

# SCHOPENHAUER ON STOICISM AS A WAY OF LIFE AND ON THE WISDOM OF LIFE<sup>1</sup>

*Keith Ansell-Pearson*

## 26.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I consider the contribution Schopenhauer can make to an appreciation of an art of living centered on the wisdom of life. Although his reflections on this topic sometimes intersect with his appreciation of Stoic teaching as a way of life, they are also in places advanced, independent of such a teaching. There are two main sources for considering Schopenhauer's reception of the Hellenistic teachings of philosophy: the two volumes of *WWR* and the 'Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life' in *PP* 1.<sup>2</sup> Although Schopenhauer's philosophy is consistently worked out and upheld across these texts, it is also the case that the treatment of the wisdom of life we encounter in *PP* 1 is less bound to his metaphysically supported philosophy of profound pessimism about existence, with the result that he is able to offer his readers inspiring recommendations for living well, including recommendations that may surprise us, especially given his commitment to the idea that the *greatest* wisdom consists in the negation and rejection of existence.

In *WWR* 2 Schopenhauer makes it clear that he regards Stoic equanimity, which aims to disarm all misfortunes by being prepared for and contemptuous of them, as little more than 'cynical renunciation' that 'makes us into dogs, like Diogenes in the barrel'. However, 'The truth is: we should be miserable and we are miserable' (*SW* 3:663/*WWR* 2:593). In *PP*, by contrast, Schopenhauer locates several sound principles of living in Stoic doctrine, and this is in accord with the empirical standpoint he has chosen to pursue in this work. As he tells his readers in the introduction to 'Aphorisms on the wisdom of life', the idea of a 'wisdom of life' refers to the art of living life as pleasantly and happily as possible, and the instructions it offers are to be regarded as part of eudaemonology. Although he explicitly tells us in this introduction that he himself does not adhere to such an 'ology' and its belief that human beings are capable of living such a life, in this work he has decided to unfold a doctrine by abandoning 'completely the higher, metaphysical-ethical standpoint to which my philosophy proper leads' (*SW* 5:333/*PP* 1:273; see also *SW* 5:365/*PP* 1:300). Although Schopenhauer holds that the immanent, empirical standpoint, which lends support to eudaemonology, commits an innate error, readers of his writings, such as myself, who have no interest in a transcendent, metaphysical standpoint – one in which *the* 'truth'

about the whole world and universe is revealed with respect to every conceivable aspect of existence and with extreme conclusions drawn from this 'truth' – can find much instruction in the contribution he makes.

This is not to say that Schopenhauer's philosophy is not misguided when taken, as it is offered, as a metaphysics, and it certainly in my view draws wrong and unnecessary conclusions about existence, conclusions that are far too extreme. I thus dissent from the arrogant viewpoint Schopenhauer is most keen to promote about his philosophy, namely, that no system prior to his has demonstrated so clearly the strong and intimate link that he alleges must exist between 'metaphysics' and 'ethics'. I see no logical, rational, or even existential necessity that leads from a recognition of the terrible and treacherous character of existence to the Buddhist-inspired ethics of self-denial and compassion advocated in book four of WWR 1. It is because I hold to this appreciation of Schopenhauer that I think we have good reasons for choosing PP 1 over WWR 1 when it comes to wanting to think about how we can most fruitfully construe his relation to the tradition and conception philosophy as an art of life and as a way of life. From the attempt to develop an honest appreciation of human existence, which is what Schopenhauer is to be most admired for, it is possible that all kinds of different ways of life can be cultivated. Nothing dictates that we need to live a miserable life, and certainly nothing determines that we *should* live such a life. In his 'Aphorisms on the wisdom of life' Schopenhauer covers many of the topics that we need to attend to in our efforts to cultivate a mature and wise way of life for ourselves, and he is a source of tremendous illumination on them.

## 26.2 Schopenhauer on Stoicism as a Way of Life

Stoicism is the Hellenistic school of philosophy that Schopenhauer treats most extensively in his writings, and his own recommendations on the happy life are best appreciated in the context of his frequent utilization of the teachings of Seneca and Epictetus. Schopenhauer has an original and incisive appreciation of Stoic doctrine. The original character of his reception of the teaching manifests itself in his appreciation of the Stoic sage. Schopenhauer conceives Stoicism – embodied in the figure of the sage – not as a straightforward teaching of virtue but rather as 'the most complete development of *practical reason* in the true and authentic sense of the word, the highest peak a human being can attain using only reason, where the distinction between humans and animals shows itself most clearly' (SW 2:103/WWR 1:113). Instead of approaching Stoic doctrine as is standardly done as one of virtue and in stark contrast to Epicurean doctrine where the stress is placed on the cultivation and enjoyment of pleasures, including the pleasure of existing, Schopenhauer thinks we will fare better if we construe it as a guide to a way of life, notably a rational way of life, in which the chief end and aim is the attainment of happiness through peace of mind. In this appreciation virtuous conduct is conceived as a means rather than an end. It is on this point that Schopenhauer wishes to divorce Stoic teaching and practice from ethical systems that focus *directly* on virtue, such as the doctrine of the *Vedas*, Plato, Christianity, and Kant. According to Schopenhauer, then, when the Stoics teach that virtue is the highest good, this is with reference to the ultimate end of life, which is happiness gained through inner tranquility and peace of mind or *ataraxia*. Stoicism is, therefore, to be approached as a special form of eudaimonism (SW 2:108/WWR 1:118).

In his reception of Stoic teaching, Schopenhauer draws mainly on the writings of Seneca and Epictetus, with a strongly expressed preference for the former and with no references

in his writings to Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* (as the work is known to us today).<sup>3</sup> In the admiration he has for Seneca as a writer and a thinker Schopenhauer follows in the footsteps of Montaigne.<sup>4</sup> He confesses to finding Seneca's writings 'energetic, ingenious, and well thought-out' (SW 5:57/PP 1:51; he also uses a line from Seneca's *Natural Questions* as the epigraph to PP 2). By contrast, he finds the *Discourses* of Epictetus, which in effect are lessons of Epictetus recorded by his pupil Arrian, not only digressive in form but also, and more importantly, inconsistent in content and so making for an unreliable guide to authentic Stoic doctrine. This is because, according to Schopenhauer, Arrian introduces into the doctrine foreign elements that smack 'of a Christian-Jewish origin' (SW 5:58/PP 1:52). He finds the main evidence for this in the theism that is found on virtually every page and that is also utilized to support the morals. This is to get Stoic doctrine fundamentally wrong for Schopenhauer since in the doctrine God and the world are one and there is no reliance on, or appeal to, a God that wills and commands, or 'a provident human being of a God' (SW 5:59/PP 1:52). According to Schopenhauer Stoicism is to be understood as a species of pantheism and of the kind that flies in the face of any sermonizing, such as we are faced with when we read Arrian. We find this pantheism clearly expressed, he argues, in Seneca's book *Natural Questions*, where God is depicted as the soul of the universe (SW 3:175/WWR 2:168; see Seneca 2010). Arrian also misses, for Schopenhauer, the essential character of the ideas of Cynicism and how they influenced Stoic ethics. He presents the Cynic as someone who seeks to be who s/he is for the sake of others and not to be a figure of disgust, but this, maintains Schopenhauer, is to completely neglect the self-sufficient character of the way of life of the old and genuine Cynics (see Epictetus on the Cynics in Epictetus 2008: Book III, part III). Sometimes in Arrian, he holds, we hear a Stoic but sometimes we also hear a Christian ascetic, and overall the book is written in a scolding and reproachful tone. Despite the distaste that he expresses for the book Schopenhauer does think we can find genuinely Stoic ideas in it here and there, and he himself will freely draw upon it as the occasion warrants in 'Aphorisms on the wisdom of life'.

In considering Schopenhauer on the wisdom of the ancient philosophers and on the ancient schools of philosophy, the extent of his admiration of Aristotle should not be overlooked. Indeed, in the 'Aphorisms on the wisdom of life' he appears to admire him more than any other ancient philosopher, and it is in Aristotle that he locates what for him is a key principle of the art of living, namely, that the prudent human being (*phronimos*) strives not for pleasure but for a state of painlessness (SW 3:165/WWR 2:159; see Aristotle 1976: VII, 12). In the chapter on 'counsels and maxims' in 'Aphorisms on the wisdom of life' Schopenhauer states that he regards Aristotle's insight as 'the supreme rule of all wisdom of life'; its truth is based on the recognition that whereas the nature of all enjoyment and happiness is negative, the nature of pain is positive (SW 5:431/PP 1:355; see also SW 2:376–81/WWR 1:345–49). It is by drawing on Aristotle's insight and dictum, as well as on Voltaire ('Happiness is nothing but a dream, and pain is real'), that Schopenhauer is able to finesse eudaemonology in accordance with his own philosophy: such an 'ology' is to be recognized as a euphemism in which 'living happily' is to be best understood as 'living "less unhappily", hence in a tolerable way' (SW 5:433/PP 1:356). Life is something to be endured or weathered, something to get through, and it is one of the consolations of old age that the labor of living is now behind us. Schopenhauer now evinces his conception of the sage: 'The fool runs after the pleasures of life and sees himself cheated: the sage avoids evils' (SW 5:433/PP 1:357). The sage is someone who will not be encouraged by optimism and who

appreciates well that the surest way not to become deeply unhappy is by not wanting to be very happy (SW 5:435/PP 1:359).

According to Schopenhauer the striving for a painless existence, practiced with rational insight and acquired knowledge of the true constitution of the world, produced Cynicism, and it is from Cynicism that Stoicism emerges. Cynicism pursued the endeavor with rigorous consistency, following it, in fact, to its furthest extremes. Schopenhauer elaborates on this claim about the Cynics in WWR 2, noting that they ‘chose the path of the greatest deprivation in order to achieve the most painless life, and fled all pleasures as snares that would only deliver one over to more pain’ (SW 3:167/WWR 2:161; see also SW 5:435/PP 1:358). This ‘spirit’ of Cynicism is to be found expressed, Schopenhauer insists, by Seneca in his *On Peace of Mind* (see Seneca 2014).

It is by paying attention to what Schopenhauer says in the supplements to WWR 1 §16 in WWR 2 that we can best appreciate his reasons for holding Stoic teaching in some esteem. The Stoic view is that human suffering always arises from a mismatch between human desires and wishes and the actual way of the world. Clearly, one of these needs to change to fit the other, and the clear perception of the Stoics is that while the way of things is not under our power, our will is. Schopenhauer then astutely notes: ‘This adjustment of willing to the way of the external world, and thus to the nature of things, is very often what is understood by the ambiguous phrase “living according to nature”’ (SW 3:173/WWR 2:166–67). When expressed as a doctrine of freedom we get the key insight that what makes one free is not the satisfaction and attainment of one’s desires or cravings but their suppression. For the Stoic, the happy life is a harmonious life in which we live in concord with ourselves. Schopenhauer cites Seneca on this and from Epistle 92: ‘What does a happy life consist in? In security and imperturbable peace. It is achieved by greatness of soul and by constancy that adheres to what is correctly known’ (SW 3:174/WWR 2:167; see Seneca 2015: 341–349).

For Schopenhauer, then, Stoicism is best understood as a very particular type of eudaemonist teaching, and it differs from Indian, Christian, and Platonic ethics, because it has no metaphysical tendency or transcendent goal; rather, for Stoicism the goal is an entirely immanent one, namely, a life of imperturbability that is attainable *in this life* and that characterizes the mode of existence sought by the wise human being. It is in accordance with these insights, especially the insight into the immanent character of its way of life as a life of wisdom, that Schopenhauer develops his appreciation of Stoicism and its key teachings in PP 1, where he himself has chosen to adopt the immanent perspective. Schopenhauer’s appreciation of Stoicism as ‘spiritual dietetics’ is an incisive and deeply informed one, and part of the reason for this is owing to the character of his own philosophical thinking with its insights into fate, or the way of the world, and suffering. The depth of his insights means that he can advance an original understanding of Stoic teaching and its practice as entailing a specific way of life:

This however is not a happy state but only the calm endurance of suffering seen as inevitable. Of course there is greatness of soul and dignity in bearing the inevitable in silence and tranquillity, remaining constant in melancholy peace while others pass from exaltation to despair and from the latter to the former. – Accordingly Stoicism can also be thought of as spiritual dietetics according to which the mind must be hardened against unhappiness, danger, loss, injustice, treachery, betrayal, disdain and the idiocy of men just as the body can be hardened against the influences of the wind and weather, against hardship and exertion.

(SW 3:174–75/WWR 2:168)

When taken as a whole Schopenhauer judges Stoic ethics to be a valuable and estimable attempt to adapt human reason – and reason, he notes, is the great privilege of being human – to an important and salutary end, namely, and through the mastery of the passions, raising human beings above the suffering and pain that every life encounters and so allowing them to participate ‘to the highest degree’ in the dignity that attaches itself to rational beings and as distinct from merely animal ones (SW 2:107/WWR 1:117; see also SW 3:163/WWR 2:157). The Stoics, then, are part of the group of practical philosophers who endeavor to carry concepts over into life. However, for Schopenhauer, this is merely an attempt or effort made by human beings, and the success of the Stoic way of life cannot be guaranteed. The problem with Stoicism resides in the very desire to live a blessed life since, Schopenhauer maintains, and in accordance with the fundamental insights of his philosophy, it is ‘completely contradictory to want to live without suffering’ (SW 2:108/WWR 1:117). Schopenhauer ends his treatment of Stoicism in WWR 1 §16 by unfavorably contrasting the Stoic with both the Indian sage or voluntary penitent and the Christian savior. The problem with the Stoic ideal of the sage is that it cannot be offered as a *living* one that possesses an inner poetic truth; rather, the figure of the sage in Stoicism is ‘stiff and wooden, a mannequin that no one can engage with and who does not himself know what to do with his own wisdom’ (SW 2:109/WWR 1:118). In short, the Stoic sage cannot educate humanity because he has rendered himself non-human: his ‘perfect composure, peace, and bliss really contradict the essence of humanity’ (SW 2:109/WWR 1:118). In sharp contrast, Christ is a figure ‘full of the depths of life’ and who conveys to human beings ‘the greatest poetical truth’ since he stands before them – ‘with perfect virtue, holiness and sublimity’ – ‘in a state of the utmost suffering’ (SW 2:109/WWR 1:118). For Schopenhauer, then, we might conclude, Stoicism suffers from the delusion that as human beings it is possible for us to transcend our humanity, and hence Christ needs to be seen as the actualized embodiment of the poetic truth of the human condition. Like other intellectual figures, such as Montaigne and Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, albeit in terms unique to his philosophical thinking, expresses both an admiration for Stoicism and a deep-rooted skepticism about it.<sup>5</sup> This skepticism centers on whether the completely rational way of life sought by the Stoics is (a) attainable and (b) even desirable. Schopenhauer does not want us to simply lament the fact that the mastery of the suffering of life through reason and concepts is seldom, if ever, found, but rather to comprehend the reasons as to why this must necessarily be the case (SW 2:372/WWR 1:342). The issue of desirability centers on the need, as he sees it, to come up with a figuration of the sage that can adequately and deeply convey to human beings the poetical truth of what it is to be human.

### 26.3 Schopenhauer on the Wisdom of Life

I now want to examine how Schopenhauer unfolds a doctrine on the wisdom of life in *PP* 1. I shall note the occasions when his recommendations also intersect with Stoic teaching. I will first highlight the presuppositions of his thinking and then focus on some key aspects of his contribution to the wisdom of life.

First, though, let me note something important about his contribution. One aspect of Schopenhauer’s approach to this wisdom we should find especially admirable is his commitment to knowledge over judgment. The main aim, he says, is to develop a ‘clear and thorough understanding’ of the ‘true and very sad nature of human beings as they mostly are’ (SW 5:484/PP 1:399). To obtain such a mature understanding requires that ‘no trait of

particular meanness or stupidity that strikes us in life or in literature should ever become the object of annoyance or anger, but only of knowledge' (SW 5:485/PP 1:399). This knowledge consists in learning from an array of observable things about existence, such as understanding (1) that life is like a game of chess in which one draws up a plan, but then much is dependent on what your opponent decides to do, and in life one's opponent is fate itself (SW 5:499–500/PP 1:411); (2) that although the form of human life may vary everywhere we observe it we can see the same elements at work, 'whether it is lived in a hut, at court, in a monastery, or in the army' (SW 5:498/PP 1:410). In this respect life can be compared to the images in a kaleidoscope: although we see something different in every turn of it we always have the same thing before our eyes (SW 5:498/PP 1:410); (3) we can profit from the wisdom of ancient writers who recognized that there are three forces operating in the world. These are prudence, strength, and luck, and it is the last one that we need to appreciate as being the most powerful force in our lives. Although we may ultimately wish to regard chance as an evil force, it is also necessary to know that it is the acknowledgment of the role played by chance in life that shows us 'that all merit is powerless and counts for nothing compared to its favour and grace' (SW 5:499/PP 1:410); (4), finally, knowing what is inevitable and necessary in and about life has a calming effect on us, and whoever is imbued with this knowledge 'will first willingly do what he can, but then willingly suffer what he has to' (SW 5:505/PP 1:416).

Two key presuppositions inform and guide Schopenhauer's contribution to the wisdom of life. The first is that all human beings, regardless of class, status, and wealth, are the same in the sense that each one of us is stuck in our consciousness and the same persona exists in each one of us, namely, 'a poor comedian with his wants and worries' (SW 5:337/PP 1:276). The second presupposition is that no one can escape their individuality, and this means two things for Schopenhauer. The first is that the subjective sphere is incomparably more essential for our happiness and our pleasure than the objective sphere; the second, and following from this insight, is that we should employ the power we have at our disposal to use our given personality to the greatest advantage, for example, pursuing aspirations that are in accordance with it and striving after the kind of education appropriate to it; in short, developing 'the way of life suitable for it' (SW 5:340/PP 1:279). Like the ancient schools of philosophy, then, Schopenhauer is recommending we do not invest our energies and hopes in the pursuit of external goods (the 'objective'), such as fame, fortune, rank, honor, and so on, but rather concentrate them on ourselves and on developing knowledge of our own personalities (the 'subjective'). We need to realize that it is the deliberate and immoderate pursuit and struggle for happiness, glamour, and enjoyment – in the form of pleasures, possessions, rank, and honor – that lead us to experience the greatest misfortunes in life (SW 5:436/PP 1:359). Here Schopenhauer cites from book ten of Plato's *Republic*: 'No human affair is worth great trouble' (ibid.; see Plato 1992: X, 604b). The same sentence is also cited by Nietzsche but who, and intriguingly, adds to it a '*nevertheless...*' (Nietzsche 1995: aphorism 628).

The first topic I wish to focus on in my consideration of Schopenhauer's contribution to the wisdom of life concerns his thoughts on 'the subjective goods' that he thinks constitute the primary and most important elements in our happiness. They include for him things such as having a noble character, a capable mind, a happy temperament, a healthy body, and a cheerful spirit. His thoughts on the latter are especially interesting to reflect upon in the light of Nietzsche's contention that Schopenhauer's philosophy is 'the mirror image of an ardent and melancholy youth' (Nietzsche 2013: aphorism 271) and so does not reflect the wisdom of a

mature mind. When we read Schopenhauer ourselves, however, we find him maintaining that of all the subjective goods we might want to consider and reflect upon, ‘what makes us most immediately happy is a cheerful spirit’ (SW 5:344/PP 1:283). He expands on this as follows:

Whoever is cheerful has good reason to be, namely the fact that he is. No other quality can completely replace every other good the way this one can. People may be young, beautiful, rich, and honoured; but if we wish to judge their happiness, we will ask whether they are cheerful.

(SW 5:344/PP 1:283)

Such cheerfulness is evident, he thinks, when we reflect on ‘the plain truth’, which is also ‘the superlative of a truism’, that whoever laughs a lot is happy and whoever cries a lot is unhappy (SW 5:344/PP 1:283). One important reason why the cheerful spirit can value itself is owing to the fact that it is ‘the genuine coin’ of happiness, as opposed to fake paper money, since it makes such a spirit immediately happy *in the present*, and it is the present for Schopenhauer that is the only truly real or actual dimension of time (this is ‘the indivisible present’ that exists between ‘two eternities’, *ibid.*). Schopenhauer cites from Seneca’s remarkable *Epistles*: ‘Regard every single day as a single life’ (SW 5:443/PP1:365; see Seneca 2015: 402–403).

The cheerfulness Schopenhauer has in mind has nothing to do with wealth and everything to do with health, and it is the flourishing of perfect health, he maintains, that entails cheerfulness. To enjoy such health requires practicing an art of life in which we avoid all excesses and debaucheries, as well as all violent and disagreeable emotions, along with avoiding prolonged mental exertion, the assumption of brisk movement daily, cold bathing, and dietary measures. Here Schopenhauer fully agrees with Aristotle’s stress on the prime character of life, namely, that it consists in *movement* (SW 5:345/PP 1:284). The extent to which one’s happiness is dependent on cheerfulness of mood, and this in turn on the state of our health manifests itself when we reflect on the impression made on us by the same events or external circumstances on vigorous days with what takes place when sickness has made us anxious and even morose. On this point, Schopenhauer finds a concordance with Stoic teaching, notably as found in Epictetus’s insight that what disturbs human beings are not things themselves but rather their *opinions* and *views* about things (SW 5:346/PP 1:284; see Epictetus 1948: section V). If we are not healthy in mind and body then the subjective goods, along with the qualities of our intellect and temperament, become depressed and may even wither away. For Schopenhauer, there is a good reason why in human greetings we inquire about another’s state of health and take the trouble to wish well-being to one another.

Of course, it is necessary for Schopenhauer to consider the affect and state of melancholia, and this is what he goes on immediately to do, noting astutely that even in a state of strong health it is possible for a melancholic temperament and gloomy mood to prevail. Here he may well be reflecting on his own personality, though the veracity of his insight cannot, I think, be said to be reducible to this. He concurs, in fact, with Aristotle’s well-known insight that all excellent and superior human beings are melancholic, and he finds evidence for this in his own insights into genius and how in this case we find an excess of nervous energy and of sensibility in general (he also draws on the insights of Plato and Shakespeare to validate his claim; see also Schopenhauer’s treatment of madness, melancholy, and genius in SW 2:225–28/WWR 1: 215–17).

Schopenhauer's insights into melancholy do not, as might be supposed, serve to render his claims about the cheerful spirit invalid; they simply add another dimension to his appreciation, and that is both rich and profound. In fact, and like Nietzsche, he is keen to make recourse to physiology or the state of the body in order to explain human morbidity: 'when a pathological affection of the nervous system, or the digestive organs, plays into the hand of innate "discontent", then it can reach such a high degree that persistent dissatisfaction produces weariness of life' (SW 5:348/PP 1:286). It is clear that for Schopenhauer feelings about life, such as depression and suicide, as well as an overwhelming feeling of inner emptiness, have specific causes that are empirically identifiable. This also explains why he can find profound truth in Seneca's claim that 'all stupidity suffers from weariness with itself' and the statement of Jesus ben Sirach that, 'The life of the fool is worse than death' (SW 5:351/PP 1:289). If we wish to be happy the best we can aim for is to be sufficient in ourselves, and on this topic, Schopenhauer is in accord with the teachings of the ancients who teach the value of autarchy, including Aristotle, the Stoics and the Epicureans: 'what we have in ourselves is more than ever important, since this will hold up the longest' (SW 5:354/PP 1:291). He thus agrees with Horace in his epistle to Maecenas that it is the greatest folly to lose 'on the inside in order to gain on the outside', that is, to relinquish one's inner peace, leisure, and independence for the sake of glamour, rank, pomp, and title. This, he wryly notes, is what Goethe did and what, by following his own genius, he has not done (SW 5:355/PP 1:292). Further on in the 'Aphorisms' Schopenhauer adds: 'To fulfil ourselves, to be everything to ourselves, and to be able to say "All my possessions I carry with me", is surely the quality most conducive to our happiness', and he once again refers to the insights of Aristotle, notably his insight that 'Happiness belongs to those who suffice themselves', which Schopenhauer says cannot be asserted enough (SW 5:355/PP 1:292).

Schopenhauer also recognizes that it is not possible to be truly and entirely ourselves without the endurance of solitude: 'In solitude the wretched person feels his whole wretchedness and the great mind the full extent of its greatness; in short, everyone becomes aware of himself as what he is' (SW 5:447/PP 1:369). Being a member of society involves mutual accommodation and feeling the pressure of displaying an agreeable temper. But, as Schopenhauer astutely notes, 'whoever does not love solitude, also does not love freedom; for only when we are alone, are we free' (SW 5:447/PP 1:369). Once society is recognized as something 'insidious', concealing behind an appearance of diversion, communication, sociable pleasures, 'great and often irremediable evils' – and here I think Schopenhauer is right – then a major area of study for the young needs to be that of '*learning to tolerate solitude*' as a source of happiness and peace of mind (SW 5:449/PP 1:370). It is, in fact, through the practice of solitude that we come to learn the value of self-reliance. Schopenhauer cites Cicero on precisely this point: 'Whoever is completely on his own and relies on himself, cannot but be perfectly happy' (SW 5:449/PP 1:370). It is on account of our lack of self-reliance that we immerse ourselves in the rituals of society and undertake travel to foreign lands, and we do so as a way of hiding our inner emptiness and escaping the tedium of life (SW 5:450/PP 1:371).<sup>6</sup> The love of solitude is not to be thought of as our natural state or as an original tendency since when we enter the world we do so with parents, siblings, and a community; rather, then, it develops as a result of experience and reflection (SW 5:453/PP 1:373). Indeed, we might consider the love of solitude to represent a mature state of mind.

These insights of Schopenhauer may have inspired Nietzsche when he thinks about solitude. In several aphorisms, Nietzsche draws attention to the benefits of solitude. In a typically witty insight, he writes:

“Only the solitary man is evil,” cried Diderot and immediately Rousseau felt mortally wounded. Consequently, he admitted to himself that Diderot was right...Whoever is evil is at his most evil in solitude: also at his best – and consequently, to the eye of anyone who everywhere sees only playacting, also at his most beautiful  
(Nietzsche 2011: aphorism 499).

Although Nietzsche esteems solitude in similar terms to Schopenhauer, he also maintains that one’s solitude can be practiced whether one finds oneself in the milling crowd or in a place of quietude (2011: aphorism 473), and he departs from him in the tremendous value he accords to friendship (1974: aphorism 14). In addition, Nietzsche holds that solitude, and the distance from things it affords us (be it our friends or our love of music), provides us with the distant perspectives we sometimes need to think well of things (2011: aphorism 485). We go into solitude

so as not to drink out of everyone’s cisterns. Amid the many I live like the many and don’t think as an I; after some time I always feel then as if they wanted to ban me from myself and rob my soul – and I turn angry toward everyone and fear everyone. Then I need the desert to turn good again  
(2011: aphorism 491; see also aphorism 524).

Nietzsche clearly echoes the concerns of Schopenhauer when he states that the most widespread deficiency in today’s type of education and upbringing is that ‘no one learns, no one strives toward, no one teaches – *to learn to endure solitude*’ (2011: aphorism 443; see also 2014: 273, 284, 289).

In practicing the good life or happy life Schopenhauer also counsels us not to come under the spell of the semblance of things, be it the semblance of joy or even the semblance of wisdom itself, such as academies and philosophical lecterns. He alerts us to the fact that so many of the splendors of life are mere semblances, ‘just like theatre decorations’ and where the essence of the thing is missing. In such instances of the apparent enjoyment of life, all we are encountering is ‘the advertisement, the suggestion, the hieroglyph of joy’ (SW 5:437/PP 1:360). As he astutely observes, when joy turns up for us in life it typically ‘slips in uninvited and unannounced, by itself, quietly, and without ceremony, often at the most unimportant, most trivial occasions, under the most mundane circumstances, indeed anywhere but at glamorous or glorious events’ (SW 5:437/PP 1:360).

In reflecting on the misfortunes and mishaps of life, including our own errors of judgment, Schopenhauer warns us against becoming self-punishers. However, the fatalistic standpoint that encourages us to view everything that happens as happening out of necessity is to be regarded as too one-sided when offered as a rule of life. Although such a standpoint may suit our need for some immediate relief and reassurance when facing our misfortune, the practice of ‘wholesome self-chastisement’ can greatly benefit us since it can aid our instruction and desire to improve ourselves. This self-chastisement needs to come into play in those cases when our own negligence and recklessness are in part to blame for the situation we find ourselves in and that we come to lament. Although this means having to inflict upon ourselves ‘the great pain of dissatisfaction with our own self’, we cannot be educated, he thinks, except by voluntarily undergoing such torment (SW 5:462/PP 1:381).

Key to this task of perfecting oneself is the need to maintain a tight rein on our imagination, lest we build castles in the air, which the imagination likes to do and at its leisure. It is

worth citing Schopenhauer at some length on this issue of the dangers of the flights of the imagination since he is offering some profound counsel, and anyone who has ever been subject to intrusive thoughts that invade and afflict the mind will be able to readily recognize the scenario he is depicting:

when we have surrendered to black thoughts (blue devils), they have brought images close to us that do not vanish so easily. For the possibility of a thing in general is certain, and we are not always able to measure the degree of its likelihood; then possibility turns into probability, and we have delivered ourselves up to anguish. Therefore, we should look at things that concern our weal and woe only with the eyes of reason and judgement, and operate with dry and cold deliberation, with mere concepts and in the abstract. We should leave the imagination out of this, for it cannot judge, but brings mere images before our eyes that agitate the mind in a useless and often very painful manner. This rule should be most strictly followed in the evening. For just as darkness makes us timid and lets us see dreadful figures everywhere, so obscurity of thought has an analogous effect, because every uncertainty gives rise to insecurity.

(SW 5:462–63/PP 1:381–82)

It should come as no surprise that Schopenhauer goes on next to discuss the importance of certain external factors for understanding our moods and attending to the needs of our individual personality, such as our state of health, sleep, nourishment, temperature, weather, and environment. Furthermore, not only is it necessary to rein in the imagination if our wish is to live well, but there is also the need to ensure that we do not allow the imagination to represent and picture wrongs, harms, insults, losses, and affronts that we have previously suffered. This is simply because if we allow this then all the hateful passions will be ignited and come to pollute our mind, including indignation, rage, resentment, and so on. Schopenhauer observes that even in the most noble and illustrious human being there exists the disposition to the most base and vulgar elements of human animal nature (SW 5:465/PP 1:383).

In recommending we endeavor to pacify the mind with reason and concepts Schopenhauer is not advocating that we lead dull or boring life. He fully appreciates the need for us to have resistances and opportunities to overcome obstacles, and he also recognizes that the more power we have at our disposal and over ourselves the greater will be our chances of becoming a master of life. Let me cite him on these points:

To labour and fight against resistance is a human need, as digging is for moles. The stagnation produced by the contentment of a lasting pleasure would be unbearable to us. Overcoming obstacles means the full enjoyment of our existence; they might be of a material nature, as in acting and doing, or of an intellectual nature, as in learning and investigating; struggling with them and winning make us happy.

(SW 5:468/PP 1:386)

A key component in becoming a master in life, or one's own unique sage, is the need to master the emotions or passions. Schopenhauer does not follow the Stoics in advocating their complete extirpation; rather, his recommendation is that we learn how to moderate the passions and know we are doing this for good reason, neither erupting in joy nor breaking out into lamentations. We do this because we have learned that all things are changeable and

not constant, with the result that a situation can be transformed at any moment. In addition, through the experience of life we learn that our own judgments are often deceptive in terms of judgments we make about what at any point in time we think is either beneficial for us or harmful for us: we may moan at one time about something that afterwards turns out to be a genuine good or we may rejoice about something that later becomes a source of great suffering to us.

Although in *WWR* 2 Schopenhauer labels the Stoics a ‘bunch of braggarts’ (*SW* 3:172/*WWR* 2:165), in *PP* 1 he draws intellectual sustenance from the Stoic attitude toward life: it teaches us never to forget the human condition but rather to always remember ‘what a sad and miserable lot human existence is in general, and how innumerable the evils are to which it is exposed’ (*SW* 5:504/*PP* 1:415). It is only based on an appreciation of such insights into the character of life that we can, in fact, be motivated and instructed into living existence in terms of some actual *way of life*.

## 26.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to make some observations about Schopenhauer’s contribution to the teaching of a ‘wisdom of life’ by bringing Nietzsche into the picture.

Nietzsche typically reads Schopenhauer’s philosophy as little more than the expression of a melancholic youthful personality (for example, 2013: aphorism 271). However, melancholy goes much deeper in Schopenhauer than mere youthfulness since it reflects his deep-seated pessimism about existence and what he, and many of us sometimes, calls ‘the human condition’. Schopenhauer, in fact, agrees with Nietzsche on the point about youth but also maintains that serenity is a characteristic of old age (*SW* 5:523/*PP* 1:431). He notes, for example, that our youth is characterized by ‘cheerfulness and vital energy’, which in part rests on the fact that at this point in our lives, we are going uphill and so do not see death lying at the foot of the other side of the mountain. Thus, as we age a ‘gloomy seriousness’ will inevitably replace our youthful spirits. Moreover, as Schopenhauer astutely notes, when we are young time unfolds at a much slower pace, with the result that the first quarter of our life is both the happiest and the longest. As life draws to a close we are left wondering where it has gone (*SW* 5:515–16/*PP* 1:424–25). It is important to appreciate that Schopenhauer is equating old age not with vital or sunny ‘cheerfulness’ but with a deep ‘serenity’.

This is a ‘serenity’ that comes about because of accepting things as they are and knowing, if we are honest about the matter, that they will never change, perhaps even ‘knowing’ that humankind is doomed. Such a ‘serenity’ contrasts sharply with the *Heiterkeit* (serenity or cheerfulness) that characterizes Nietzsche’s mature philosophy, and where it is presented as part of a stance of fearlessness and hopefulness in the face of the ‘greatest recent event – that “God is dead,” that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable’ (Nietzsche 1974: aphorism 125). For Nietzsche, the consequences of this event are not to be regarded as what we might think and expect: ‘They are not at all sad and gloomy but rather like a new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn’ (*ibid.*).

It is only in his early writings that we find in Nietzsche an appreciative reception of Schopenhauer as a philosopher of wisdom. In *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874) his greatness is said to consist in the fact that he deals with the picture of life as a whole by paying attention to all the different facets of life, including the vital need to cultivate a life of wisdom as a way of life. Because he has this picture, Nietzsche notes, Schopenhauer can

regulate the sciences for himself and avoid becoming enmeshed in a web of conceptual scholasticism. Schopenhauer thus awakens for Nietzsche a powerful need for us moderns just as Socrates did in ancient times: a need not for knowledge but for wisdom.

Although Nietzsche expresses his admiration for Schopenhauer in these terms, there is no indication even in this early period of his intellectual development that he subscribes to any of Schopenhauer's most fundamental doctrines, such as his teaching on the denial of the will to life and an ascetic withdrawal from life. However, it is perhaps curious that nowhere in his early appreciation does Nietzsche draw his reader's attention to the wide-ranging and pertinent insights Schopenhauer has into how we can best cultivate a life of wisdom. This neglect continues into the reception of Schopenhauer we encounter in Nietzsche's middle and late writings, where the appreciation becomes openly hostile. This should not surprise us, however, since his futurism clashes fundamentally with Schopenhauer's deep-rooted pessimism.

Unlike Schopenhauer, Nietzsche does not ever seek a fixed solution to 'the human condition', for example, in the figure of Christ. Nietzsche describes Christ as having 'the warmest of hearts', but herein, in this 'unintelligent goodness', lies a great danger. Nietzsche spells out the danger in terms of a contradiction: the warm, sympathetic heart yearns passionately for the elimination of life's violent and savage character, but it fails to recognize that it is this very passion that takes fire and heat from the energies of life. Thus, the warmest heart, embodied most nobly in the figure of Christ, 'wants to eliminate its own foundation, to destroy itself, which is to say: it wants something illogical, it is not intelligent' (Nietzsche 1995: aphorism 235). Nietzsche thus appeals to a different conception of the perfect sage, one whose teaching will work against any excessive desire for unintelligent goodness and the promotion of 'human stupidity', so obstructing the engendering of a Christ. As Nietzsche sees it, this is a necessity if our faith is in life and its development and continual enhancement.<sup>7</sup>

Nietzsche invites us to reflect on the desire to attain the perfect State as a lasting site of the good life; although we may dream of such a State and site would it not come at the cost of ruining the soil from which great intellects and powerful individuals grow? This is 'the great energy' of life that Nietzsche labels 'Dionysian', and in my view, the best presentation he gives of this is in the penultimate aphorism of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Here Dionysus is portrayed enigmatically as the 'tempter god' and a 'philosopher' who possesses the intellectual and personal virtues of courage and honesty, as well as philosophy's traditional 'love of wisdom'. Such a philosopher-god is presented by Nietzsche as the teacher of self-cultivation and self-mastery, he is 'the born piper of consciences whose voice knows how to descend into the underworld of every soul'. This 'god' loves humans, conceived as 'agreeable, brave, ingenious' animals who know how to make their way through every labyrinth and who he seeks to make 'stronger, more evil, and more profound, and even 'more beautiful' (Nietzsche 2014: aphorism 295).

The contrast I am drawing here with Schopenhauer reveals, then, a quite fundamental difference between the two thinkers and highlights a distinctive feature of Nietzsche's thinking, namely, its concern with the future. Schopenhauer famously has no hope for the future. The solution to the problem of existence for human beings is aesthetic (contemplation) and ascetic (renunciation). Georg Simmel astutely noted that Schopenhauer's pessimism is not drawn from positive pain so much as it is derived from ennui, including the dulling monotony of days and years. Moreover, this is the point that is most relevant to what I am seeking to highlight in my conclusion: 'It is the absence of the idea of evolution which

condemns the world and mankind to always being the same, without solace' (Simmel 1986: 8–9). At the present juncture of our human evolution we may experience a deep sympathy with Schopenhauer and consider his pessimism to be well-founded, but we may also find it hard, even in the face of knowing the worst and intuiting that the very worst may be yet to come, to give up on Nietzsche's 'highest' hope. This is the de-theologized hope that human beings will be delivered from the spirit and bonds of revenge and come to establish new peoples and create a new earth by remaining true to it (Nietzsche 1969, 'Of Old and New Law-Tables').<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

- 1 My thanks to David Bather Woods for his helpful comments on a draft of this essay and for suggestions on improving it.
- 2 My focus in this chapter is on Schopenhauer's reception of Stoic teaching. His thoughts about Cynicism will be covered as part of developing an appreciation for his reception of Stoicism. He has very little to say in his writings, unsurprisingly given his commitment to metaphysics, about the ancient Skeptics – they are not covered, for example, in his 'Fragments for the History of Philosophy' in PP 1. For his reception of Epicurus see SW 2:231/WWR 1:219–220, SW 3:540/WWR 2:489, and SW 5:367/PP 1:303.
- 3 What we know as the book, *Meditations*, was not in fact a book written by the emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius for publication, not even for others, but a set of notes, aide memoires, Stoic quotations, and sketches of the art of living he wrote first and foremost for himself and as a set of spiritual exercises. The title, *Meditations*, is a modern invention, dating back to the seventeenth century, and as a manuscript it is perhaps best understood by the title *To Himself* (*ta eis heauton*), or as Pierre Hadot has it, *Exhortations to Himself*. It is by this title that the work was known in much earlier times. See Hadot (1998).
- 4 See Montaigne, 'Defence of Seneca and Plutarch', in Montaigne (1943: Book Two, essay 32). See also for valuable insight, Friedrich (1991: 60–66).
- 5 For Montaigne see the insights developed by Friedrich (1991: 60–66). For Nietzsche see *The Gay Science* (Nietzsche 1974), aphorisms 12, 122, 305, 306, 326, and 359. For insight into the reception of Stoicism in nineteenth-century German philosophy, including Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, see Ure (2016).
- 6 Compare Emerson when he notes in his essay 'Self-Reliance': 'The soul is no traveler; the wise man stays at home...Traveling is a fool's paradise' (Emerson 2000: 149–150).
- 7 Although Nietzsche thinks a Stoic way of life is capable of greatness, he is equally critical of it as a way of life. As the eternal guardian of his castle the Stoic becomes, 'insufferable for others, difficult for himself, and impoverished and cut off from the most beautiful fortuities of his soul. And, also, from all further *instruction*. For one must be able to lose oneself occasionally if one wants to learn something from things different from oneself' (Nietzsche 1974: aphorism 305).
- 8 For aphorisms on hope in Nietzsche's corpus see *Human, all too Human* 71, *The Gay Science* preface, 268–272, 343, and *The Anti-Christ* 23. A great deal of the narrative of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is informed by appeals to hope (see also the denouement to the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality*). He is most critical of the hope for a 'beyond,' which is a hope that people who suffer from life need and that cannot be refuted by any reality. For instructive insight into 'hope' see the recent study by Adam Potkay that features a discussion of Nietzsche in its coverage (2022: 255–264).

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