poet, Critic, and Philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), was criticized by 19th and 20th century philologists, because he translated Aristotle's phrase of 'eleos and phobos' into 'Mitleid und Furcht' (compassion and fear) instead of the linguistically more appropriate phrase 'Jammern und Schaudern' (sorrow and shivering).[4] Lessing's explanation employs an interpretation

4- Schadewaldt, Wolfgang, *Die griechische Tragödie. Tübinger Vorlesungen Bd. 4*., Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

which grounds compassion (Mitleid) on fear (Furcht) ("Aus dieser Gleichheit entstehe die Furcht, dass unser Schicksal gar leicht dem seinigen ebenso aehnlich werden koenne [...] und diese Furcht sei es, welche das Mitleid gleichsam zur Reife bringe."[5] We are (pre-) suffering with the other, we are compassionate, because we 'fear', that what happened to the other, may happen to us as in the same or a similar way. Applied to a social context outside the art-world this means that the compassionate secondary sufferer (B) fears that the primary sufferer's (A's) suffering could occur to him in the same manner. The compassion is based on the fear of the anticipated fate or tragedy. In the same manner retro-perspective fear can motivate compassionate attitude and behavior.

Schopenhauer: Compassion as the Foundation of Ethics

The German Philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), a contemporary of G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), holds a different opinion than that of Lessing. For Schopenhauer, compassion is non-egoistic, which is an argument that is difficult to sustain, as we will see below. But his explanation of the reason for, or grounding of, compassion is interesting, because Schopenhauer attempts, but does not entirely succeed, to solve the riddle that deals with the question concerning why the suffering of the other can be (almost) our own.

In 1840 Schopenhauer wrote an essay titled "On the Foundation of Ethics" (also: *The Basis of Morality*). This essay was later published together with another essay "On the Freedom of Human Will" in a book under the title of *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics.* Both papers had been submissions to essay competitions. While the Royal Norwegian Society of Science and Letters awarded the first prize to "On the Freedom of Human Will", his "On the Foundation of Ethics" was rejected by the Royal Danish Society of the Sciences due to an inappropriate focus, dissatisfaction with the mode of discussion, and "unseemly" language (despite being the only submission for the contest). Indeed, Schopenhauer admits that he cannot

5- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1768.

answer the meta-ethical question, "*the great mystery of ethics*",[6] how it can come about that we can be concerned for others to such an extent that we even forget about ourselves, despite the fact that we are egoistic beings. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer's approach in answering this question concerning the foundation of ethics is a new contribution to Western philosophy, though it is obvious that Eastern thought strongly influenced his account on compassion.

According to Schopenhauer, compassion is the foundation of morality. In the second part of "On the Foundation of Ethics", Schopenhauer dismisses Immanuel Kant's deontological foundation of morality as "*hairsplitting […] a priori soap bubbles*"[7] and draws up his own account in the third part. The interesting aspect for research dedicated to philosophical anthropology is that Schopenhauer is convinced to find the root of "*…the ultimate foundation of morality […] in human nature itself*".[8] By nature we are almost completely egoistic.[9] This is obvious when we are focused on our personal "*weal and woe*", but if we are exclusively concerned with the other's joy and sorrow, we are not acting egoistic. Only such an action is of moral value whose motive is the other's weal and woe.[10] Only if an action is exclusively done for the advantage or benefit of another does it bear the seal of ethical worth.

Meta-ethically, Schopenhauer's account can be challenged since we cannot absolutely be sure that in case of such an ethical worthy action there is not a single spark of egoism left in the deepest corner of our reasoning or feeling. As soon as such an egoistic spark is detectable, the argumentation is falsified. But Schopenhauer's account could be opened up by widening the condition in stating that if an action is 'mainly' (although not exclusively) done for the other, then it deserves to bear the stamp of ethical value. The next problem

6- Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The Basis of Morality*, London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1903. http://archive.org/details/cu31924028961394, 204.

7- Ibid., 202.

8- Ibid., 205.

9- Ibid., 211.

10- Ibid., 203.

arising with such a widened understanding would be that it is hard to measure if the action is *mainly* done for the other with one's own benefit only as a side effect or vice-versa; the others benefit could simply be a side effect of an egoistic action.

Interestingly enough, in the Western context a person having done an ethically valuable action *mainly* (although not exclusively) for another person (an action which is usually considered of moral worth in public opinion), quite often assures the other that the action undertaken had also had some kind of egoistic implication. This is done in the understanding that the other might be worried that an action could have been exclusively done for him or her, which is often considered as an obligation towards the person who has done the morally good action, or there can be a feeling that one has inconvenienced the other with one's personal issues. But for Schopenhauer, the primary ethical phenomenon is compassion,[11] which desires the other person's well-being.[12] This "natural" compassion "*resides in human nature*"[13] and is not culturally relative, it "*appears in all countries and at all times*".[14] From this natural compassion stems the "cardinal virtues", philanthropy or loving kindness[15] and justice, from which, again, all other virtues may be derived.[16] The first manifestation, of compassion is the restriction it causes if a person wants to harm another person. Although that does not always prevent harm in practice, nevertheless there is an inner voice that "*calls out to me, 'Stop'!*" Thus, the "*first degree of compassion*" is "*the fundamental principle of justice*": "*injure no one*".[17] Schopenhauer ties the moral principle to emotions that can be felt as well as anticipated. If we imagine the trouble we can inflict on a person, the "*truth is felt*". Compassion helps us to anticipate potential harm

11- Ibid., 207.
12- Ibid., 205.
13- Ibid., 209.
14- Ibid., 208.
15- Ibid., 225.
16- Ibid., 208.
17- Ibid., 209.

and pain we could inflict on others and thus can act as a deterrent.[18] Compassion is the *"instinctive participation"* in another person's suffering.[19] Justice as voluntary virtue (not as prudence) *"has its origin in compassion"*.[20]

Coming to the meta-ethical 'mystery' of the grounding of ethics in human nature via compassion Schopenhauer writes,

> How is it possible for a suffering that is not mine and does not touch me to become as directly a motive as only my own [suffering] normally does...? This presupposes that to a certain extent I have identified myself with the other..., the barrier between the ego and the non-ego is for the moment abolished...I share the suffering in him.[21]

While this statement is crucial in explaining our motivation it could also be used against Schopenhauer's own claim that compassion is non-egoistic, since the (quasi) extinction between the ego and non-ego distinction implies that doing something for the other is as doing it for oneself, the ego; that action would thus be egoistic. This meta-ethical motivational issue, again, could be a good argument for widening Schopenhauer's claim according to which actions of ethical value must be absolutely non-egoistic. As mentioned before, claiming that ethical worthy actions have to be mainly or even only to a great/certain extent non-egoistic (at the same time having some egoistic components) would be safer meta-ethically for the establishment of a foundation of morality on philosophic-anthropological ground.

Schopenhauer rejects that religions can be a foundation of morality: *"Whoever is good through religion and not by natural inclination must be a bad fellow."*[22] Christianity, especially, is criticized by Schopenhauer because it does not extend its ethics to animals: *"[…] whoever*

18- Ibid., 231.
19- Ibid., 222.
20- Ibid., 211.
21- Ibid., 223.
22- Ibid., 229.

is cruel to animals cannot be a good man."[23] Schopenhauer does not go as far as to recommend vegetarianism, but he raises an argument that is often employed in animal ethics, according to which suffering is greater in organisms that are more complex. According to him, a human being might suffer more due to lack of animal food than a less complex animal suffers, which is going to be killed for food, especially if animals are killed in such a way that suffering is minimized.[24]

Nietzsche: Compassion as Multiplier of Misery

Friedrich Nietzsche, like Schopenhauer, situates compassion (or pity) in the moral realm. Despite being a follower of Schopenhauer in many aspects, Nietzsche despises compassion, which, according to him, multiplies misery rather than reducing it. The two major ethical works in which Nietzsche deals with compassion are *Beyond Good and Evil* (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, 1886) and *On the Genealogy of Morality* (*Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 1887). The German word 'Mitleid' is translated in Nietzsche's writings either by compassion or pity.

From Nietzsche's perspective, compassion is almost entirely seen in a negative light. For a man of knowledge, compassion is ridiculous[25] because of the way it hinders progress in culture. According to Nietzsche, it is an impossible task to abolish suffering; it is foolish to attempt the eradication of suffering.[26] Compassion is not morality itself.[27] It multiplies rather the misery that already exists due to empathic suffering with those who suffer. There is double occupation with suffering, that of the sufferer and that of the "with-sufferer"; compassion, therefore, duplicates suffering. Nietzsche signifies Christianity as the "religion of compassion".[28] Nietzsche interprets

23- Ibid., 235.

24- Ibid., 237-8.

25- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Cambridge: University Press, 2007, 171.

26- Ibid., 225.

27- Ibid., 202.

28- Ibid., 202,206.

its paradigm of compassion, as an epidemic,[29] which the clerics noisily preach. From a psychological perspective it is a symptom of self-hatred, unhappiness, ugliness, and a celebration of suffering. He views compassion as a contemptible contemporary pandemic,[30] a new (negative) European Buddhism.[31]

Nietzsche revaluates compassion by shifting the view from compassion as moral incentive to compassion as a symptom of morale-destruction. Compassion is a concept that lies within the framework of theories built on the foundation of the pleasure-pain-dichotomy such as Utilitarianism, Hedonism, Well-Being, and Eudaimonism. This understanding of morality and motivation is naïve and trivial in Nietzsche's understanding: "Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility".[32] But the consciousness of an artist or of another formative power (this is how Nietzsche sees himself)[33], the consciousness of somebody who has higher goals, will look beyond the concepts of utility, pleasure, pain, and compassion. Compare the Aristotle quote, "To seek everywhere for usefulness is the least appropriate for great souls or free spirits." [34] Nietzsche thinks that the only compassion such a person with higher goals feels is the pity due to the intellectual or spiritual smallness and decadence of humanity and its cultural decline.[35]

The improvement of humanity and culture is impossible without great suffering. And here—this is highly interesting, and one has to assume that Schopenhauer would have liked this account—Nietzsche is anchoring his account on a philosophic-anthropological datum: as humans we are creatures and creators at the same time. Compassion is aimed at the creature, but the human being as cre-

29- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Cambridge: University Press, 2008, 14.

30- Nietzsche, BGE, 222.

31- Nietzsche, BGE, 202; GM 5.

32- Nietzsche, BGE, 260.

33- "*The noble person helps the unfortunate too, although not (or hardly ever) out of pity, but rather more out of an impulse generated by the over-abundance of power. In honoring himself the noble man honors the powerful as well*" (BGE 260).

34- Aristotle, Politics, 1338 b 2-4, http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/20685.

35- Nietzsche, BGE, 225.

ator needs to crush, destroy, brake, mold, and purify, that which inevitably creates suffering.(36) The creature-creator duality in human nature is mirrored in the slave and master morality Nietzsche describes in his ethical works. The Übermensch motif is clearly implicit in Nietzsche's account of the creator in the human creature-creator-duality. This is very similar to Raskolnikov's justification of destructive force against the weaker by a strong minority in Dostoyevski's "Crime and Punishment": The strongest and ablest have the 'license' to destroy and kill for the sake of higher goals. This understanding also resembles Michael Walzer's more utilitarian "sliding scale" argument in "Just and Unjust Wars". In cases of supreme emergency in which a threat is imminent and potentially devastating, certain just war regulations might be overridden in order to win a war so that justice can prevail.(37) But Nietzsche is not interested in justice at all, rather in its Beyond:

> Hedonism, pessimism, utilitarianism, eudaemonianism...measure the value of things according to pleasure and pain, which is to say...trivialities. They are...naivetes, and nobody who is conscious of both formative powers and an artist's conscience will fail to regard them with scorn as well as pity. Pity for you! That is certainly not pity...for social "distress," for "society" with its sick and injured, for people depraved and destroyed from the beginning as they lie around us on the ground. Our pity is a higher, more far-sighted pity: - we see how humanity is becoming smaller, how you are making it smaller!...You want, if possible (and no "if possible" is crazier) to abolish suffering. And us? - it looks as though we would prefer it to be heightened and made even worse than it has ever been! Well-being as you understand it - that is no goal; it looks to us like an end! - a condition that immediately renders people ridiculous and despicable...! The discipline of suffering, of great suffering - don't you know that this discipline has been

36- Ibid.

37- Walzer, Michael, *Just and Unjust Wars. A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations.* New-York: Basic Books, 1997, 228-230, 242ff (for a detailed account on the 'sliding scale' argument and its relation to the concept of 'supreme emergency' cf. ibid. Part two).

> the sole cause of every enhancement in humanity so far? The tension that breeds strength into the unhappy soul, its shudder at the sight of great destruction, its inventiveness and courage in enduring, surviving, interpreting, and exploiting unhappiness, and whatever depth, secrecy, whatever masks, spirit, cunning, greatness it has been given: - weren't these the gifts of suffering, of the disciple of great suffering? In human beings, creature and creator are combined: in humans there is material, fragments, abundance, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos; but in humans there is also creator, maker, hammer-hardness, spectator-divinity and seventh day: - do you understand this contrast? And that your pity is aimed at the "creature in humans," at what needs to be molded, broken, forged, torn, burnt, seared and purified, - at what necessarily needs to suffer and should suffer? And our pity - don't you realize who our inverted pity is aimed at when it fights against your pity as the worst of all pampering and weaknesses? - Pity against pity, then! - But to say it again: there are problems that are higher than any problems of pleasure, pain, or pity; and any philosophy that stops with these is a piece of naivete.(38)

But Nietzsche goes even further than only dismissing compassion, by celebrating suffering and cruelty(39):

> This is my claim: almost everything we call "higher culture" is based on the spiritualization and deepening of cruelty...Cruelty is what constitutes the painful sensuality of tragedy. And what pleases us in so-called tragic pity as well as in everything sublime, up to the highest and most delicate of metaphysical tremblings, derives its sweetness exclusively from the intervening component of cruelty...what they all enjoy and crave with a mysterious thirst to pour down their throats is "cruelty", the spiced drink of the great Circe.(40)

38- Nietzsche, BGE, 225.

39- In 1889 Nietzsche collapses in Turin throwing his arms around an old horse that had been severely beaten by its owner. Schopenhauer would probably have taken Nietzsche's behavior as an act of real compassion.

40- Ibid., 229.

Here we can still detect remnants from the birth of tragedy. Order and beauty (the Apollonian element) are not sufficient for great tragedy in particular, for great artworks in general, and for fundamental progress of culture at large. A complementary element is intoxication and destruction (the Dionysian element), which may involve cruelty as for example in tragedy. According to Nietzsche, suffering is a source of knowledge.(41)

Suffering is an almost certain side-effect of the expansion of knowledge. Introspection and observation evidently make clear that learning processes are often accompanied by suffering. The process of writing a dissertation, for example, in many cases involves suffering in a wider sense. But the 'appreciation' of cruelty leads down into the realm of human negativity which reaches beyond the scope of this paper. Cruelty, violence, suffering, pain, and transgression surface in phenomena closely related to compassion such as catharsis, the sublime, the Dionysian, and the numinous(42). In those phenomena, expressed in Nietzsche's terminology, pleasure is spiced with pain, or pain is spiced with pleasure. The painful pleasures and the pleasurable sufferings pose religious, metaphysical, psychological, and aesthetic riddles to our logical, utilitarian, and economic mainstream understanding of human nature, culture, and the world in which we live. The answer to this riddle can only be that human nature does not only try to avoid pain and seek pleasure, but at times invites painful pleasures and delightful suffering. Suffering alleviated by a compassionate person is a pain in which a homoeopathic dose of comfort has been injected.

Compassionate Understanding, 'Aufhebung', and Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the noun of the verb 'forgive' from Old English 'forgiefan' meaning *to allow, forgive, give, grant*; forgiefan is a composite of 'for' meaning completely and 'giefan' meaning *give*. In German the equivalent to forgiveness is the noun 'Vergebung' ('vergeben'

41- Ibid., 270.

42- *"The "wild animal" has not been killed off at all; it is alive and well, it has just - become divine."* (Nietzsche, BGE 229).

is its verb). Vergebung is etymologically closely related to forgiveness. It is a composite of 'ver' and 'geben'. The meaning of 'geben' is *give*. Most likely the Old English 'for' in forgiveness and the German 'ver' in Vergebung are etymologically rooted to the Indo-German prefix 'per'. The German prefix 'ver' can have diverse meanings such as 'beyond', or it denotes the intensification or negation of the following word/meaning. The noun 'Vergebung' in almost all cases means forgiveness, but in very rare instances it can be equivalent to 'Vergabe', *meaning allocation, awarding, placing*.

The three directions of meanings of the German prefix 'ver' (and probably also of the English prefix 'for') '*beyond*', *intensification*, and *negation* seem to be implicit in the meaning of 'Vergebung' and 'forgiveness'. The SEP defines forgiveness as:

> ...the action of forgiving, pardoning of a fault, remission of a debt, and similar responses to injury, wrongdoing, or obligation. In this sense of the term, forgiveness is a dyadic relation involving a wrongdoer and a wronged party, and is thought to be a way in which victims of wrong alter their and a wrongdoer's status by, for instance, acknowledging yet moving past a transgression.(43)

This definition involves all the three groups of meanings implicit in the German prefix 'ver': *"moving past a transgression"* signifies the 'meta' or 'beyond' character of forgiveness. Forgiving means to move, go, think, or feel *beyond* the transgression and to 'give' oneself and a wrongdoer a new status, stand, or starting point, or a new chance. In that forgiving is an *intensification* of 'giving', it is a 'giving' and going beyond what one thought would be possible. Finally, it is also a negation of the previous status of both victim and wrongdoer. The wrong act might not be forgotten, but might be forgiven. The act might not be negated, but the negative attitude related to the act of wrongdoing might be negated.

43- Hughes, Paul M., "Forgiveness", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/forgiveness.

My hypothesis was that compassion via catharsis can result in forgiveness, provided that an adequate understanding for or of compassion is employed. We need to synthesize Nietzsche's, Schopenhauer's, and Aristotle's accounts for an appropriate *compassionate* response to an act of wrongdoing. Compassionate understanding involves an emotional (re-, pre-, or with suffering/feeling), as well as an intellectual component (understanding) and may lead to purgation. Compassionate understanding may transcend the status of the involved actors due to insight into the emotional-therapeutic, anthropo-ethical, and philosophic-anthropological complexity of compassion which we gain by synthesizing Aristotle's, Schopenhauer's, and Nietzsche's accounts on compassion:

1- Emotional-therapeutic aspect: re-suffering, with-suffering, and pre-suffering, e.g. in art contexts (Aristotle) or even simulated environments, alleviates (and partly heals) experienced suffering, and the fear of prospective suffering. Suffering may additionally be alleviated due to aesthetical components in the context of the art-world.

2- Anthropo-Ethical aspect: compassion is grounded in human nature. It may or may not be seen as the/a foundation of ethics (Schopenhauer), but compassionate understanding should be understood as an ethical value and a moral virtue.

3- Philosophic-anthropological aspect: human nature invites at times painful pleasure and delightful suffering, which may lead to cultural progress, due to its transcendence of the mainstream pleasure-pain-motivation framework (Nietzsche).(44)

We need to start with Nietzsche, not by ethically justifying his dual anthropology, but by acknowledging the unpleasant philosophic-anthropological fact of the potential of moral negativity. Slavoj Zizek is only partly correct by stating that "*we are all demons, we just pretend to be humans*".(45) But we are humans and within a second we

44- But it may lead to disaster as well. Heraclitus' statement that "war is the father of all things" comprises both meanings: destruction and construction; it is a fact that disasters also foster cultural-technological development.

45- Taylor, Astra, *Zizek!*, Zeitgeist Films, 2005.

can be demons in particular circumstances, especially if there exists a problematic personal, psychological, social, or political history before such a particular circumstance. Some wrongdoers (think of certain heads of states, for instance) were convinced (although completely led astray by fundamentalist or extremist ideologies) that they were acting for a higher goal, but in the line of that crushed entire states. Not many people would like to forgive figures like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, or Benito Mussolini, but (depending on the particular standpoint) there exists diverse attitudes concerning forgiveness and compassion if it comes to certain former U.S. American heads of state, Osama bin Laden, and others. Many may forgive wrongdoings committed by heads of states such as Erich Honecker or Nelson Mandela. But all of them were convinced they were fighting for higher goals in the sense Nietzsche stated. (This does not answer the question of how to deal with wrongdoing resulting from stupidity or ignorance, which is beyond the scope this paper).

Human negativity needs enlightenment that is more thorough. If we understand a bit more of that complexity, we can be more compassionate and may not only be in a position to forgive, but we may also be able to prevent more wrongdoing. This potential for human negativity is not the only aspect of human nature and definitely not the only guiding one. As Schopenhauer has pointed out, compassion is grounded in human nature as well. It is not contradictory to synthesize Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's views on compassion which are based on philosophic-anthropological accounts as two aspects of a multi faceted human nature. We have both the potential to act like demons(46) or help compassionately.

Max Scheler omits one human dimension when he states that "*the human being can always be better (more) or worse (less) than an animal, but never an animal*",(47) since more current sobering etological research suggests two issues: wild primates are sometimes extreme-

46- Cf. Zimbardo, Philip G, *The Luciffer Effect. Understanding How Good People Turn Evil.* New York: Random House, 2007.

47- Scheler, Max, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos.* Berlin: Bouvier, 1995, 31: "der Mensch könne immer *mehr* oder *weniger* als ein Tier sein, niemals aber – ein Tier".

ly cruel without having reasons on which their survival depends (food, self-defense) and at times humans behave exactly according to the same pattern.[48] The many wars have shown that people can do both, kill and help, at the same time. Only the latter can usually be called ethical behavior, but rather in a wider frame than that of Schopenhauer's account, which might be self-contradictory in regard to absolutely or totally non-egoistic actions.

If we are psychologically in a position to make an effort to truly understand the action and the context of a wrongdoer, so that *to a certain extent I have identified myself with the other..., the barrier between the ego and the non-ego is for the moment abolished*, as Schopenhauer pointed out, we might be in a position to have this 'with-feeling' even with a wrongdoer. And, in an Aristotelian sense, the identification with the person who committed such a wrong act can lead to the homeopathic effect of catharsis that can help us to forgive.

I am claiming that the German notion "Aufheben" provides useful insights that could be therapeutically interpreted as components (and at times consecutive steps) in the process of compassionate understanding, which leads to forgiveness. A translation of the German notion 'Aufheben' into English from a therapeutic perspective is at least fourfold: Aufheben can mean to: 1) pick up, 2) store, 3) annihilate, and 4) elevate. 1) Therapeutically "picking up" an issue means that one is ready to make an initial approach to engage with the issue, e.g. wrongdoing, and its potentially related forgiveness. 2) To "store" or to "keep" means that one therapeutically has "picked up" the issue, has engaged with an issue of wrongdoing, but is not yet ready to forgive. The issue is kept at a certain distance, in the awareness that it exists, but that it is not yet an issue that can be forgotten, annihilated, or even elevated. The issue, e.g. an act of wrongdoing, is kept at a certain distance in which one is possible to deal with it, once in a while, for a longer or shorter period engaging with the issue. But it is "stored safely" at a bearable and manageable

48- Wrangham, Richard and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males. Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*. New York: Mariner Books 1996.

distance, sometimes closer, sometimes more far away in terms of physical or psychological distance. 3) "Annihilate" is not so much annihilating the issue, but rather letting one's own negative feelings, especially sadness and resentments towards the wrongdoing/wrongdoer, fade out and finally maybe fade away. That is the first major step in the process towards forgiveness. The second step is 4) "elevating" the issue in such a way that it will be re-assessed and re-evaluated in one's individual process of progression and development.

While the whole therapeutic process related to the notion of "Aufhebung" can involve, compassion, catharsis, and forgiveness, especially "picking up" and "storing" an issue corresponds most with compassionate understanding, because when we engage with an issue related to wrongdoing and a wrongdoer, we need to relate ourselves not only with the act of wrongdoing, but also with the wrongdoing person. The engaging act presses us to make sense of the issue. We attempt to understand it and in the process of understanding develop a re-, or with-suffering/feeling. That is what can be understood as compassionate understanding, which may occur after we have "picked up", "stored", and engaged with the issue. The "annihilation" of negative feelings, especially sadness and resentments towards the wrongdoing/wrongdoer most closely correspond to the phenomenon of catharsis. Catharsis is the annihilation of negative emotions due to pre-, re-, or with-feeling. And forgiveness with its implications of '*beyond*', *intensification*, and *negation* corresponds to "Aufhebung" in the sense of "elevation", therapeutically understood as re-assessment, re-evaluation, and revaluation of the issue, the event, the act of wrongdoing, and the wrongdoer.

Conclusion

Aristotle, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche provide us with accounts of human nature, which help us to better comprehend catharsis, compassion, and the reasons why at times human beings transgress moral conventions. Such transgressions in turn make catharsis, compassion, and forgiveness necessary. Due to its limitations

this paper could not explore strategies of how to delimit acts of wrongdoing and discourage (potential) wrongdoing actors. From a normative side it must be concluded that (1) we need to acknowledge the existence of human negative potentials with Nietzsche, the findings of contemporary psychological research, and the etological research, but also with the facts we have about war, warlike, and other combat situations in which lives are at stake or persons face "back against the wall" situations. (2) We need more transdisciplinary research on human negativity that helps us to synthesize research findings on such phenomena which we often find hard to even acknowledge. (3) If we understand human negativity better we can be more compassionate (as Schopenhauer put it "the truth is felt"). A deeper therapeutic exploration of the notion "Aufhebung" and the therapeutic concepts implied in this notion will help to relate the phenomena of compassion, catharsis, and forgiveness.(49)

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