

Albert Schweitzer's Reverence for Life ethic
in relation to Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche

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Abstract

The present work examines the Reverence for Life ethic of Albert Schweitzer in terms of its philosophical grounding through the works of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. The role of these thinkers has not been well understood in prior scholarship on Schweitzer, and it had been presumed that his reliance on these figures created serious flaws with his ethical system by making it excessively metaphysical. This investigation proceeds through an analysis of the historical sources used by Schweitzer for the development of his ethic. It is argued that Schweitzer drew upon the will-to-live concept from Schopenhauer and the naturalistic Will to Power theory of Nietzsche to create an elemental nature philosophy compatible with empirical science. These elements were used by Schweitzer to support a new ontological understanding of the human person, a project termed by him as the New Rationalism. This naturalistic ethical foundation placed people in the world as moral agents. After demonstrating the coherence of Schweitzer's Reverence for Life ethic, his system is then examined in relation to its applicability in contemporary environmental ethics through Schweitzer's commentary on economic life and ethical personhood.

Résumé

L'ouvrage présent se penche sur l'éthique du « Respect de la vie » d'Albert Schweitzer, en termes de ses fondements philosophiques puisés aux œuvres d'Arthur Schopenhauer et de Friedrich Nietzsche. Le rôle de ces penseurs n'a pas bien été compris dans les travaux académiques existants sur Schweitzer. Il a été présumé que les emprunts à ces deux philosophes créaient de sérieuses failles dans le système éthique développé par Schweitzer en le rendant excessivement métaphysique. Cette enquête procède à l'analyse des sources historiques employées par Schweitzer pour développer son éthique. Il est proposé que Schweitzer se soit servi du concept de la « Volonté de vivre » de Schopenhauer et de la théorie naturaliste de la « Volonté de puissance » de Nietzsche pour créer une philosophie élémentaire de la nature, elle-même compatible avec la science empirique. Ces éléments ont été utilisés par Schweitzer pour appuyer une nouvelle compréhension ontologique de la personne humaine, projet qu'il a nommé « Nouveau rationalisme ». Ce fondement éthique naturaliste situe les gens à l'intérieur du monde en tant qu'agents moraux. Après avoir démontré la cohérence de l'éthique du « Respect pour la vie » de Schweitzer, son système sera examiné en relation à son applicabilité dans l'éthique environnementale contemporaine, à travers les observations de Schweitzer sur la vie économique et sur son éthique en tant qu'individu.

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Chapter One

Schweitzer's Life and the Crisis in Civilization

It was 1915 in French Equatorial Africa. Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) had only been in Lambaréné two years and was serving as a jungle doctor for people who did not have access to medical treatment in cities. He was now 40 years old. At the age of 30 he decided that it was too selfish for him to remain in Europe and continue to write academic books and give organ concerts as he had done previously. Already possessing three doctorate degrees – one in philosophy, one in religious studies, and one in music – he had now decided to enroll in medical school.¹ A man of deep religious conviction, Schweitzer felt the admonitions of Matthew 25 were aimed directly at him.² He believed he had been vain and egotistical to remain merely a scholar and musician when the world needed so much more. The enigmatic figure of Jesus whom his own foundational work in 1905, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, had sought to fathom, silently reproached him to devote his life to the least of his brethren. Leprosy was still rampant in Africa, and lepers were in dire need of conscientious and careful medical attention. There was no effective cure for the disease until the 1940's and so all a medical care provider could do was try to redress the chronic complications brought on by leprosy to allow for the best quality of life as possible.³ In a moment of inspiration while gazing at a magazine article about Africa, Schweitzer decided to seek out the true meaning of Christianity by caring for those who needed it most. Seven years later he had his medical doctorate, said his goodbyes to family and friends, and then set out for an African village located one degree of latitude south of the equator.

That day in 1915 Schweitzer was in a small steamship traveling up the river Ogowé on an emergency medical mission to see a patient 160 miles away. It was now sunset on the third day of the voyage. To occupy himself, Schweitzer was once again lost in thought about the crisis in civilization that had brought forth the horrific battles which were then raging across Europe. Before the war Schweitzer had been penning a book to be entitled *Wir Epigonen* (“We Inheritors of the Past”) which was to be a criticism of the concept of progress in modern civilization and how an unseen and deep spiritual decline had taken root in Western philosophical thought (*Out of My Life and Thought*, p.146f.). But then the First World War broke out and the project was set aside as coming too late. Yet that day he was again taken up in thinking about the war and the spiritual crisis in civilization when the steamboat encountered a herd of hippopotamuses who were also in the river. Gazing at the incredible scene, Schweitzer had a sudden realization. He would recount this life-changing event in his autobiography (p.156):

Lost in thought I sat on the deck of the barge, struggling to find the elementary and universal conception of the ethical which I had not discovered in my [earlier attempt at] philosophy. Sheet after sheet I covered with disconnected sentences, merely to keep myself concentrated on the problem. Late on the third day, at the very moment when, at sunset, we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought, the phrase “reverence for life.” The iron door had yielded: the path in the thicket had become visible. Now I had found my way to the principle in which affirmation of the world and ethics are joined together!

Somehow in seeing these families of behemoths making their way through the dark river water in the sublime light at dusk the idea of Reverence for Life (*die Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben*) came to him as the answer to the problematic. From then on Schweitzer knew the necessary change must come through what he called life- and world-affirmation. The ethical ideals from the great philosophers of the past had ceased to have any real meaning in the lives of contemporary people—those were culturally conditioned truths with no real claim to universality outside their historical contexts (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.41). Worse, Schweitzer saw that the very idea of civilization had instead become only a “will to progress” in material and technological achievements that left aside the goal of ethically perfecting persons and society (*Out of My Life and Thought*, p.149, 153). He concluded that a new ethic had to emerge from ‘the mystery of existence’ itself and that it had to be universally true for all people regardless of time, place, or cultural background. For this to happen the ethic would have to be founded on an elemental truth, which in philosophical parlance meant being derived from a new first principle (*archē*) for ethics. An elemental truth allowed for the specific articulation of the ethic to be interpreted and reinterpreted over time. Only in this way, Schweitzer wrote, could it be “spiritually our own” (p.155). He also knew that the elemental truth had to be accessible to all, immediately evident, and intuitively confirmed. In the simplicity of the phrase ‘Reverence for Life’ he found what had previously eluded him.

What would arise from this encounter on the river Ogowé would become Schweitzer’s great work, *The Philosophy of Civilization* (1923). Curiously, the Reverence for Life ethic would not be identified in this book as specifically Christian. In fact, Jesus is barely mentioned and usually only in passing. He would reserve his impassioned defense of the Christian faith for another 1923 work, *Christianity and the*

Religions of the World. This separation of publication aims was intentional. Schweitzer wanted Reverence for Life to be embraced by all cultures and people everywhere. In order to do this, Schweitzer would establish Reverence for Life as an elemental nature philosophy, not as something *limited* to Christianity. Only in its extended mystical meditations would Reverence for Life take on religious overtones, and only then could Christianity or any other world religion be said to find particular resonance with its elemental universal truths.

This is the reason why Schweitzer felt he had to develop his philosophy as a two part project: an elemental nature philosophy supporting a secondary manifestation he called Ethical Mysticism. He did this because he believed that “reason and heart must work together if a true morality is to be established” (*Reverence for Life*, p.112). The first part, the elemental nature philosophy, would seek to satisfy rational thought. It would be created through a critical philosophical and scientific inquiry into the basic truths of existence. With respect to the issues examined for this present work, much of this would focus on writings of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). He took certain elements from their systems and refashioned them into his own philosophy. It included what he termed the New Rationalism which was a new starting place for philosophy, different than the one established by René Descartes (1596-1650).

His project then moved from academic theory to the lived experience of ethical personhood—that is to say, it sought to harmonize the ‘reason’ of rational thought with a person’s heart. Reverence for Life was created by Schweitzer to substantiate a deep personal conviction in moral agency and even support religious faith. This was the second part of his project called Ethical Mysticism. It was an enlightened and deepened worldview that informs and adds context for ethical decisions; it produces what

Schopenhauer called a “sublime character” for a person which allows them to become ethically selfless and unconditionally altruistic (*The World as Will and Representation* §39, p.206). As such, Schweitzer’s Ethical Mysticism does not require conversion to a traditional religion. Few people are so spiritually inclined to seek out a selfless life of Christian devotion to others in the example Schweitzer himself. Yet for such rare people, the worldview of Reverence for Life would substantiate their faith with an intellectually sound elemental nature philosophy.

Put simply, Schweitzer’s philosophy can support a religious worldview. But this was to be a *philosophy* of civilization, not a religion. While Schweitzer once wrote about an “ethic of love” he saw in the teachings of the historical Jesus (*Out of My Life and Thought*, p.232), this ethic finds its true origin as an elemental truth first revealed in the human heart. It is established by Schweitzer through philosophical arguments concerning something called the will-to-live theory and in scientific findings on the evolution of humankind’s social instincts. In this way, the ethic of love could be accepted by *all* religions, not just Christian ones, and even be embraced by people with no religious background at all—but more on this later. The conjoining of natural science, philosophy and mysticism is a very distinctive and unusual aspect of Schweitzer’s ethic, and something this work as a whole will try to set into perspective.

The Philosophy of Reverence for Life

Schweitzer considered Reverence for Life as the summation of his life’s work. Yet his ethic has remained perplexing to scholars, a problem residing in its unclear philosophical grounding. Part of the problem results from the fact that Schweitzer only completed the first two volumes of what was to be a four volume work on his Reverence for Life ethic, *The Philosophy of Civilization*. The two completed volumes present his

analysis on the development of the Western philosophical and ethical worldview (*Weltanschauung*), and then introduce the Reverence for Life ethic as his response to the problematic established from his critical deconstruction of prior philosophical systems.

Advanced age and his humanitarian duties in Africa are part of the reason why the work was never completed, but is also clear from his autobiography (published in 1931) that he had changed his mind and instead intended the example of his life to be the definitive final word on his philosophy. Schweitzer would only publish a single article in 1936 to provide additional specificity on the philosophical grounding for the Reverence for Life ethic. But even this did not clarify the critical philosophical questions. And while he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952 for his medical mission in French Equatorial Africa (modern day Gabon) which was for Schweitzer a key recognition of his Reverence for Life ethic before the general public, reception of his philosophy in academic circles has suffered from the incomplete picture of his system in published works.

And so we arrive at the fundamental problematic concerning Reverence for Life. How exactly does it relate to basic philosophical categories such as a theory of knowledge (epistemology), an explanation of existence (ontology), and—especially because it is described by him as a nature philosophy—how does it deal with Kant’s challenge that we can never know anything *intrinsic* to the phenomena⁴ of the natural world? Alternately, can it be said that Reverence for Life is not so much a philosophy true and proper, but rather merely a personal conviction on the part of a noteworthy humanitarian? With respect to these central questions on philosophical cosmology, the works of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche will be shown to have factored large in the development of Schweitzer’s

thought. My investigation here seeks to explore these correspondences with regard to understanding the philosophical underpinnings of Reverence for Life.

For the time being, cosmology can be thought of as synonymous with a worldview that places and orients a person in life. The technical dimensions of philosophical cosmology will be addressed in upcoming chapters on this subject. As it will be argued, Schweitzer was particularly indebted to Schopenhauer for the cosmological description of the 'will-to-live' which would become an elemental truth in Reverence for Life. Schweitzer will also be shown to have been indebted to Nietzsche for certain aspects of his reimagining of Schopenhauer's philosophy in terms of biological phenomena as well as for Nietzsche's extension of cosmological thought into the sphere of economics. Economics is itself a form of applied ethics. Schweitzer's criticism of the Western worldview in *The Philosophy of Civilization* took aim at the deleterious effects of modern economic life upon people in terms of their ethical development. He saw this happening both in Europe and in the colonial regions too. Schweitzer came to believe that modern economic systems had undermined the possibility of true moral 'personhood' for many people. Just as it was for Nietzsche, Schweitzer believed the societal worldview becomes entwined with the economic circumstances of daily life, and usually for the worse.

Schweitzer never intended Reverence for Life to be merely a code of interpersonal conduct or just an academic discourse on theoretical matters. His ethic sought to place people in life as moral agents and embed them in a larger worldview uniting all people, all cultures, and all life as one. His philosophy would be presented as the necessary prescription to redeem Western civilization from the colossal collective moral failure that led to the First World War. It is not an exaggeration to say that Schweitzer's project was nothing less than attempting to establish Reverence for Life as *the* philosophy

of civilization—an incredibly grand and bold undertaking on Schweitzer’s part. And though he lived 90 years and accomplished much during his life, what was to be the very pinnacle of his achievements now languishes because of its lack of clarity in terms of philosophical grounding. And so we return to the central question: what exactly is Reverence for Life? To begin exploring this complex question, we need to take a closer look at the man himself.

The Man and His Works

Schweitzer was a polymath with few equals in his time or any other. As already mentioned, Schweitzer had obtained four doctorate degrees in fields of study spanning from natural science to the humanities by the time he was 40 years old. His particular contributions in each of those fields helped define the cutting-edge of academic scholarship for his time. Then in Africa he pioneered innovative medical practice in a remote jungle hospital (Richardson 2007, p.137),⁵ all the while still finding time to contribute the occasional academic article to worldwide journals in each of his areas of expertise, researching and writing them in the hot African nights by the light of a kerosene lamp after a full day of surgery and hospital administration. This is mentioned to highlight the fact that as a collective body of works and achievements this single person’s contributions are nothing less than amazing. It is also quite intimidating to a researcher studying him today. Even when the scope of the investigation is confined to just his work in philosophy, as it is here, Schweitzer’s critical writings on the great philosophers of the past for his own Reverence for Life project are exceptionally comprehensive.

In *Out of my Life and Thought*, Schweitzer jokingly curses the day he read Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and adopted his methodology of developing “the problem of

philosophy out of criticizing [all] previous philosophizing” (p.119). This would be his approach in his *The Philosophy of Civilization*. In it he undertook a critical analysis of Western philosophy from ancient Greece up to his present day, all with the aim in mind that “it is only the elements in [each of] them which can help the establishment of an ethical system that will interest us” (p.24). Nevertheless, the style of the book departs markedly from Aristotle. Schweitzer had little interest in presenting a technical and systematic treatment of abstract principles and metaphysical concepts to his reader. He instead provided commentary on the strengths and weaknesses of each figure and their thought. One reason for this approach was the audience he was specifically addressing. This is something he reveals in the preface to the second volume of *The Philosophy of Civilization*:

Our philosophy would become more and more complicated. It lost the connection with the elementary questions—the ones that placed people in life and in the world. More and more it found its satisfaction in the working of philosophically academic questions and in the expert mastery of philosophical technique. More and more it would be held captive to these secondary and incidental matters. It is like this. Instead of composing real music, it frequently produced music only for the conductor’s tastes, though often truly excellent music, still it was the conductor’s music and not music for the audience. Instead of striving to establish thought and life in a practical worldview, through this philosophy, the only philosophy pursued, we came into the condition of having no worldview at all and consequently without a real foundation for civilization.⁶

The Philosophy of Civilization was written to be accessible to an educated laity and this is why it mostly contains critical commentaries on the history of philosophy together with a few sustained essays developed in relation to that critical deconstruction. His aim was to open up philosophy to everyone. This point is later reiterated in his autobiography (p.199). A key excerpt from that passage is provided below:

I intentionally avoided technical philosophical phraseology [in *The Philosophy of Civilization*]. My appeal is to thinking men and women whom I wish to provoke to elemental thought about these questions of existence which occur to the mind of every human being.

While this approach would reach a wider audience, it was not something trained philosophers were accustomed to recognizing as philosophy true and proper. In contrast we should keep in mind that Schopenhauer would produce both academic and popular works, and he became very successful because of this. Schweitzer however only aimed for the simple persuasive truths he hoped would reach people in their daily lives. He never created an accompanying systematic work of dazzling complexity and subtlety for impressing an academic audience. This is both a strength and a central weakness of Schweitzer's *Reverence for Life* project. This is what both charms the popular imagination and frustrates the scholar at the same time.

This is not to say his work was either simplistic or that his commentaries were not expertly rendered with particular surgical skill—quite the opposite in fact. Schweitzer's dissertation for his doctorate in philosophy, after all, was critical and technical engagement of Kant's philosophy. He was certainly capable of undertaking a Kantian approach in his written works yet chose otherwise. Schweitzer did not want his book to become a dusty academician's tome for descrying obscure intellectual ponderings about

an abstracted theoretical world with only tangential relations to the real one in which people actually lived, worked, dreamed, suffered and died. *The Philosophy of Civilization* was to be a book for daily reflection and inspiration to support a practical mysticism that placed everyday people in everyday life. This was to be a book open to everyone, a Reverence for Life ethic for all of humanity.

For the present day scholar working with the same materials, however, certain challenges arise in reading these critical commentaries and translating them into their identifiable constituent elements for what Schweitzer argued was indeed an elemental nature philosophy with claims to universality. This as I have suggested will be found in how Schweitzer engaged the cosmological systems of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in establishing his own Reverence for Life ethic.

Cosmology and Reverence for Life

Schopenhauer had employed the particular terminology the ‘will-to-live’ as a description for the basic essence of human and non-human life, and the ‘Will’ to describe a cosmological force that was responsible for observable changes in the world. Schweitzer employs the same terminology in his own system, and further sets forth an ethic of compassion inclusive non-human life similar to the one promoted by Schopenhauer. Yet major differences also exist between the two with respect to social action. Schweitzer would criticize Schopenhauer for having an ethic of world- and life-resignation [*Welt- und Lebensvernseining*] which he felt called for merely an individualistic and contemplative life. In contrast, Schweitzer came to see his humanitarian work in Africa as a means for actively setting his ethic into motion for greater social change. But the question remains of how Schweitzer employed and

transformed Schopenhauer's cosmology, which is where Nietzsche, the other great philosopher of the Will, becomes important for this investigation.

Schweitzer singled-out and praised Nietzsche for both the cosmological naturalism of his famous Will to Power theory and for setting forth an attitude of radical life-affirmation in his books. Nietzsche had a great interest in the natural sciences and claimed that he looked at science from the perspective of an artist (*Birth of Tragedy*, Attempt at Self-Criticism §2). While scholarship is divided on the interpretation of his works, some have concluded that Nietzsche had re-envisioned Schopenhauer's cosmological Will for his own Will to Power theory, changing its metaphysical character to the sum of all organic and inorganic forces at each level of physical reality; dynamics that take place not only in microscopic biological processes within cellular tissue but also in macroscopic societal interactions between people through economic and political life. This, as it will be argued in Chapter 3, is how Schweitzer interpreted him. Through Nietzsche, Schweitzer found a way to make the will-to-live theory something compatible with modern science.

Here it should be recalled that Schweitzer also possessed an advanced degree in natural science as a medical doctor. In his autobiography he admits he had grown weary of how the truths within the humanities were established because it "is carried on in constantly repeated endless duels between the sense of reality of the one [scholar] and the inventive power of the other ... [and yet we are] never able to obtain a definite victory" in establishing a true verifiable fact (*Out of My Life and Thought*, p.104). Natural science provided objective certainty and a way to dispel to the ambiguity of opinion. Schweitzer, unlike Nietzsche, never doubted the veracity and importance of empirical science. Yet he also knew that the natural sciences were incomplete and unable to fathom the 'mystery of

existence' itself. He therefore concluded that the relationship between natural science and the humanities had to be complementary (p104f.):

Intoxicated as I was with the delight of dealing with realities which could be determined with exactitude, I was far from any inclination to undervalue the humanities as others in a similar position often did. On the contrary. Through my study of chemistry, physics, zoology, botany, and physiology I became more than ever conscious to what an extent truth in thought [within the humanities] is justified and necessary, side by side with the truth which is merely established by [scientific] facts.

Schweitzer could not look past the empirical world of the natural sciences. He recognized that rational thought must always be correlated to what is found there and never become lost in the fanciful mindscapes emerging from the human imagination. At the same time the life-affirmation that he felt could only arise within the humanities must never lose its place. Accordingly, Reverence for Life and its elemental nature philosophy would be derived from empirical science by building on Charles Darwin's description of evolutionary social instincts and through Schopenhauer's own engagement of natural science. Only then would it be translated into a philosophical worldview and social ethic. This last point also reveals why Nietzsche would become so important to Schweitzer. He would need to redress what he saw as the metaphysical excesses of Schopenhauer as well as his ethic of contemplative life-resignation. Through what he called a "mysterious combination" of the two thinkers (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.248), Schweitzer would develop the philosophical grounding and life-affirmation he needed for his own Reverence for Life ethic.

But metaphysical excess and ethical resignation are not the only problems he found with Schopenhauer. Schweitzer wryly wrote of him that Schopenhauer was able to succeed where Kant had failed, “because he did not possess Kant’s moral depth” and thus could see more clearly and objectively to the true problem of ethics (*Philosophy of Religion*, p.338f.). Schopenhauer had written persuasively and passionately about an ethic of compassion that was inclusive of all suffering, human and animal alike. Schweitzer deeply valued Schopenhauer’s contributions to advance Kant’s philosophy and ethics into the natural world. But Schweitzer personally despised him at the same time as the thinly veiled edge in the above quote reveals. The problem was that, as beautiful and wonderful his moral philosophy was to read, and despite of the penetrating truths Schopenhauer wrote about, he had preached one thing and practiced another. Schopenhauer had a widely known and scandalous public image as a womanizing ‘Buddhist’ who ate meat, lived like an aristocrat, and was a vicious anti-Semite at the same time. Even worse, at least for the public reception of his thought, there was a particularly infamous passage in Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation* (§68, p.383f.) which Schweitzer would later make special note of:

In general, it is a strange demand to make on a moralist that he should commend no other virtue than that which he himself possesses. To repeat abstractly, universally, and distinctly in concepts the whole inner nature of the world, and thus to deposit it as a reflected image in permanent concepts always ready for the faculty of reason, this and nothing else is philosophy.

Referring to this passage specifically Schweitzer wrote, “With these sentences Schopenhauer’s philosophy commits suicide” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.243).

Schweitzer considered Schopenhauer a hypocrite for preaching one thing for society and living by another less-than-moral standard in his private life. Schweitzer's decision to begin medical school for his fourth doctorate degree in medicine at age 30, and then devote the rest of his life to running a humanitarian medical mission in Africa, was deeply influenced and rooted in what he saw as Schopenhauer's personal moral failings. Schweitzer lived his life as the anti-Schopenhauer. This is an important context for understanding Schweitzer. He would finish writing out his ethic out in deeds rather than just through printed words. For Schweitzer this would not be a failure of his philosophy but rather its ultimate testimony. He set himself out before the public eye as a personal representative of his own ethic and tried to succeed where Schopenhauer had failed. Because of this, my investigation will necessarily have to go over certain biographical aspects of Schweitzer's life and also be inclusive of other writings in which he expressed views on ethical social action in society—particularly those involving economic life. This is where we turn to next.

The Decay and Restoration of Civilization

The individual is front and center in Schweitzer's prescription of the restoration of civilization. The actualization of the Reverence for Life ethic is dependent upon the person who is capable of inspiring others through the power of their ethical character. The greatest threat to the development of such ethical personalities, Schweitzer wrote, came from the circumstances of their lives. Unnoticed economic forces in a society can both prevent the needed change and perpetuate the causes of social decline by progressively degrading the 'personhood' of the citizenry. This threat was deemed to be of such great importance that Schweitzer felt compelled to write about economic life in the very opening pages of *The Philosophy of Civilization*. He would also write about

economic life in the place where he maintained his hospital—the French colony that would later become the nation of Gabon. The commentary in both contexts was much the same. Despite the different settings and actual form of economic life, both cultures were suffering the same serious repercussions for the development of moral character and ethical agency due to the demands of ‘making a living’ in a modern market economy.

Schweitzer believed that the crisis in civilization arose from two root causes. The first was the failure of contemporary philosophy to tap into the spirit of the age and connect with the common person in helping them deal with the problems of their lives. Schweitzer knew that “the value of any philosophy is ... to be measured by its capacity, or incapacity, to transform itself into a living philosophy of the people” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.7). Modern philosophy had gone astray in this respect. Through the efforts of Hegel, Fichte and others it had been drawn into speculative excess with unbridled power of invention over questions of ‘pure being’ as a theory of the universe (p.4). Then in a single stroke, the emergence of empirical science “reduced to ruins the magnificent creations of their imagination” leading the majority of people to dismiss rationalism and, with it, any optimistic convictions and moral meaning for life it could have provided (p.4f.). Into this cultural vacuum of values would step the economy itself as a principal means to give direction and meaning to the lives of the ordinary person. This became the second cause of the crisis in civilization.

Schweitzer wrote that the very souls of people had become entangled in the economic institutions now controlling their lives (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.18). This happened to civilization slowly and almost imperceptibly. But now conditions of life had dramatically changed for making a living and this has had a profound effect on personal identity. “For two or three generations [now] numbers of individuals have been

living as workers merely, not as human beings” (p.11). Schweitzer meant this quite literally. “Our society has ceased to allow all men, as such, a human value and a human dignity; many sections of the human race have become merely raw material and property in human form” as laborers and corporate employees (p.15). He is not saying here that people are simply working in a new setting, such as in an industrialized factory as a line-worker instead of a being employed in a professional trade within a village a century before. Rather, Schweitzer is claiming that being an itinerant wage-earner in a modern self-regulating labor market has devalued human existence itself—something he was inspired to write about from the writings of Nietzsche.⁷ The problem was that a person is now only an employee who is easily replaceable, just like a soulless cog in the machines they work on. Yet it is not just the factory worker and laborer who suffer this fate. “We are all more or less in danger of becoming human *things* instead of [true, self-determining] personalities” (emphasis added; p.334).

Schweitzer also became greatly concerned that public education was increasingly focused on training students for the job specialization needed for future employability. Because of this, both teachers and their students now lacked the breadth of knowledge and educational background to allow them to be fully functioning citizens with critical thinking skills (p.13).⁸ He believed that this had further narrowed personal identity and injured the soul of modern people; their “mental horizon” was not as wide as it should be (p.13). This left many of them incapable of thinking for themselves. It was now the case that a modern person increasingly “can only see himself as thinking in the spirit of some group or other of his fellows” (p.16f.). Public education and other social forces, he feared, were being used in this way to subordinate people to economic institutions. They were being taught to see themselves through their job title—that became ‘who’ they are in

their own estimation. Individuality was being lost. The very identity of humanity was being cast in terms of economic function.

Schweitzer believed that modern economic life had damaged the psyche of the human person in several other ways too. Increasingly people are required to work long hours to provide for themselves and their families, leaving little possibility for the reading and reflection necessary for the development of strong ethical character (p.13, 88). They were too worn-out to seek intellectual self-improvement or for strengthening the bonds of community with their fellows. “Family life and the upbringing of children [also] suffer” from the stress of making a living today (p.334). All this exhaustion produced a great need for relaxation, and people turned to distractions that would not engage their minds. The various media institutions, such as newspapers and periodicals, were then taken over by “the spirit of superficiality” to cater to this very need (p.14). An important avenue for creating critical thought was thereby closed off, further damaging society.

Another tragedy was found in the very nature of the modern economic relations themselves. Schweitzer believed a “serious psychical injury” occurs through specialized work lives that separate people from any direct connection to their fellows for their own personal wellbeing (p.10). No longer are people getting immediate benefit from their labors. Economic exchange was now depersonalized in such a way that a person works for wages and then has to purchase food and other commodities for living from another institution, not from a community of cooperative fellows as it had been in former times (p.10). People were becoming entirely materially and psychologically dependent upon these soulless institutions (p.87f.). They had lost all immediate connection to greater humanity. Because of this, people were living “in a depressing, materialist state of serfdom” to the economic forces now controlling their lives (p.333).

Perhaps the greatest danger of all this, Schweitzer believed, was to be found in the resultant damage to *ethical* personhood. Independence of thought was becoming progressively more uncommon; people instead were susceptible to ‘group-think’ and merely echoed the common wisdom presented to them in the popular media (p.17f.). The problem here, Schweitzer wrote, was that “with the surrender of his own personal opinion the modern man surrenders also his personal moral judgment” (p.19). Such a ‘go with the flow’ person no longer thinks critically. It becomes increasingly easy for them to excuse the “cruel, unjust, or bad behavior of his nation” (p.19). No one was left to form the core of critical thinkers with strong communitarian sensibilities, educational background and moral character to challenge the system. Society then unthinkingly ambles locked-step down “the path towards inhumanity” (p.14). Nietzsche had warned of the same thing. “Everything a man does in the service of the state is contrary to his nature ... This is achieved through division of labor (so that no one any longer possesses the full responsibility [for their decisions])” (*The Will to Power* §718, p.383). This is what Schweitzer saw happening in Europe in the wake of the First World War. Modern economic life had fractured the psyche and homogenized individuality, leaving society without a moral foundation other than the prevailing social trends (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.20):

The man of to-day pursues his dark journey in a time of darkness, as one who has no freedom, no mental collectedness, no all-around development, as one who loses himself in an atmosphere of inhumanity, who surrenders his spiritual independence and his moral judgment to the organized society in which he lives, and who finds himself in every direction up against hindrances to the temper of true civilization. Of the

dangerous position in which he is placed [modern] philosophy has no understanding, and therefore makes no attempt to help him. [Philosophy] does not even urge him to reflect on what is happening to himself. The terrible truth [is] that with the progress of history and the economic development of the world it is becoming not easier, but harder, to develop true civilization ...

On top of all this, the people of the world had been profoundly demoralized by the First World War. Schweitzer wrote that even those nations not involved in the conflict became deeply troubled over the idea of progress (p.85). Modern science and technology had brought forth unimaginable death, not peace and prosperity. People awoke at the dawn of the twentieth century expecting utopia. They had been taught to believe that civilization was like a continuous blossoming of social progress, unfolding from the past into a better future for all (p.85). They instead found a disturbing age of nationalistic and individualistic barbarity. Somehow there had been an unnoticed and terrible regression within the spirit of humanity. European high culture produced not enlightenment but unleashed mechanized, chemical, and airborne carnage upon the world (p.88). This is what civilization had become. Schweitzer asks his readers to resign themselves to these facts, writing that they must come to realize and accept that “material achievements, then, are not civilization” (p.89). The common wisdom was that material, scientific and technological invention somehow equated to social progress, and it was a dangerous fallacy. In the supporting essay, he provides a diagnosis (p.86):

The disastrous feature of our civilization is that it is far more developed materially than spiritually. Its balance is disturbed. [...] in our enthusiasm over our progress in [scientific] knowledge and

[technological] power we have arrived at a defective conception of civilization itself. [...] The essential nature of civilization does not lie in its material achievements, but in the fact that individuals keep in mind the ideals of the perfecting of man, and the improvement of the social and political conditions of peoples, and of mankind as a whole, and that their habit of thought is determined in living [in a] constant fashion by such ideals.

Civilization and economics were inseparable, and this terrible lesson would become all too clear in the rise of Nazism. Schweitzer saw its spectre on the horizon—he even gave a public speech in Frankfurt in 1932 against the Nazi economic policies that were ‘bewitching’ the people (*Goethe: Four Studies*, p.56f.). And this is also why in his 1954 Nobel Prize lecture, Schweitzer would warn that “we are guilty of contempt for history if ... we fail to take economic realities into consideration” when trying to establish a lasting world peace. *Reverence for Life* was from its onset aimed at countering these precipitating causes for the decline that had befallen Western civilization—a catastrophe that would bring forth not one, but two world wars.

Because of all this, Schweitzer set out to reform the political, social and economic foundations of society. But what civilization should be like *exactly* was not defined by Schweitzer. He does however have a few recommendations regarding the distribution of wealth in society—a subject to be revisited in the final chapter. Instead he mostly stipulated that this ideal society could only be manifested through the promotion of intellectual, spiritual and ethical ‘personhood’ for each individual to their self-chosen ends. A central concern in this project was guaranteeing economic security within society (p.10). Civilization requires people who are empowered to act with moral agency; each

person must be free, as much as possible, to pursue their desires for self-improvement in any way that they feel moved to explore. The individual must be the author of their own lives because true civilization could only grow out of the collective manifestation of such self-actualized persons (p.320). In this sense Schweitzer is a utilitarian because society is to be seen as “the sum of a number of individuals, not as an organized body” impressing authoritarian order into the masses (p.226). But this is most definitely not the “rational pleasure” utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill or the claimed naturalistic “biologico-sociological” foundation for economic market-based utilitarianism (p.227).⁹

Schweitzer’s utilitarian vision is instead rooted in a cosmological worldview that promotes an individualized ethic of self-fulfillment actualized through social altruism (p.299). People, he argued, had lost the primal cosmological connections to the land and this had resulted in a psychic injury to those now existing as only employees in modern economic life. This fracturing of prior relations to the land had created a ‘placeless-ness’ within the human psyche, and this in turn had undermined civilization itself. Schweitzer hoped his elemental nature philosophy could serve as the lynchpin for re-securing persons both within the natural world and also in their economic lives. Even if that life would still be found in a modern factory, the ‘sense of place’ could still be restored *cosmologically* through the Reverence for Life ethic. While this will have to be explained more fully later, he believed a person could reconnect to their fellows and all life through the New Rationalism that places their consciousness in contact to the universal will-to-live; taking an interest in the life before them, and helping whenever one can, would allow a person to also reverence the infinite Will that dwells within too (p.322). He felt this would be enough to give them the ethical orientation to be able to navigate their way through modern life. It would enable “the mass of individuals to work themselves out of the

condition of spiritual weakness and dependence to which they have brought themselves” through modern economic life (p.18).

Schweitzer in Africa

The life-changing event on the African river described at the beginning of this chapter actually had its genesis earlier in Schweitzer’s life—the epiphany arose gradually from an accumulation of experiences and reflections about the problem of ethical society that go all the way back to his school days, and in particular to his readings of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. And so, just like an archeological expedition, we need to continue peeling-back the layers of history to discover what it was that inspired his Reverence for Life ethic. Schweitzer’s views on economic life in Europe discussed in the prior section were deeply influenced by changes he saw taking place in Africa as a result of colonialism. Therefore, to provide additional context for the discussion just provided on *The Philosophy of Civilization* and economics, it necessary to now go to his earlier published works, to speak of why Schweitzer was in Africa in the first place, and to detail exactly what it was that he experienced there. This discussion will also allow for a fuller picture of the man and his personality to emerge for the reader.

Schweitzer had chosen Africa for his humanitarian work out of a moment of inspiration after reading an article in the Paris Missionary Society magazine entitled *Les besoins de la Mission du Congo*, “The needs of the Congo Mission” (*Out of my Life and Thought*, p.88). Yet, after setting his heart on the Congo, he was warned that his liberal theological positions would raise “serious objections” by members of the overseeing committee (p.97). Nevertheless, in July of 1905 he wrote a long letter to the Reverend Alfred Boegner, head of the Paris Mission, trying to sell him on the idea. He listed all his virtues, including his good health and being a teetotaler, and tried to assuage any potential

reservations he may have. “Please do not be alarmed by my activities in theological and philosophical scholarship ... Absorbed in my thoughts about Jesus, I have asked myself whether I could live without scholarship, without art, without the intellectual environment in which I now exist—and all my reflections have always ended with a joyous ‘Yes’” (*Letters: 1905-1965*, p.4f.). He was still rejected. Schweitzer remarks that it would have been an easy matter to find an appointment through the liberal Swiss *Allgemeine Evangelische Missionsverein*, but felt he had to honor that initial calling for the Congo region (*Out of my Life and Thought*, p.97). This meant he had to agree to go to Africa as a doctor only since his scientifically minded ‘liberal’ Christianity was considered unacceptable for missionary work (Wadlow, p.26).¹⁰ He then enrolled in medical school to begin his long training to become a doctor. It would be 1913 before he would set foot in Africa.

Schweitzer was assigned to a mission at the native Galoa village of Andende near the colonial town Lambaréné, which takes its name from an expression in the local language meaning, “let us try” (Wadlow, p.24). This remote outpost was established in the jungle interior around 1860 by a migration from the larger French coastal settlement of Libreville, so named because it had been founded in 1849 by freed slaves taken from a Brazilian cargo ship captured by the French (Trefon, p.42). The French and Galoa nevertheless also engaged in the slave trade in addition to their other economic exports of ivory, wood, and salt (Wadlow, p.25f.). Trefon suggests the motivation for the establishment of Libreville in the first place was the desire by the French to establish an indigenous labor force for greater colonial aims (p.42).

This region of Africa was originally discovered by the Portuguese in the 15th Century, who established the first settlement in 1521. By the time of his arrival,

Schweitzer wrote that the local people had been devastated by the colonial contact. “We have a present merely the remains of eight once powerful tribes, so terrible has the population been thinned by three hundred years of alcohol [used as a form of payment] and the slave trade” (*On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, p.6). Schweitzer found himself, quite literally, at the very interface between the two very different worlds: one consisting of the remains of traditional societies with subsistence livelihoods, and the other representing European ‘high’ civilization with a colonial agenda for the local population. As a witness to such events, he felt compelled to write about life in the colony and what he felt needed to happen for the greater benefit of the Gabonese people.

A Few Comments on Scope of Work

The subjects of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and Schweitzer’s place in history as an agent either for or against these economic forces (he has been cast as both) are beyond the scope and aims of this present work. I will instead point the reader to what is arguably the best and most definitive account of Schweitzer’s relations with the Gabonese people prepared by Steven E.G. Melamed and Antonia Melamed (2003). Schweitzer’s legacy had become wrapped-up in that uncomfortable history which led many to consider him *persona non grata* as an academic thinker worthy to be spoken of anymore. Only recently has there been a resurgence of academic interest in him. The even-handed and unblinking assessment of Melamed and Melamed sets that complicated history into perspective. One of their key conclusions is that Schweitzer showed a capacity for cultural learning and sensitivity that started to emerge *after* he had written his early accounts of economic life for the Gabonese people. In time Schweitzer would be profoundly changed by his experiences in Africa and through his developing relationships with the people there. Melamed and Melamed underscore this point by reminding the

reader that the very idea of Reverence for Life only came to Schweitzer in Africa. Yet the early accounts about Africa remain, and these are the same ones that necessarily form the core my investigation.

Take for example the chapter in *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest* that deals with economic life. It was written in July of 1914, just fifteen months after he arrived. While very much a thinker who was opposed to much of the colonial agenda and the rampant abuses that he saw, Schweitzer still used the typical colonial language of the day to describe the African people, and sometimes in harsh and judgmental ways (e.g., writing that the locals were untrustworthy laborers who needed constant supervision). He also used language that today would be considered racist, such as calling the people ‘primitives.’ It has to be kept in mind however that this word did not carry the cultural baggage back then as it does now. Schweitzer also spoke about the *primitive* Christianity of Paul and the early Church to contrast it to later ecclesial developments that took place because this was the standard academic vocabulary for his day. Similarly, the term was used by Schweitzer to contrast the traditional cultures of Africa with the so-called advanced European societies. This still reflects a cultural bias and value judgment to be sure. But the same can be said for the accepted nomenclature today. The very idea of a ‘developing nation,’ or the United Nations choice phrase of Least Developed Country (LDC), or even the word *development* itself for that matter all suggest that the current state of a society is not acceptable based on some value judgment. Such is the nature and the dangers of any type of academic investigation in these areas.

Because he lived such a long life (90 years) the elderly Schweitzer would find himself caught up in the worldwide backlash of public sentiment against European activity in Africa in the 1950’s and 60’s. The outmoded language and economic

commentary in his early writings would be used against him to impugn his legacy—ironically in contradictory ways. The American civil rights activist W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) for example called Schweitzer “the last of the Great White Fathers” of Africa and claimed that “Schweitzer assisted in perpetuating colonialism by making life tolerable under it” as a medical doctor (Melamed and Melamed, p.182). However, others “labeled [him] a traitor to the white race because he preached and wrote that whites had exploited black Africa without giving enough in return” (p.186). Schweitzer was caught between these conflicting and politically motivated interpretations. Yet he remained silent during all of this, as was his life-long practice in response to criticism of any kind. Fortunately, these perceptions of his humanitarian work have faded with the historical distance that has allowed fresh perspective and critical scholarship to be performed since that time. Some of that history, certainly not all of it, will have to be revisited in order to examine Schweitzer’s views on economic personhood for people in a developing nation context. Again, it is recommended that the reader interested in a full treatment of Schweitzer’s place in that complicated history begin with the aforementioned study by Melamed and Melamed.

A People under Colonial Rule

The French introduced a cash economy in their African colony and imposed taxation upon the locals to force their assimilation and to prevent a reversion back to traditional subsistence livelihoods (Trefon, p.39). One means to impose this taxation was through indentured labor wherein native “individuals ... [were] forced by the army to leave their villages, often bound to each other with ropes, and set to cutting down trees that were exported to Europe” as their tax payment (Wadlow, p.26). Schweitzer

considered this nothing less than slave labor under another name (Melamed and Melamed, p.186).

The colonial powers at this time in history were only interested in the export of lumber from the old-growth forests of the region, particularly mahogany and another hardwood species called okoumé (*Aucoumea klaineana*) used mainly for plywood. Schweitzer remarked that the local people would have been better served if an improved subsistence economy had been established instead. He noted that the region could support the cultivation of palm oil, coffee, pepper, cinnamon, natural rubber, vanilla, and cocoa—a diverse economic base that could supplement some local needs as well. “But the chief business of Europeans is neither the cultivation of these things, nor the collection of rubber in the forest, but the timber trade” (*On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, p.4). This left the colony without a sufficient agricultural base for subsistence. It was “necessary, therefore, to import from Europe flour, rice, potatoes and milk, a fact which makes living a complicated business and very expensive” (p.5). While the cash economy and the creation of wage-earning labor force allowed for new found purchasing power, the local people were often required to exchange their labor in work camps that were largely dependent upon these expensive foreign foodstuffs. As a result, many people after their time in these work camps to pay their annual tax would “return home as poor as they went away” (p.116).

Another problem and a huge drain on the new found monetary wealth of the local people was cheaply produced imported alcohol, without which the colony itself would not have been profitable but for its import duty (p.125). Just as with his comments about the working people of Europe, the mental and physical exhaustion of long work hours inclined people seek out unthinking distraction and relaxation. While in Europe it was

the “picture show” or some vapid popular magazine (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.11), in Gabon these were not an option and so the imported, plentiful and readily available rum is what many people turned to instead. Schweitzer despised this as a great social evil. He was not opposed to the consumption of alcohol and speaks favorably of the palm wine locally produced by the Gabonese for village festivals (*On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, p.125f.). But he believed the cheap foreign rum could destroy entire villages in time—something which was reported to him secondhand by the European traders themselves as having already happened throughout the region (p.25).

This tragedy did not happen with the imposition of a colonial authority over the traditional societies, but started when the first commercial interests arrived in their lands; the colonial rule came afterwards to secure those private commercial interests (*A Treasury of Albert Schweitzer*, p.71). He writes that the colonial authorities focused on maximizing economic development for those foreign interests: “as much of the population as possible shall be made available in every possible way for utilizing to the utmost the natural wealth of the country ... so that the capital invested in the colonies may pay its interest, and that the [European] motherland may get her needs supplied through her connection with them” (p.117). Benefit to the local people was not a real concern, and so strategies had to be developed to get the locals to cooperate with the colonial agenda. It would take the form of a two-pronged approach. Schweitzer noted a curious motto that summed it all up. To motivate a person to work when previously such labor conditions never existed in their traditional societies, it was necessary to: “‘Create in him as many needs as possible; only so can the utmost possible be got out of him,’ say the State and commerce alike” (p.114).

The first approach was through taxes that had to be paid through labor, whether at the work camps or through their own ability to generate revenue through commerce. The second was to encourage “voluntary needs in him by offering him wares of all sorts, useful ones such as clothing material or tools, unnecessary ones such as tobacco and toilet articles [e.g., imported razors], and harmful ones like alcohol” (p.114). While Schweitzer could be said to be guilty of a subjective value judgment here about what people should want to do with their money, one of his assessments is not. He bemoans the fact that traditional native industries were dying out, having “been destroyed by the goods which European trade has introduced” in their colony (p.124). Just as with his comments about modern economic life in Europe, people were becoming more and more dependent on impersonal institutions for subsistence instead of communitarian relations through native industries. Because of this Schweitzer believed that the local people were not benefiting from colonial the relationship, and real development for the people was “going backwards instead of forwards” (p.124).

A Prescription for Self-Determination

To use the modern parlance in environmental ethics, Schweitzer certainly did not want to create ‘human zoos’ by keeping traditional societies completely isolated from Western influence. He was not a neo-Primitivist. The Gabonese were in dire need of access to modern medical care, and he felt it was unconscionable to not make available European medical science to people everywhere—this was in fact Schweitzer’s stated motivation for going to Africa as a doctor (p.1f.). Such comments may have certain air of paternalism but it is really no different than the mission of such contemporary organizations such as Doctors without Borders. Like them, Schweitzer professed that, “It was, and is still, my conviction that the humanitarian work to be done in the world

should, for its accomplishment, call upon us as men, not as members of any particular nation or religious body” (p.3). He was not a missionary seeking to convert people or ‘improve’ them with Western ideas. Evidently he had matured in his outlook since his initial desire a decade earlier about wanting to become an African missionary.¹¹

Schweitzer was not opposed to making consumer goods available within developing nations. Luxury items however had become a means to disrupt the existing social and political arrangements in these societies, leading to social strife. He remarks that the native ‘informal’ economy had been aimed at reciprocity, collective interdependence and social welfare. Schweitzer also observed that tribal customs ensured that “there are no widows unprovided for and no neglected orphans” (*On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, p.127). But with the introduction of foreign economic values and luxury goods, the social structures began to break down such that the tribal “chiefs begin to sell their subjects [as slaves] for [foreign] goods” and would trade their land outright to foreign interests leaving his people social “pariahs ... [and] landless laborers” (*A Treasury of Albert Schweitzer*, p.67, 71). Incipient consumerism had undermined the traditional social structures leading to selfish individualism and greed. Similar psychological dynamics were identified to have taken place in Europe that also led an ethical individualism putting society “on the path to inhumanity” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.14). Schweitzer’s commentary on Europe was no doubt informed by his experiences in Africa.

The international market had unleashed non-traditional consumer goods and advanced western weaponry in the colony which led to irreversible effects on the Gabonese. “Already they have lost their freedom because of [international markets]. Their economic and social fabric has been transformed by it” (*A Treasury of Albert*

Schweitzer, p.149). Schweitzer contended that economic development, which the people wanted, must proceed under a different paradigm: “Real wealth for native peoples would be found in their producing, as far as possible, the necessities of life by their own agricultural and handicraft efforts” (p.150). He wanted to create a subsistence economy not dependent on foreign markets, yet not isolated from them either. As early as 1927, Schweitzer argued on behalf of human and economic rights for the African people, including the right to freedom and self-determination in land ownership, the use of natural resources, to be able to freely choose work and place of residence, and a right to an education (p.188). His aim was to encourage that kind of economic development which would allow for the greatest self-determination on the part of the people themselves.

Schweitzer practiced what he preached. He did what he could to help the local Gabonese develop economically without losing the traditional communitarian character of their society. He opened two nursing schools to educate a new generation of healers from the locals themselves, “yet for unexplained reasons, these ventures did not succeed” (Melamed and Melamed, p.185). In the end, all he could personally do was train a few local nurses and orderlies, and lead by example on the inherent dignity of subsistence labor by joining in the physical work of masonry and carpentry for the hospital itself (*A Treasury of Albert Schweitzer*, p.70).

The Way Forward

Having arrived at this point, a clearer picture of the man and humanitarian has emerged. The centrality of economic life for the crisis in civilization has also been brought into sharper focus. But to employ the archaeological analogy here again, we still need to dig even further to discover the deeper origins of his Reverence for Life ethic.

This is a journey that will take us down to the academic roots that secured his work as a true philosophy in the strictest academic sense—the very aim of my dissertation.

Here it is important to keep in mind Schweitzer wrote that, even as a student, he had grown “concerned that the history of [Western] thought was always represented as only a history of philosophical systems, but not as a history of the struggle to obtain a worldview” (*Kulturphilosophie – Zweiter Teil: Kultur und Ethik, Vorrede*, vii). He concluded that it is for precisely this reason civilization itself has remained fragmentary and unsecured (vii). His project would therefore seek another route. He would not proceed by presenting a systematic philosophical system in the way Kant and other philosophers had done, for “neither cautious academic theory nor ambitious fantastical metaphysics can give us a true worldview” (viii). Instead, his project focused on establishing a worldview through certain elemental truths that could secure a philosophy of civilization; *only then* does it support a secondary metaphysics derived from those elemental truths called Ethical Mysticism (ix).¹² Nevertheless, Schweitzer’s innovative approach came with one very serious drawback.

Consider for the moment Schweitzer’s very good friend, Albert Einstein. Virtually everyone has heard of his general theory of relativity, and many can instantly recite its famous equation $E=MC^2$ that describes the relationship between mass and energy. Its simplicity is its allure. But Einstein’s famous formula is still backed-up by painstaking mathematical development through a type of advanced theoretical physics that only very few specially trained academics can actually understand. The beauty of Einstein’s work is that it appealed to both the laity and the specialist equally. This is a rare accomplishment. And this is what Schweitzer failed to do.

Put simply, Schweitzer did not ‘show the work’ behind his beautifully simple ethic. Reverence for Life declares that “evil is what annihilates, hampers, or hinders life ... [and that] goodness, by the same token, is the saving or helping of life, the enabling of whatever life I can to attain its highest development” (The Ethics of Reverence for Life, p.230). Its beauty is its simplicity. This is an ethic that requires no scholarly initiation. It is a clear and elegant truism that anyone could remember and reflect upon in their daily lives. But where is the accompanying philosophical backing that *proves* this has the same credibility of a true systematic philosophical treatise in the continental tradition?

The aim of my dissertation is to show the academic merits of Schweitzer’s work by painstakingly going through the intellectual history behind the elemental truths he used to underpin his philosophy. To this end, the figures of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche will be shown to be central for his Reverence for Life ethic. The next two chapters are devoted to revealing what it was exactly he took and transformed from each of these great philosophers. This project will show ‘the other half’ of his work—which is to say, it demonstrates the academically rigorous grounding behind the Reverence for Life ethic with specifically an audience of academic experts and sceptics in mind.

Schweitzer’s philosophy is deceptively complicated even though its message is simple. His breadth of knowledge and expertise was astounding, and he drew upon it all for his philosophy of civilization—and sometimes in unexpected ways. As a man possessing four disparate areas of expertise, his thoughts were naturally synergistic. Schweitzer was a savant and a mystic, and it all made intuitive sense to him. This present work will therefore attempt to untangle the enmeshed complexity of his thought for the reader in the clearest possible terms.

As previously mentioned, the particular question to be examined in the following chapters is how Schweitzer was influenced by the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and how his own synthesis of their systems in the New Rationalism project relates to the problems of ethical personhood in economic society today. It must be kept in mind however that I am not suggesting here that other figures were not also significant to the works and worldview of Schweitzer. Many dissertations could be written on Schweitzer in relation to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johann Sebastian Bach, the Chinese philosopher Chwang-tse (who he particularly admired), the protestant theologian Martin Luther, the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, the economic historian Karl Polanyi, or any of a whole host of other important thinkers too numerous to list. His works and legacy are truly inexhaustible wells for academic scholarship. Consequently, this dissertation must focus on just a single question relating to philosophical cosmology.

Much of what is to be argued in the following chapters has not been previously identified in scholarship or has been presumed to have been a mistaken or poorly grounded argument on Schweitzer's part. This present work hopes to set the stage for a re-examination of Schweitzer's work and launch renewed interest in him as an original and relevant philosopher within academia today. A central finding of this investigation concerns Schweitzer's New Rationalism. In particular, this aspect of his work may especially appeal to environmental ethicists since it opens the door to the idea of 'intrinsic valuation' for non-human nature in a powerful new philosophical framework.

With all this in mind, my investigation will proceed as follows. In Chapter 2, Schopenhauer's philosophy will be sketched-out before turning to the question of how Schweitzer was influenced by him. But even here it was by way of Nietzsche's writings that Schweitzer came to see Schopenhauer. This necessitates that his philosophy be

outlined also, and so this appears in Chapter 3. Nietzsche had re-imagined Schopenhauer's cosmology by recasting its metaphysical and religiously interpreted 'theory of causality' (etiology) as biological phenomena. This is Nietzsche's famous Will to Power theory. And while Schweitzer would retain the name 'will-to-live' as used by Schopenhauer, his conception of it will be shown to have followed Nietzsche in terms of naturalistic biology. Chapter 4 then presents an analysis on how Schweitzer critiqued and transformed the cosmologies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in his own writings. This is where Schweitzer's New Rationalism project will be formally outlined. Chapter 5 then moves on to examine and respond to certain criticisms of Schweitzer's philosophy. The final chapter summarizes the findings and then discusses their continuing significance for contemporary environmental ethics. Specifically, the thought of Schweitzer is brought out and discussed in relation to such figures as Aldo Leopold, Colin A.M. Duncan, and Peter G. Brown. It is here that Reverence for Life will be shown to be a philosophy capable of contributing to the work of these and other scholars in finding solutions to the environmental problems facing the world today.

It is hoped that my work on the foundations of Schweitzer's thought will help and assist those academics who seek to carry forward his philosophy of civilization. But this dissertation can be only one small step in that direction. Its aims are modest but significant. Before Schweitzer will be recognized in the academic domain of philosophy, he has to be shown to be a true philosopher who addressed those foundational questions expected of one. This came about by drawing on a very specific intellectual history for certain elements in his Reverence for Life ethic. The following chapters detail that intellectual history and discuss exactly what Schweitzer took and transformed from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Chapter Two

Schopenhauer and his Philosophy

Until recently, the centrality of Schopenhauer to Schweitzer's philosophy was not well understood. Schweitzer mentions him only infrequently in his published works. Yet private correspondence tells a different story. In a letter Schweitzer wrote just three months before his death, he mentions that as a schoolboy at Müllhouse Secondary School in Alsace he studied under Wilhelm Deecke who was "an enthusiastic follower" and a former pupil of Schopenhauer (Barsam 2002, p.213).¹³ And in another previously unpublished letter, Schweitzer responded to Jackson Lee Ice on the question of who were his greatest influences. He only gave one name in reply: "I felt, even at the age of eighteen, that Schopenhauer's work ... was an event for me" (Barsam 2008, p.55). Even so, these letters serve to underscore the relative omission of the name 'Schopenhauer' in his books and articles. As mentioned in the first chapter, Schweitzer's decision to begin medical school for his fourth doctorate degree and then devote the rest of his life to running a humanitarian medical mission in Africa was deeply influenced and rooted in what he saw as Schopenhauer's personal moral failings. Schweitzer would lead by example.

Due to Schweitzer's reluctance to, at times, directly associate his own name with Schopenhauer, this investigation will have to proceed by different means. We will begin by taking note of a curious dualism Schweitzer maintains between the scientific worldview and a person's lived experience in the world (i.e., life-view): "We must make up our minds to leave our conceptions of life and of the world *independent* of each other, and see that a straightforward understanding between the two is reached" (emphasis

added; *The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.276). In this exceedingly enigmatic statement, which will be explained in a moment, Schweitzer was addressing an age-old debate.¹⁴

But before we turn to that, it needs to be remarked that the academic domain of philosophy is heady stuff. To the uninitiated it can seem like a minefield of technical definitions and overly subtle nuance set in unnecessarily mind-bending articulations of careful phraseology concerning exceptionally obscure conceptual matters—it is little wonder that Schweitzer chose to express his philosophy in ordinary language! But at the same time, this was one of the main reasons Schweitzer has not been taken seriously as a philosopher. The general assessment from academia has been that *Reverence for Life* is in no way significant and that it fails to rise to the level of real philosophy (a subject that will be revisited in Chapter 5). In order to *prove* that Schweitzer was not just an amateurish commentator, I will have to show how his system does indeed engage the key philosophical questions expected of a true philosopher. Because of Schweitzer's reliance on Schopenhauer, the only way to do this is by getting into the technical nuances for Schopenhauer's will-to-live theory in the context of his overall philosophical argument. Only then can Schweitzer's distinctiveness be revealed.

Here it has to be kept in mind that Schweitzer earned a PhD in philosophy specializing in Kant. This was his training, and he was well versed in that highly specialized and technical argumentation indicative of continental philosophy. Schweitzer was no amateur here. It is a testament to his wisdom that he chose to write in ordinary language when trying to create what he called a "living philosophy of the people" (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.7). This was a deliberate decision on his part. But that said, his philosophy of civilization was intended to be just that—a *philosophy* true and proper in the strictest academic sense. He just went about it in an unexpected way.

As will be revealed in a moment, Schweitzer's approach was to create this philosophy out of what he called 'elemental truths' which were taken from certain philosophers in the Kantian tradition. Foremost in his mind was the will-to-live theory from Schopenhauer. This philosophical postulate was advantageous to Schweitzer for several reasons, including the fact that the ordinary meaning of a 'will to live' sums up much of its philosophical definition rather nicely. No scholarly training is required for the general public to understand this elemental truth. Yet at the same time there is a deep intellectual history behind this philosophical concept. It is *this* aspect of Schweitzer's thought that has not been acknowledged in academia: he was drawing upon a very specific intellectual history in his Reverence for Life ethic that he had assumed his academic audience would have immediately recognized and acknowledged as being valid and true. But for various reasons, including the subsequent emergence and dominance of new trends in philosophy (including existentialism and phenomenology), this has not been the case.

The aim of the following discussion is to show the depth of the intellectual history behind the will-to-live postulate in the clearest possible terms given the demands of the subject matter. It is hoped that academic philosophers will come to recognize exactly what Schweitzer was trying to achieve by drawing on Schopenhauer's will-to-live theory in his Reverence for Life ethic. We will therefore now turn to a detailed recounting of that history in order to set the stage for a new appreciation of Schweitzer to emerge. Only after this is done can the enigmatic statement about different conceptions of life and the world that was mentioned in the second paragraph of this chapter be made clear.

The Birth of Modern Philosophy

The defining dispute in the history of philosophy was between the ‘materialists’ who held to the ultimate primacy of the physical world and natural body, against the ‘rationalists’ who maintained that the mind had a special cosmological place over the apparent materialism of the visible world. This dispute may at times sound exceedingly esoteric and preoccupied with pseudo-problems that arise in unnecessarily technical and hair-splitting propositions of logic. But their concern was to establish certainty over mere opinion. No true theory of knowledge (epistemology) could ever be established unless a foundation was first exposed on the unfractured bedrock of absolute verifiable truth. In philosophical parlance this is called a first principle. Only with a completely defensible first principle can arguments be advanced with confidence about the validity of the subsequent claims. In trying to establish a new philosophy of civilization, Schweitzer felt he needed to engage these basic philosophical questions, and do so on their own terms.

In modern philosophy this debate can be traced back to René Descartes. He had sought a solution to ‘solipsism’—the fear that everything a person experiences may just be illusion, hallucination, or just some kind of waking dream that we mistake for real life. Just like a person recovering from an amputation of a limb may still experience the presence of that missing leg, what our senses tell us may not actually correlate to something real. The mind is only connected to the world by the five physical senses, and perhaps they can all be fooled. What appears to be reality may not be really real. And if the senses cannot be trusted, what can? This type of questioning reveals how uncompromising the skepticism of philosophy was in trying to establish a first principle grounded in undeniable truth.

To this end Descartes created a thought experiment about a ‘grand deceiver’ (ostensibly Satan) who could conjure up all things perceived by the senses to fool the rational mind. He then asked himself, can anything we experience be proven to be actually real without any doubt whatsoever? He had to conclude—*No*, there was absolutely nothing in our sensory experiences that could be established as certain. Worse, at least to his logic, the objects perceived to be external to the mind were mutable and impermanent, and so no first principle could be established in the outside (phenomenal) world. In the final analysis, his uncompromising doubt distilled all claimed knowledge to just two irreducible premises: that he himself must be a limited finite being, and that the ‘I’ at the center of consciousness, at a minimum, could be trusted to be real.

Descartes then turned to the question as to whether the outside world exists. He concluded that because the perceived reality is the subject for rational examination, it must be undergirded by a true intelligible nature. The external ‘sense world’ thus exists only for the mind, and the mind alone. “I rightly conclude that my essence consists entirely in my being a thinking thing ... on the other hand, I possess a distinct idea of a body, insofar as it is merely an extended and not a thinking thing, it is [therefore] certain that I am really distinct from my body and can exist without it” (Meditation VI, p.44). In other words, the mind’s essence is thought, and bodies are only a spatially extended intelligible substance. For this reason Descartes maintained that the objects of the visible world specifically exist for human thought and that all non-rational beings (i.e., plants and animals) had to be just unthinking clockwork automata controlled by rational laws.

Schweitzer wrote that Descartes set philosophy “irretrievably on the road to the abstract” and drove an arbitrary wedge between human and non-human life that has plagued philosophy ever since (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.309). He would seek to

rescue philosophy from this misbegotten beginning, but had to do it with their logic to be taken seriously. In large part he would do this by building on Schopenhauer's theory of knowledge, which is outlined next.

Descartes' Legacy

Western philosophy became preoccupied with human consciousness. This is because Descartes used a first principle based on the recursive awareness of the self. He then systematically worked his way out from the solipsism of mere consciousness to describe the intelligible nature of the empirical world. Following critiques by Hume and others,¹⁵ Kant took up the project anew and was able to masterfully map the inner dynamics for the cognitive acts of knowing and understanding. Kant proved that spatial and temporal awareness are not contained in raw sensory experience, but are the products of the intellect itself through the processing of sensory information into recognizable ideas. Epistemology hit its high-water mark with Kant. No previously assumed premise or postulate survived his rigorous critical examination. Even the human 'soul' had to be grounded in something actually provable, which in this case was consciousness itself (whose substance was *a priori* time) as the ultimate object of the inner sense. But even here the soul was only demonstrable during a person's lifetime. Its permanence after the death of the body could not be positively established. The same went for God. Postulates such as the existence of an immortal soul and the Christian God were only possibilities arising from antinomies of logic. Yet from this foundation, Kant could still proceed to describe the empirical world with complete assurance of the veracity of his claims. But a problem was soon discovered.

First principles always determine the nature of all subsequent claims. By beginning with a first principle of rational consciousness, all resulting conclusions

regarding reality were necessarily contingent upon an experiencing subject for their existence. Kant could not give the visible world complete independence from our perception of it. In the end, all he could say was that the outer world appears the way that it does due to the particular nature of the human brain which renders sensory data consistently according to its inner constitution. What sense objects are in-and-of-themselves cannot be determined beyond their intelligible properties. Kant's work highlighted that fact that the mind is only connected to the world by five senses. The mind creates its own 'virtual reality' by constantly interpreting the incoming sensory data by adding spatial and temporal qualities, thereby making it into something intelligible—a process based upon experience and the given properties of the brain's perceptual faculties. Consequently, it is easy to trick the mind with optical and auditory illusions.

Dissatisfaction with the Kantian approach led natural philosophers to begin anew with a different first principle. Continental philosophy had seemingly hit a dead-end. The empiricists would instead take perception as a given truth, and do this uncritically despite Kant's work here. For example, Linnaeus (1707–1778), who was the pre-eminent natural scientist of the eighteenth century, believed that empiricism allowed the scientist “to know the thing itself (*res ipsas nosce*)” and that the essence, the very ‘beingness’ of plants and animals, could be revealed through examination of their biological structures (Lindroth 2004, p.4, p.30). The empiricists embraced Newtonian physics and mechanical materialism for causal explanations, and by using inductive reasoning and scientific verification they made stunning advances in cataloguing the attributes of the phenomenal world. This is modern science as we know it. No longer would it be called ‘natural philosophy’ as it was in former times. The philosophers and scientists now moved in separate circles and would increasingly support incompatible truth claims about reality.

Schopenhauer and Science

Schopenhauer was the only continental philosopher who broke free from the solipsism of consciousness and found a way to posit causality in the empirical world independent of human perception. He was thus able to create a true philosophy of science out of the Cartesian tradition. Yet he would never become a leading tradition in philosophy, being occluded by Nietzsche and then by Martin Heidegger's distinctive interpretation of both figures that set philosophy back on a Cartesian track towards abstraction. This will be discussed further in the next chapter. It is mentioned here because Schweitzer was one of the few to embrace Schopenhauer and this is in large part the reason why his cosmology strikes many today as peculiar when it is compared to the dominant paradigms in contemporary academia.

Schopenhauer's uniqueness is in how he redressed two key problems plaguing philosophy. The first was accounting for causality. This is one of the central issues that separated philosophy from empirical science because we do not have a physical sense that detects causality. It is instead a conclusion of the mind from the sequence of events and learned experience that ascribes a causal association for phenomena—for example, the porcelain cup that falls from the table and shatters on the floor becomes broken *because of* the impact. Kant had argued that such conclusions were not possible based merely on perception but became implicated by the mind which ascribes causality to account for what is perceived.

The second key problem was the idea of a material substance as a substrate for the intelligible properties in the objects of perception. Kant termed this the 'thing in itself' (*Ding an sich*; alternately, *noumenon* or the 'noumenal'). While empiricists as far back as Linnaeus took the objects available to perception as the 'thing in itself' in its entirety,

Kant had to declare that the thing in itself was unknowable. He was necessarily confined by the Cartesian demands of uncompromising scepticism and so Kant likewise defended the claim that the mind was only able to discern the empirical world indirectly with the physical senses. While the objects of perception have many intelligible properties such as weight, volume, texture, hardness, friability, etc., the idea of a ‘thing itself’ to account for all these knowable characteristics of empirical objects could only be a supposition of the intellect. The thing itself cannot be proven outside a set of intelligible properties which all supported the original Cartesian claim about phenomena. What empiricists called substantive ‘mass’ the philosophers in the wake of the Kantian tradition ridiculed as merely a myth of the mind.¹⁶ Science and philosophy were at an impasse.

Schopenhauer however recognized the need for a theory of knowledge that accounted for the natural world apart from human perception and subjectivity. Schopenhauer did this by examining changes in the objects of perception that occur against the backdrop of the mind’s faculties of Kantian space and time (i.e., the *a priori*). But to understand Schopenhauer, we must first discuss the naturalist Comte Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707–1788) who he relied upon.

Causality, according to both Count Buffon and Kant, was an ascription of the mind regarding the objects of perception. Yet Buffon was able to demonstrate that a process of discernment exists that mitigates the human factor so that causes in the phenomenal world could be identified. Buffon still realized that, “because our senses, being themselves the effects of causes that we cannot know, can give us ideas of effects only, and never of causes,” and so we are limited to asserting a physical truth as merely the probability of an observed outcome to reoccur from experience (1969, p.108). The field of mathematics, on the other hand, proceeds from abstraction and extrapolated

identity and so, “what we called mathematical truths . . . have no reality” apart from these relational definitions within mathematics itself (p.106). Yet, “these truths would always have been matters of pure speculation, mere curiosity and utter uselessness, if we had not found the means of associating them with physical truths” through the field of physics (p.107). This becomes the key link between the thing itself within the sense-world and the seemingly irreducible rationalism of the mind. Causality, a rational deduction, can also be identified as an empirical reality independent of experiencing subjects; physics determines mathematically the causal relations in the sense-world because “what is involved here is combining and calculating the probabilities in order to judge whether an [observed] effect depends on one cause rather than another” (p.108). Thus, the probability of whether one cause or another (e.g., temperature or pressure) is responsible for an observed change can be calculated to a mathematical certainty, allowing causality to be determined apart from subjective perception.

Physics, chemistry, and other natural sciences have been able to determine the properties of the natural forces in those fields of study. But the causality (etiology) for living beings had not been examined the same way. This is what Schopenhauer did. He described the natural force operating here as the Will (*Wille*). The Will is not self-causal agency in intention or volition, but a generic name for the cause of change from one physical or mental state to another. The Will is supra-personal and indeed a nonhuman force operating within the mind, and it was also responsible for the physical and chemical changes in the outer world detected by science (*The World as Will and Representation* [WWR] §17, §18; p.98ff.). For Schopenhauer the Will was both causality and the thing itself subsisting phenomena. This then is Schopenhauer’s solution to the Kantian

dilemma. Delving one step further towards the true inner nature of phenomena (i.e., the noumenon), Schopenhauer declared that reality is *The World as Will and Representation*.

The second part of his famous book title, ‘Representation’, is a reference to what are known as Plato’s Universals. These are metaphysical ideas for the species of the natural world.¹⁷ Schopenhauer examined phenomena in historical time and asked himself why it is that the same phenomenal forms kept reoccurring. He recounts an illustrative example of noticing a cat playing in his yard. It occurred to him that myriad individual cats have existed throughout history and that all these cats were essentially all the same. “I know quite well that anyone would regard me as mad if I seriously assured him that the cat, playing just now in the yard, is still the same one that did the same jumps and tricks there three hundred years ago; but I also know that it is much more absurd to believe that the cat of today is through and through and fundamentally a different one from that cat of three hundred years ago” (*WWR*—Supplements to the Fourth Book, Vol.2, §41, p.482). Individual cats have arisen and passed away through causality, and yet “in all these forms we recognize only the different aspects of the principle of sufficient reason [of existence] that is the ultimate principle of all finiteness, of all individuation, and the universal form of representation as it comes to the knowledge of the individual as such” (*WWR* §30, p.169). He concluded that a metaphysical ‘Idea’ for a cat must control the appearance of each new manifestation of a kitten born into the world. This conception of Platonic Universals for every species in nature (a very primitive forerunner to the modern idea of DNA) allowed Schopenhauer to go further than Kant in describing empirical reality. The natural world could then be presented as a storehouse of different Platonic Ideas trapped in physical substance that exist independently from perception, and that change in

appearance as objects move from potentiality to actuality in time through the cosmological Will.

The activity of the evolutionary Will was described by Schopenhauer as mindless and meaningless striving, yet not entirely random or aimless. The Will, in joining with a Platonic Idea creates a discrete body under *principium individuationis* (the law of specification) forming a nexus (*Weltknoten*) of space and time brought together as an individual will-to-live. And just as the evolutionary Will strives for objectification of Platonic Ideas in phenomenal reality, it is the character of the individual wills-to-live to also struggle against one another in order to express their embodied Ideas in the world of nature. By drawing on this cosmological claim of the Will as the Kantian thing itself and by having the Platonic Ideas as the intelligible substance for empirical reality, Schopenhauer was able to do what Kant could not. He was able to use philosophical argumentation to establish the independent reality of the external world.

Schweitzer and Schopenhauer

It was through Schopenhauer that Schweitzer found a starting place for reconciling philosophy with empirical science. The will-to-live is a philosophical postulate that was in agreement with the empiricists' claim that the empirical world actually does exist—which is to say, that it is not some kind of 'social construction' or waking phantasy. Schweitzer needed Schopenhauer to rid philosophy of these Cartesian biases. Only through him could non-human life and the abiotic features of the natural world be given independent existence and independent causality. Admittedly, this is the most obvious of all possible claims to the sensibilities of most people today, but for philosophers, both now and then, it is quite radical and still controversial. Some contemporary philosophers even argue that empirical science is illegitimate and that the

natural world has no reality outside human ‘socially constructed’ rational consciousness.¹⁸

That said, Schweitzer had no sympathy at all for the metaphysical idealism in Schopenhauer’s use of Platonic Ideas. He instead based his nature philosophy on the scientific “cell-theory of matter” to account for how species emerges from biological processes (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.196).¹⁹ As a medical doctor, Schweitzer was only interested in Schopenhauer’s concept of the will-to-live to explain how cosmological processes bring about the existence of the observable phenomena in empirical reality. This was the linkage he was after. Through Schopenhauer he was able to bring this one elemental truth from philosophy into agreement with scientific biology. The impasse was now broken and the way was open for bringing the Cartesian world of rational consciousness into dialogue with empirical science. Put in its simplest terms, the will-to-live for Schweitzer was not metaphysics but physics. As for the question of exactly how Schweitzer was able to sanitize Schopenhauer from his greater metaphysical claims and make it an entirely ‘this worldly’ philosophy compatible with natural science, this will have to wait and be discussed in the next chapter when we turn to Nietzsche.

Schopenhauer and the Thing Itself

With this overview in mind, we can now turn to a more in-depth analysis of Schopenhauer. This will be necessary to bring to light certain other distinctive elements of Schweitzer’s Reverence for Life ethic. The preceding discussion revealed the centrality of the cosmological Will in the works of Schopenhauer. This in turn points to a more interesting question because the Will for Schopenhauer was *also* the Kantian thing itself. The question before Kant was whether a knowing subject could gain knowledge of the thing itself behind the objects of perception. Kant concluded the thing itself was

unknowable.²⁰ Nevertheless, Schopenhauer could not accept a philosophy of the mind as his starting point for describing existence (ontology)—particularly offensive to him was Hegel’s philosophy of *Geist* (Mind as the universal Spirit of the world) since the same chemical and physical forces operating in the physical matter of the natural world also controlled the functioning of the ‘grey-matter’ of the brain—and surely, he thought, this must defeat any claims of a first principle based within the intellect (*Parerga und Paralipomena*, On Various Subjects §1B, p.213). And because he considered that “the intellect is physical not metaphysical” (*Parerga und Paralipomena*, On the Antithesis of Thing in Itself and Appearance §5, p.59), the problematic before Schopenhauer became whether the intellect (a projection of the organic brain, which in turn was a projection of the thing itself) could discern its true nature. To go further than Kant regarding the nature of the thing itself (*noumenon*) even though it lay behind the serial projections of body and mind, he turned to the analysis of the Will as it was revealed in the embodied will-to-live.

At this point of the discussion it must be remarked that Kant would not go as far as Schopenhauer. He was more cautious regarding claims to truth. Even the existence of a reality external to self-consciousness could only be granted a provisional and indeterminate existence in his epistemology: “That there is something real outside us which not only corresponds but must correspond to our outer perceptions can likewise be proved to be, not a condition of things in themselves, but for the sake of experience. This means that there is something empirical, that is, some appearance in space without us, that admits of a satisfactory proof” (*Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic* §49, p.84). Experiencing subjects require *something* to experience that exists apart from themselves, yet the empirical is always mediated through the spatial and temporal intuitions of the mind. And while the object of inner sense (self-consciousness) demonstrates the actuality

of the ‘soul’ (the experiencing self) which exists in time, the soul cannot be said to exist apart from the mind’s faculty of representation. Moreover, the form of outer phenomena is determined by the nature of our senses and cognitive faculties, and so Kant cannot give ‘Ideas’ existence apart from perception, which Schopenhauer does. This is where he stands at starkest distinction to the great Prussian. Kant steered clear of the excesses of speculative metaphysics, but Schopenhauer stood at the edge of the noumenal nothingness and dreamt of Nirvana.

Schopenhauer, Evolution and Buddhism

Schopenhauer adapted the conception of evolution by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) to ground cosmology in natural history.²¹ For Schopenhauer, the Will is Lamarck’s vital force (*élan vital*) that ‘quickens’ (in the Aristotelian sense) each organism—it is the true procreative source for each new life (*The Will in Nature*, p.265). This Lamarckian and Aristotelian inspired theory of evolution would however become entwined with Buddhist metaphysics. This is where Schopenhauer’s philosophy takes a sharp turn to become decidedly unscientific.

The cosmological Will is presented by Schopenhauer as an evolutionary force which progressively brought forth the very *objectification* of reality beginning with the “most universal forces of nature” such as gravity and magnetism (*WWR* §20, p.107f.; §24 p.123; §27, p.142, p.149ff.). Phenomenal reality then emerged through a chain of its own causes to become matter, whereupon the species of nature as defined by their Platonic Ideas then appeared (*WWR-2* §26, p.130ff.). The pinnacle of evolution, not surprisingly, was claimed to be humankind.²² Yet there is still an evolutionary inter-dependence here; the higher forms of life *had to develop* from the earlier, more primitive life-forms (*WWR-2* §28, p.153), for “unless the serpent eats a serpent, he does not become a dragon”

(Schopenhauer cites Francis Bacon; *WWR-2* §27, p.145). The definitive moment in evolution was the emergence of non-human animal consciousness, whereupon “the *world as representation* now stands out at one stroke with all its forms, object and subject, time, space, plurality, and causality” (*WWR-2* §27, p.150). Put simply, Schopenhauer is saying that the act of subjective perception in consciousness actually makes phenomenal reality objectively real. His position here is not coincidentally very similar to the doctrine Twelve-Fold Chain of Dependent Arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*) in Buddhist metaphysics.

Not surprisingly then, matter in Schopenhauer’s cosmology has ephemeral existence. Atwell (1995) concluded that matter is the “third thing” between cause and effect (p.68), and is a phenomenal substance that the differentiated wills-to-live struggle over to maintain their temporal forms (p.152; cf. *WWR-2* §27, p.147). For Atwell, Schopenhauer’s matter only exists as a corollary in the becoming and passing away of phenomenal bodies. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer strictly maintained that there are only two ultimate principles of existence: the causal Will and the Platonic Ideas that undergird phenomenal representations. For this reason, empirical substance is said to exist as a set of intelligible properties, and what appears to be physical matter is only an impermanent *secondary* reality emerging from the objectification of the outer world through perception. Sensations then arise to be received by the intellect through causality from the other corporeal will-to-live, which are themselves only objective forms of their own inner subjectivity. Matter is thus only a by-product of causality through the other will-to-live, and “therefore we said also that matter is through and through causality” (*WWR-2* §26, p.135). As a medical doctor, Schweitzer could simply not accept a theory of the universe based in such highly speculative and Buddhism-inspired metaphysics.

Salvation and Compassion

Schopenhauer can find meaning in an ultimately meaningless world of suffering through a single tenuous thread: compassion. This is the keystone to unite his ethics and his doctrine of salvation (soteriology). Schopenhauer claims that compassion is the sole non-egoist motive for it takes the other as its foremost concern. Accordingly, he says, it is the only valid first principle for ethics (*On the Basis of Morality* §19.1, p.168f). All other ethical principles are subject to antinomies of logic or can be undermined by passions of the personal will. Rather, as Schopenhauer writes, “boundless compassion for all living beings is the firmest and surest guarantee of pure moral conduct, and needs no casuistry. Whoever is inspired with it will assuredly injure no one, will wrong no one, will encroach no one’s rights; on the contrary, he will be lenient and patient with everyone, will forgive everyone, and help everyone as much as he can, and all his actions will bear the stamp of justice, philanthropy, and loving-kindness” (*On the Basis of Morality* §19.4, p.172). Compassion emerges from a transformation of the egotistical self through mystical contemplation upon the universal will-to-live to yield a sublime personal character and an ethical worldview.

It is also through compassionate acts, “whereupon the distinction between I and Not-I disappears” that a pathway to divine salvation is opened up (*Parerga und Paralipomena*, On Ethics §2, p.134). Compassion breaks down the sense of separation that makes the personal self *seem* like it is entirely different from the other life. Compassion arises by way of a pre-rational sublimity in the perception of suffering. The sublime is a different way of knowing, something which Schopenhauer called ‘intuitive pure knowing.’ This kind of knowledge is seen by him as superior to the analytical intellect, for such “*intuitive knowledge* can guide our actions and conduct directly ... this

explains why the real life of the scholar, whose merit consists in an abundance of abstract knowledge, is so inferior to the man of the world whose merit consists in a more perfect intuitive knowledge” (his emphasis; *Manuscript Remains*, p.296). This concept of an ‘intuitive pure knowing’ would become a key inspiration for Schweitzer’s understanding of negative (apophatic) theology, a subject to be explored in Chapter 4.

Notably, Schopenhauer would use the Christian claim of ‘no greater love’ in self-sacrifice for the sake of another (John 15:13) as an illustrative example for his ethics. He writes, “what could possibly express more clearly the consciousness that this [self] destruction is only the destruction of a phenomenon and is therefore itself phenomenon, while the essential being of him who faces destruction remains unaffected: it continues to exist in the other” (*Parerga und Paralipomena*, On Ethics §6, p.141). What he is saying is that the self and the other share a single undivided unity through the universal Will (which is to say, the Kantian thing itself). The two lives are separated only by the secondary and impermanent conditions created by perception that objectifies phenomenal reality. Therefore, compassion dissolves the *principium individuationis* (the law of specification) that ties together the *Weltknoten* (the will-to-live described as, literally, a ‘world knot’). The experience of compassion then imparts a sense of transcendent sublimity—the foretaste of Nirvana itself.

Acts of self-sacrificial altruism may allow the ‘person’ to achieve Nirvana. But there are two other indirect consequences. The first is that such acts of conscience serve to generate greater awareness of the power of compassion in those who witness or hear of it—a sympathetic response of sublimity can be generated in others. This can facilitate an incrementally expanding ethical consciousness in humankind that improves all of society. He also believed that this would eventually bring non-human life into ethical

consideration.²³ Schopenhauer, the passionate anti-vivisectionist, cannot surrender the phenomenal world to unfeeling others. All life is ethically considerable since all life has the same basic essence as the self. This then is the second repercussion. Individual acts of compassion can, in time, help free others and even the whole phenomenal reality from *samara* (endless reincarnation) through the power of ‘grace’ (WWR-4 §70, p.407ff.). Grace is Schopenhauer’s term for a specific qualitative imputation of the unitary universal Will upon an individual will-to-live. Grace does not come by way of a deity. Presumably, it is the echoes of the self-sacrificial compassion, asceticism, and aesthetic revelation imparted from moral agents who have since achieved Nirvana.

For Schopenhauer, ethics remains entwined and rooted with the will-to-live—ethics are mediated through the body, not the Kantian rational soul. It is paradoxical that the abhorrence and mental anguish over bodily suffering becomes the basis for an ‘ethical mysticism’ (to borrow Albert Schweitzer’s phrase) aimed at denying the reality of the self and phenomenal world for the betterment of all. The paradox is resolved when suffering is presented as a necessary experience to unite the self with the other (*Parerga und Paralipomena*, On Suicide §1, p.78). Compassion over suffering dissolves the sense of otherness and individuality maintaining *samara*, and “since all suffering is a mortification and a call to a resignation, it has potentially a sanctifying force ... [but] only when suffering assumes the form of pure [intuitive] knowledge, and then this knowledge, as a *quieter of the will*, produces true resignation” (WWR-4 §68, p.395, p.397). This final move toward of world- and life-resignation was particularly distasteful to Schweitzer and he would have to turn to Nietzsche to find a theory of world- and life-affirmation to balance out Schopenhauer’s otherwise immensely beautiful ethic.

Conclusions

Schweitzer drew upon Schopenhauer's will-to-live theory as his basis to begin to relate empirical science with continental philosophy and ethics. He had assumed that this was a settled matter and that academics would accept Schopenhauer's revolutionary work in philosophical causality as simply a given truth. This was a strategic error on Schweitzer's part because the domain of philosophy has since moved on to newer theories that have reestablished the Cartesian nature of phenomenal world as its true reality (a subject to be revisited in Chapter 5). This is not to say Schopenhauer's will-to-live theory is fundamentally flawed, especially in light of how Schweitzer modified it, only that contemporary academics have failed to appreciate his philosophy precisely because of these modern trends.

In addition to the will-to-live theory, many elements of Schweitzer's thought can be identified in the preceding analysis including an ethic based on compassion, an attention to evolutionary theory, an interest in interpreting world religions in light of philosophy, and also the idea that altruism can inspire others to transform all of society. Schweitzer, like Schopenhauer, also emphasized the place of the physical body in ethics (over the role of the Kantian intellect) by contending that it is only compassion over suffering which can guarantee a lasting foundation for a moral society.

But Schweitzer was no simple follower of Schopenhauer. Much of his philosophy was *far* too metaphysical for him, particularly its Buddhism inspired theory of perception. Reverence for Life would also not present a prescription for divine redemption (soteriology). His was to be entirely a 'this worldly' ethic.²⁴ And so in order to sanitize Schopenhauer's cosmology of its greater metaphysical and religious associations, Schweitzer would turn to the reformulation of Schopenhauer's theory of causality as set

forth by Nietzsche—a subject we will examine in the next chapter. But first, as promised at the start of this chapter, Schweitzer’s enigmatic statement about different conceptions of life and the world must be revisited. This distinction will become important for understanding Reverence for Life, and the will-to-live theory is the key for deciphering it.

Monism and Dualism

Somewhat unexpectedly, Schweitzer created a dualism between the life-view of rational consciousness and the scientific understanding of the world. That claim is repeated here for reference: “We must make up our minds to leave our conceptions of life and of the world *independent* of each other, and see that a straightforward understanding between the two is reached” (emphasis added; *The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.276). We are now in a position to clarify what he meant.

This ‘straightforward understanding’ would become the very foundation for his new philosophy of civilization. To put it simply, Schweitzer needed at least one shared element between philosophy and science in order to break through the Cartesian wall that had separated these two ways of looking at reality. This opening would come through Schopenhauer’s will-to-live theory which existed in both domains (natural science and continental philosophy). But this one point of reconciliation does not produce a harmonization. It was merely one small area of overlap between otherwise exclusive disciplines. That was enough. Schweitzer wanted to keep the domains independent because both outlooks on reality have particular claims to legitimacy and particular roles to play in his philosophy of civilization. He therefore only linked them together at this one point of agreement.

But Schweitzer also felt he *needed* to keep natural science and philosophy independent of one another. The problem was that for Schweitzer the worldview of

natural science, by itself, was ethically nihilistic. World- and life-affirmation instead arose from the life-view of rational consciousness—the exclusive province of philosophy. Because of this, he had to keep *something* of that Cartesian consciousness alive in his new philosophy of civilization. To this end, Schweitzer would describe the will-to-live as the place in a living being where biological instinct, rational consciousness, and a mysterious third category, “the capacity for divination,” are fused together (The Ethics of Reverence for Life, p.228).²⁵ The way was now open to allow true life-affirmation to emerge out of the dualism between rational consciousness and the scientific worldview through that ‘mysterious’ third category—a subject that will be discussed at length in Chapter 4.

This is where his philosophy becomes very complicated indeed. In a very interesting twist from his assertion mentioned on the previous page about a necessary dualism between science and philosophy, the life-view of Ethical Mysticism is nevertheless presented as a mystical *monism* of the universal will-to-live. Now the question must be asked, how can Schweitzer explain this transition to monism? He explains it in this key paragraph from *The Philosophy of Civilization (Kulturphilosophie – Zweiter Teil: Kultur und Ethik, Vorrede, xiv)*:

The vital element for our life-view is not our [scientific] knowledge of the world, but on the contrary it is in the certainty of the predisposition that is given in our will-to-live. The infinite immortal spirit confronts us in Nature as a mysterious creative power. In our will-to-live it is experienced as world- and life-affirmation and as an ethical predisposition. Just as it is given in the certainty of our will-to-live, so too our relationship to the world can be likewise found if we seek to recognize this connection in rational thought: this is worldview. The

worldview [of Ethical Mysticism] comes out of the live-view, not the life-view [*Lebensanschauung*] out of the [scientific] worldview [*Weltanschauung*].²⁶

In Reverence for Life, Schweitzer is asking his readers to accept that the natural world is a mysterious manifestation of something closely resembling Schopenhauer's cosmological Will: "the ultimate insight is the recognition that the world, in how it appears to us, is in every respect a mysterious appearance of the universal will-to-live" (*Kulturphilosophie – Zweiter Teil: Kultur und Ethik, Vorrede*, xii). Nevertheless, the monistic life-view of the universal will-to-live never ignores the grisly reality of the natural world revealed by science; it only longs for meaning and purpose, and mysticism is born out of that longing. A dualism thus emerges between a person's logical mind and their sensitive heart—a distinction Schweitzer makes that was mentioned back in the first chapter. For him, the scientific worldview necessarily forms a dualism with the rational consciousness of the Cartesian tradition, while the resultant contemplative life-view [*Lebensanschauung*] of Ethical Mysticism is a monistic synthesis of the two.

These shifts between dualism and monism in the works of Schweitzer are admittedly confusing. This distinctive feature of Schweitzer's philosophy can only be introduced here; it will be revisited in the next two chapters as we continue with our investigation. The point being drawn out will then become more clear. But first, certain questions raised in this chapter have to be investigated further. It was pointed out that aspects of Schopenhauer's philosophy were unacceptable to Schweitzer, including his metaphysical excess and philosophy of resignation. This is why Nietzsche would become especially important for Schweitzer.

Chapter Three

Nietzsche and his Philosophy

Nietzsche was the first philosopher to wrestle with Darwin's theory of evolution. In trying to understand the ramifications of evolution on the Western worldview, he would become deeply concerned with what it meant for both ethics and the human place in the universe. Schweitzer would be drawn into these same problems and troubling questions through the writings of Nietzsche. Moreover, it was *Nietzsche* who provided him with the very answers he needed to create his Reverence for Life ethic. This is reflected in a letter dated February 19, 1964 (*Letters: 1905-1965*, p.336f.):

Nietzsche compelled me to keep being concerned with the problem of ethics and the emergence of an ethical civilization. Thus, by the fall of 1915, I developed the notion of an ethics of reverence for life. It dawned on me that European philosophy deals purely with half an ethic. All it demands is kind behavior and mercy toward other people. A complete ethics, however, requires kindness and mercy toward all life, for any living creature can suffer. Kindness knows no limits. It is boundless. Only a profound and complete ethics is able to create an ethical civilization. Through studying Nietzsche I came to realize that an ethics focusing solely on [hu]mankind is incomplete and cannot really be justified. Schopenhauer was right when he said, "Preaching ethics is easy, justifying ethics is hard." Only a complete ethics can be justified. There is no justifying the semi-ethics of European philosophy.

A central concern for Schweitzer was where any system of ethics could draw its ultimate authority. If ethics were merely the province of rational beings capable of language and social contracts, ethical duties and responsibilities would be limited to people alone; this is what Schweitzer called the 'semi-ethics' of European philosophy. Alternately, if ethics were somehow embedded in the natural order of the world, then they should be brought forth out of human nature automatically just by natural instinct alone; philosophers would not have appeal to enlightened self-interest to create ethical societies. Because of this, there was a great fear that ethics were only arbitrarily founded and socially convenient without any ultimate authority at all. Worse, the new Darwinian science seemed to complicate these questions immensely. Consider the following words from Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* (Hadot, p.198; emphasis added):

Do you wish to live in conformity with nature? O noble Stoics, what fraudulent words! Imagine a being that is like Nature is, prodigal without measure, indifferent without measure, without intentions nor consideration, *without pity or justice*, simultaneously fruitful and sterile and uncertain!

The history of evolution certainly did seem to be 'without pity or justice' for individual lifeforms that had to struggle for existence, devour one another, compete for opportunities to procreate, and yet eventually succumb to suffering and death. But not only for individuals, entire species have fought vainly against extinction before disappearing forever. This is precisely why Schweitzer felt he had to turn to a *monistic* and mystical interpretation of the universal will-to-live. Like Nietzsche, Schweitzer had come to believe evolutionary science was at 'face value' ethically nihilistic. This is

something he had learned from Nietzsche and why he would come to a conclusion very similar to his (*Kulturphilosophie – Zweiter Teil: Kultur und Ethik, Vorrede*, xii):

My solution to the problems is this—that we must resolve to forego in every way the optimistic-ethical interpretation of the natural world. If one takes the world as it is, then it is impossible to adjoin to it a sense in which the aims and goals of human enterprise, or humanity itself, can become meaningful. Neither world- and life-affirmation nor an ethic can be established out of what our [scientific] knowledge can reveal concerning the true state of the world. A purpose to evolution cannot be discovered for us, nor can a sense of importance be obtained for our actions.

This passage comes two pages before he offers the mystical and monistic life-view as a way to overcome the harsh reality of the scientific worldview. But how can he have it both ways? Schweitzer claims that it is improper to imagine a purpose to evolution or to claim that humans can find our ethical ideals mirrored in nature. Then two pages later, he upholds the centrality of the will-to-live as the foundation for a mystical worldview that sees reality as the result of an infinitely creative evolutionary Will. Is this a contradiction? No. The answer to how he can uphold both ways of looking at the world is something he learned from Nietzsche. This innovation, which will be discussed next, would become the means to bring together his new philosophy of civilization.

Nietzsche in his struggles with evolution and its implications for human society turned against the *strictly* scientific way of viewing the natural world. He instead interpreted the harsh realities of Nature the way artists interpret their subjects in order to

create meaning in their works of art. He spells this out in the preface to *The Gay Science* (cited from Hadot, p.285):

No, this bad taste, this will to [purely scientific] truth, to ‘truth at all costs,’ this adolescent madness in the love of truth—we’ve had enough of it: for that, we are too experienced, too serious, too joyous, too weather-beaten, too profound. We no longer believe that the truth is still the truth, if its veils [of mystery] are taken away from it—we’ve lived too long to believe that. [...] A hint to philosophers! We should have more respect for the modesty with which Nature hides behind enigmas and colorful uncertainties.

As will be revealed in detail later, Schweitzer would likewise seek to balance out the strict scientific worldview (with its mechanical necessity and ethical nihilism) against the human need to find meaning for our lives. He would similarly bring this about through an ‘artistic’ interpretation of reality which Schweitzer instead described as mysticism—specifically, Ethical Mysticism. Notwithstanding, despite the difference in terms, both sought to create a culturally defined truth that was informed by science but not limited to its reductionist and mechanistic logic.

Schweitzer believed that *only* a culturally defined truth could uphold a sense of purpose and meaning for life. Truth had to preserve the mystery of existence for mystical reflection—it had to be kept partially ‘veiled’ to use Nietzsche’s expression. But the question remains of exactly how he could claim such a culturally defined truth as being in any way legitimate? This would come about through what is called in philosophical parlance the ‘synthetic *a priori*’ which means (in this context) a combination of rational concepts into a new value system.

This is how Schweitzer could synthesize a dualistic life- and worldview (Cartesian consciousness and the scientific perspective on the empirical world) into a monistic interpretation of reality (an Ethical Mysticism based on the universal will-to-live). But to explain *exactly* how this is accomplished, Nietzsche's philosophy must be laid-out in his own terms. Even then, it must be noted that Schweitzer did not accept all of Nietzsche's views uncritically. This is particularly the case with Nietzsche's near complete rejection of scientific facts in his later works. In addition, and of particular relevance for this chapter, Schweitzer would differ with Nietzsche on how to interpret Darwin's views about the evolution of humankind's social instincts. He instead secured Schopenhauer's compassion in Darwinian science as another critical component in his foundation for the philosophy of civilization. Yet Schweitzer also needed to universalize his ethic of compassion by showing how it is grounded in both natural science and in Cartesian consciousness. This would come about in the New Rationalism project.

The following discussion will establish these relatively simple and straightforward conclusions, but it will necessarily have to proceed through a very technical engagement of philosophical questions using the vocabulary Nietzsche himself employed. Only in this way can Schweitzer's work be revealed to be a philosophy in same sense that the works of Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are considered true philosophy. Schweitzer's works have never been appreciated as philosophy in an academic sense—that is to say, as a comprehensive system of thought complete with a theory of knowledge and an ethical first principle. This has hampered the appreciation of his ethic in academia. To redress this problem, Schweitzer will be shown employing certain distinctive features of Nietzsche's work even though he himself usually expressed his philosophy in ordinary language aimed at a non-academic audience.

With this in mind, the discussion can now turn to the philosophy of Nietzsche. But as readers not familiar to his works will soon discover, some of Nietzsche's views come across as rather odd and, at times, even quite outlandish. But none of this detracts from the fact that Nietzsche is arguably *the* most influential philosopher of the modern era. Such well known figures as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984) base much of their own systems directly on the very same texts which will be outlined in this chapter. Even the field of environmental ethics has been deeply influenced by Nietzsche. It is now an accepted truth that empirical science is itself a culturally conditioned practice and not as neutral or objective as it is sometimes presented to be before the general public (Saarikoski, p.489). This claim originated with Nietzsche. These are also the same texts that would influence Schweitzer in his decision to likewise reject the unspoken nihilism of empirical science. And just as Nietzsche urged, Schweitzer's Ethical Mysticism would instead present an interpretation of natural science that upheld a life-affirming and mystical worldview.

Nietzsche and his Works

Friedrich Nietzsche died at only 56 years of age. Even more tragic, for the last eleven years of his life, Nietzsche was reduced to a vegetative state after a complete mental breakdown. The full expression and development of his thought was cut short. Though a prolific writer, his works cannot be considered complete—at least measured against what he could have written if he had lived as long and productively as Kant and Schopenhauer. What is worse, a particularly important work, *The Will to Power*, was never completed. What remains of it from his manuscripts (*Nachlaß*) consists entirely of fragments and preliminary drafts. Another complication is the inherent difficulty of discerning the intent of Nietzsche's thought because of his particular stylistic approach

and the divergent opinions in subsequent scholarship concerning the same. His essays often take the form of biting commentary on contemporary figures and he even created fictional narratives and poetry to present his philosophy. His writing style was also flamboyant, often exceedingly obscure, and at times deliberately obtuse. Nietzsche certainly did not lay out his ideas in a straight-forward and systematic manner like the way Kant had presented his arguments to the reader! Nietzsche is possibly the most difficult modern philosopher to understand because of these reasons.

But one thing *is* clear. Nietzsche saw himself as undertaking something entirely new in philosophy. The works are designed to reorient the reader's expectations and prepare the ground for a different understanding of humanity, culture, and the world to emerge. He began this project through an uncompromising deconstruction of every truth claim regardless if it was founded in science, philosophy or religion. What is of interest to us here is views on human rational consciousness. Nietzsche sought to undermine the Cartesian belief that the mind has special and privileged access to ultimate truth by turning to the new evolutionary science of Charles Darwin.

Through Darwin, Nietzsche would come to believe that the human mind was particularly ill-suited to perceive 'truth' for the reason that "consciousness is the last part of the organic [evolution] and consequently also the most unfinished and weakest part of it" (*The Gay Science* §11, p.158). The human species appeared very late in evolutionary history. Because of this, and rather than presenting the human mind as the crowning achievement of evolution, Nietzsche instead argued that the intellect is merely an accidental and ancillary offshoot in primate evolution, and that this actually reveals a deep defect in our species.

Nietzsche says animal consciousness evolved as a response to the “instinct of fear” which allowed all animals, in varying degrees, to live within a rational world of Cartesian consciousness (*The Gay Science* §355, p.301).²⁷ Only in this way can they make spatial inferences to track prey, to remember and anticipate danger from a sense of place, and to identify the ‘identical’ from similar sensory objects. Yet, as “the most endangered animal” (*The Gay Science* §354, p.298), Nietzsche writes the primordial humans had to evolve further than simple animal consciousness. We invented a conceptual world for our consciousness through language (*Human, all too Human* §11, p.56). Speech, he writes, “*developed only under the pressure of the need for communication ... consciousness is really only a net communication between human beings*” (*The Gay Science* §354, p.298). And so, “conscious thinking *takes the form of words, which is to say signs of communication ...* [this is] the way reason enters consciousness” (*The Gay Science* §354, p.299).

Now, the upshot of his argumentation is that because the reasoning powers of the human mind evolved in this way, and are nothing more than an offshoot from that ‘fear based’ conceptual world created through language (*Human, all too Human* §19, p.57), Nietzsche concluded that Cartesian logic and pure reason cannot claim to have access to a higher-world reality (*Twilight of the Idols*, ‘Reason’ in Philosophy, §5, p.482f.). Yet, human consciousness still exists, in part, within that conceptual world of language. For Nietzsche, this meant that the true essence of reality was hidden from perception by cognitive ‘veils’ of language and rationality that distort our worldview.²⁸

Nietzsche also believed that biological instincts within a body intervene to regulate the intellect to keep it from excess; the mind was necessarily correlated to the body through instincts and physiological drives such that what it perceives as truth is

actually “*the kind of error* without which a particular kind of living creature could not live” (*Writings from the Late Notebooks* 34[253], p.16). If this were not the case, Nietzsche claims, the human species would have “perished through its perverse judgments and waking phantasies, [with] its superficiality and credulity, in short its consciousness” (*The Gay Science* §11, p.158). What he is saying is that through natural selection the biological Will to Power (his term for Schopenhauer’s will-to-live) shaped the human intellect to function within the reality of the natural world and to see certain truths that were not necessarily true, but only evolutionarily useful in protecting the frightened human ‘herd’ animal.

What is worse, Nietzsche believed that when reason and abstract concepts were turned to the analysis of physical reality, “all that we [can] actually know about these laws of nature is what we ourselves bring to them – time and space, and therefore relationships of succession and number” (*Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*). He thus concluded that we live in a “trimmed and simplified world on which our *practical* instincts have worked” (*Writings from the Late Notebooks* 14[93] p.250). The human mind therefore has no access at all to actual *Truth*—which is to say, truth with a capital-T. The only reality is the biological Will to Power as an evolutionary force bringing forth and maintaining life under naturalistic necessity.

For this reason Nietzsche believed that “the total nature of the world is ... to all eternity chaos, not in the sense that necessity is lacking but in that order, structure, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other human aesthetic notions we may have are lacking” (*The Gay Science* §109, p.201). Put simply, he believed that the idea of shape and form for the objects of our world (say for example, an apple being ‘apple shaped’) is a necessary illusion of our perception but not a true objective reality. While hard to

fathom, it appears that he was arguing that the human mind superimposes perceptual expectations on sensory experience and that this allows us to see certain realities roughly correlated to evolutionary advantage, but not to see other possible aspects of our surroundings. To use the same example, he appears to be claiming that people evolved to notice edible fruit but not the complex biochemical gas exchanges that occur between the trees, soil, and biota (as some insects do) since that sensory information did not serve the hominids.

In his opinion, life was merely complex groupings of natural forces as cohesive organizations of a Will to Power nexus surviving in a complex world of other similarly constituted power relations. Nietzsche, in at least in these respects, is even more nihilistic and pessimistic than Schopenhauer about the arbitrariness of existence. Even the truth claims of science would not be spared his ruthless, unforgiving critiques.

The Later Period Writings of Nietzsche

Nietzsche wrote that “science also rests on faith; there is simply no science ‘without presuppositions’” (*The Gay Science* §344, p.281). Objective scientific facts divorced from human subjectivity were for Nietzsche impossible. Each hypothesis set forth by a researcher was for him merely a personal conviction that must gain acceptance from the scientific community to become an ‘objective’ theory (p.280). He believed that the initial conviction of the researcher relied upon a biasing of data resulting from the aforementioned evolutionary dynamics taking place in perception. Because of this he wrote that even “physics too is only an interpretation and arrangement of the world (according to ourselves! if I may say so) and *not* an explanation of the world” (*Beyond Good and Evil* §14, p.15). Babich (2004) says Nietzsche here argues these points to “hyperbolic extreme” because he fears science has become a new kind of authoritarianism

over the domain of truth (p.147). In this way it was becoming “the true legacy of Plato’s academy” with the elevation of math as the ‘sine qua non’ for knowledge—a new type of idealism created in abstracted concepts (p.141; cf. *Twilight of the Idols*, How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable, p.485).

For Nietzsche, science was merely as an expression of a “will to truth” against the uncertainties of life. He was concerned that science was rising to a type of mythology with its own idealized truths disguised as empirical facts (*The Gay Science* §344, p.281). This is why Nietzsche said it was “a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests” (p.283). He feared science was aiming for an objectivity that transcends all subjectivity—in effect, it was trying to dehumanize knowledge. It was for this very reason that Nietzsche felt that science represented a “will to death” since it denies the reality of human subjective experience and affirms a different world order other than the one actually experienced in the fullness of life (p.282).

Real truth however can never be inhuman because “delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge and sensation” (*The Gay Science* §107, p.163). Evolution created the human intellect to see the world through cognitive veils that distort our perception of reality; the falsification of the empirical world through culturally defined values and beliefs was therefore not improper, for too much “*honesty* would lead to nausea and suicide” (p.163). He says the lived experience of a person’s life is inherently ‘aesthetic’ through the cognitive rendering of sensation and the falsification of knowledge to suit the circumstances of our lives. Taking as his example the ancient Hellenic world that was filled with a rich and diverse pantheon of religious myths and speculative cosmology, he writes: “Those Greeks were superficial—*out of profundity!* ... Isn’t it precisely in this sense that we are [also] Greeks? Worshipers of forms, sounds,

and words? And precisely in this sense—artists?” (*The Gay Science*, Preface §4, cited from Hadot, p.285). Science must never become the dead ideal of the empiricists but rather it must stay true to what it actually is—a life-affirming ‘gay science’ that recognizes science is a human craft (*techne*) and an artful practice (*die Kunst der Auslegung*). His solution was simple. We must always interpret science through the lens of the artist because only in this way can we find real meaning for our lives.

Nevertheless, it is now clear that with the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), and the second edition of *The Gay Science* (1887), Nietzsche’s position on the body has shifted noticeably from his earlier works. He now warns that we “should not erroneously *objectify* ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ like the natural scientists do (and whoever else thinks naturalistically these days –) in accordance with the dominant mechanistic stupidity which would have the cause push and shove until it ‘effects’ something; we should use ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ only as pure *concepts*, which is to say as conventional fictions for the purpose of description and communication, *not* explanation” (*Beyond Good and Evil* §21, p.21). The truth is that “*we* are the ones who have invented causation, succession, for-each-other, relativity, compulsion, numbers, law, freedom, grounds and purpose; and if we project and inscribe this symbol world onto things as an ‘in itself’, then this is the way we have always done things, namely *mythologically*” (p.21).

With these words in particular, Nietzsche has set himself apart from earlier claims on the biological primacy of the body and positioned himself in direct opposition to the grounding of the sciences by Count Buffon, whether he was aware of him or not. This creates a problem for Nietzsche that is never fully resolved—that is, how does he account for the world of appearance epistemologically? He proclaimed the non-self world to be

Will to Power in its entirety, and the Will to Power has causality as its very nature. Yet his comments in *Beyond Good and Evil* mentioned above specifically locates the causality of phenomena residing within the self, a very Neo-Kantian position. In earlier works, such as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85) and the unpublished *Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (1873), Nietzsche has the mind itself an emergent property of physiological forces and shaped by evolution. His overall argumentation thus becomes circular without a clear grounding for the exact nature of the Will to Power as to whether it is firstly and ultimately cosmological, or if it is wholly psychological and Kantian. The latter is the conclusion of Martin Heidegger who interprets Nietzsche from the last period of his works and dismisses the physiological passages as merely metaphor for inner experience. Heidegger and some of those who followed in his tradition, including the strict social construction theorists, dismiss the truth claims of natural science based on Nietzsche's questionable and sometimes entirely indefensible conclusions about science—which it must be recalled were written at a time when he was becoming increasingly compromised by mental illness.

Rationality and Life-Affirmation

An important question is how can Nietzsche say that his view of life is better or truer than those promoted by religion. When discussing all such cultural truths (the synthetic *a priori*), including his own, Nietzsche concluded that they are “false judgments” (*Beyond Good and Evil* §4, p.63). Yet at the same time he maintains that these judgments “are the most indispensable for us, that without granting as true the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical, without a constant falsification of the world by means of numbers, [hu]mankind could not live” (p.63). This is the key to Nietzsche's philosophy

of perspective (i.e., ‘perspectivism’). While such truths (the synthetic *a priori*) are always false, this falsity is not necessarily a basis to dismiss them since these judgments may still be culturally advantageous, life-affirming, and even “species-cultivating” (p.63). Culture itself is an accumulation of such judgments (*Human, all too Human* §107, p.79):

Everything is necessity—thus says the new knowledge; and this knowledge itself is necessity. Everything is innocence: and knowledge is the path to insight into this innocence. If pleasure, egoism, vanity are *necessary* for the production of moral phenomena and their greatest flower, the sense for truth and justice in knowledge; if error and aberration of the imagination were the only means by which [hu]mankind was able gradually to raise itself to this degree of self-enlightenment and self-redemption—who could venture to denigrate those means?

The life and works of Nietzsche were aimed at this very project. He was attempting to save culture from ethical nihilism through his own synthesis of concepts into a new cultural narrative that was grounded in part by natural science but certainly not limited to it. He interpreted science from the role of a cultural critic and artist, and in this way he sought to direct the path of accumulated cultural resentment (*ressentiment*) into an ‘overcoming’ to create a future defined by the Supermen (*Übermenschen*, alternate translation: transcendent humanity). These would be the ones with the power to write a new history for humankind that was unfettered by the limitations of the culture they were born into. The *Übermenschen* have the power to start a new direction for civilization.

Nietzsche on Schopenhauer

Life is arbitrary and meaningless. Nietzsche had learned this from Schopenhauer. But in rejecting a Buddhist escape to Nirvana’s bliss, he can only present to the reader

one certain and nihilistic reality. There is only the Will to Power consisting of myriad natural evolutionary forces. The human intellect is an expression of this evolutionary biology but it cannot be said to be its pinnacle. Rather, he depicts humans as the most pathetic and misbegotten species to have ever accidentally emerged in nature, and he says our minds are the most flawed of any creature. For Nietzsche, the human intellect only exists to perceive error and create imagined realities for our species to survive as a marginally viable and frightened herd animal.

We, however, call these imagined realities and cultural truths our sense of humanity. And what we choose to value in art and culture can actually *become* truth—certainly not as necessary and unchanging scientific facts, but as culturally defined truth. We make it so by a collective cultural willing for it to be so. Our unique and misbegotten brains have to power to create these conditional truths: this is where life-affirmation rises like a glorious phoenix from the ashes of Nietzsche's scorched-earth approach to philosophy. He sought to promote a 'self-overcoming' of the evolutionary Will to Power to create that type of consciousness entirely free to choose its destiny and the *power* to make truth claims for a better society. These are the *Übermenschen*. And while Schweitzer does not join in Nietzsche by rejecting empirical science like he was, he did embrace this one central message about the possibility of creating new cultural truth out of naturalistic possibility.

Schweitzer on Nietzsche

Schweitzer read Nietzsche as recognizing, at first, "the ideal [of] a scientifically deepened Positivism" in finding life-affirmation based in scientific findings (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.243). But Nietzsche eventually turned against his own

views in his later works. Schweitzer writes about this in a particularly noteworthy passage from his book (p.246):

But Nietzsche cannot get rid of the antagonism between the spiritual [*Geistigen*] and the natural. Just in proportion as he emphasizes the natural does the spiritual [*Geistige*] shrink back. Gradually, under the visible influence of the mental disease which is threatening him, his ideal man becomes the “superman,” who asserts himself triumphantly against all fate, and seeks his own ends without consideration for the rest of [hu]mankind.

Schweitzer believed that Nietzsche rejected the natural world in his final works for a radical and individualistic life-affirmation for people alone—and only the *Übermenschen* at that. This change was not only because of the unresolved tension between the natural world and rational consciousness in his early writings, but also resulted from the worsening emotional and mental problems Nietzsche was experiencing. This, for Schweitzer, was a most tragic twist of fate. Nietzsche’s failing mental health had derailed the incredible potential breakthroughs he could have done for philosophy, particularly with respect for establishing a naturalistic basis for ethics.

Schweitzer determined that Nietzsche’s “original belief was that he could conceive the higher life-affirmation as the development to a higher spirituality of the will-to-live” through the Will to Power theory (p.246). But in the end Nietzsche would merely promote an ethic of “a more or less *meaningless* living out life to the full” (p.246; emphasis added). A very harsh assessment. The wonderful grand naturalism of Nietzsche’s philosophy would decay together with his great mind into a mere ecstatic self-affirmation and psychological self-overcoming—meaning found in madness. An

ethic for humanity as a whole and for the world in which we lived had slipped away from him at the end. Nevertheless, Schweitzer was still deeply inspired by Nietzsche's individualist focus as the starting point for ethics, as well as his naturalistic conception of the cosmological Will for its "*religious* reverence for life" (emphasis added; p.247n.8).

Schweitzer also agreed with Nietzsche that evolutionary science showed a dead-end for those trying to find meaning or purpose for humankind in natural history. Nature often seems capricious and unethical since what lives and who dies is often as arbitrary as it is a matter of naturalistic necessity. Worse, there is no ideal for human social values to be found in nature that cannot be countered by another interpretation promoting ruthlessness and selfish opportunism. For Schweitzer, there was nothing in nature to which an ethic can be anchored except for one line of thought he discovered in the works of Darwin.

Charles Darwin and Social Ethics

This chapter now moves on to a discussion about the second key inspiration Schweitzer would take from Nietzsche. Through him, Schweitzer became attuned to the problem of trying to reconcile philosophy and ethics with Darwin's evolutionary theory. Yet despite Nietzsche's influence, Schweitzer would come up with his own interpretation concerning the evolution of the human intellect, and he found a way to claim compassion as a scientific truth for his Reverence for Life ethic. But first we must outline what it was Charles Darwin actually wrote.

For Darwin, explaining the emergence of social instincts in the human species through natural selection was a problem. His conclusion was that incipient reasoning powers led some individuals of our hominid ancestors to learn that aid given to a fellow may be returned in exchange, whereupon this behavior, if reciprocated, would become

habituated within the immediate social clan. This inclination and habitual behavior yields a competitive advantage; these traits would be favored for generational inheritance to offspring. But—and *this is key*—these traits would only be passed down if a clan was in competition with other groups for the same subsistence resources. The cooperative clan would have to be able to supplant others through greater success in rearing offspring, the active exclusion of limited resources, and/or outright warfare that eliminates these other groups who did not possess such cooperative inclinations. Only in this way, Darwin concluded, could social instincts have become a defining characteristic of the emergent human species (*Descent of Man*, p.129-131).

Only later, Darwin wrote, that with the emergence of fully human beings, these social instincts could become strengthened through psychological pressures. The opinion of others in the clan could be brought to bear on the individual, and thereby further reinforced and codified into social norms and taboos. The point here is that social instincts are no longer being perpetuated by natural selection; the instincts have now become decoupled from direct evolutionary advantage for the individual. It is now a social selection within intra-clan dynamics that determines both survival and reproductive success for the individual within that community. Further habituation of these inherited propensities led to the psychological phenomenon of social instincts being felt and experienced as a duty to one's "inmost soul" and other "sacred" abstractions (p.131). The social instincts can now become self-actualizing rather than being imposed by others in the clan. This is how Darwin could explain the emergence of humankind's peculiar preoccupation with a seeming 'anti-natural' compassion for the infirm and aged in our populations, and how martial monogamy became a social ideal (p.131-145). Nevertheless, he warned, that even though it is *certain* that such civilized behavior as

caring for the imbecile, the sickly, the maimed, and the development of vaccines and medicines to help those of weak constitution had all been “highly injurious to the race of man,” this inherited sympathy still represented “the noblest part of our nature” (p.134).²⁹

In his reading of Darwin, Schweitzer ascribed to a very atomistic interpretation of evolution. Animal life only survives at the death of another, and plants draw their sustenance from the decaying biomass of all that carnage from those who have since succumbed to their earthly graves. Indeed, “The world is a ghastly drama of the will-to-live divided against itself” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.312). Nature is like a pointillism painting marked out in individual instances of suffering and death. Patterns of beauty and harmony only emerge when one steps back and observes from a distance. But Schweitzer does not give himself permission to do this. “The beauty of nature is darkened by the suffering [we] discover everywhere within it” (p.281). He looks unflinchingly at the reality of predation, and finds that death and procreation are the twinned teleologies of life when considered through a strictly atomistic Darwinian perspective. Schweitzer therefore claimed only the naturalistic will-to-live and Darwinian sympathy as the foundation for his philosophy, not all of capricious nature.

Schweitzer’s reading of Darwin was informed by the evolutionary views of both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Schopenhauer had drawn support from Rousseau to show that the true basis for ethics is a type of compassion that draws humans into social groups, and that this is the natural foundation of society. Nietzsche, however, embraced the worldview of Thomas Hobbes that the first societies were drawn together by fear and selfish advantage. For Nietzsche it was the ruthless Will to Power which overcame the ‘nasty, brutish and short’ existence of early humans—not Rousseau’s *pitié* (*The Will to Power* §1017, p.525). Nietzsche believed that human existence had become decoupled

from nature; society became self-referential, and this for him was unnatural and therefore improper. Schweitzer on the other hand, like Darwin, finds humankind's true humanity in this curious social instinct that was equally natural as it was a product of rational consciousness. The fact that ethical sympathy was decoupled from natural selection yet still naturalistic made it exactly what he was looking for to secure his philosophy of civilization.

Schweitzer would therefore write of Darwin's *Descent of Man* that "we possess devotion to others as descendents of herds which maintained themselves in the struggle for existence while others succumbed, because the social impulses were developed in them the most strongly and the most universally" (p.224).³⁰ Humans possess a natural instinct to form social groups that served an evolutionary advantage. Yet this natural inclination is not self-actualizing in our species under natural laws alone, but requires rational thought to manifest itself fully. Through Darwin, Schweitzer asserts that "altruism therefore is now regarded as natural and at the same time as something which has come into existence though [rational] reflection" (p.255). This sentence is key. Schweitzer saw the very task of philosophy as taking the altruistic potential within this natural instinct and "bring this to completion" as a social reality (p.255).

Schweitzer would try to do this by actualizing Darwin's social instinct through the life-view of rational consciousness. World- and life-affirmation would come from a naturalistic truth supporting an elemental morality that existed in both the domains of philosophy and evolutionary science: compassion. But this alone would be an incomplete ethic. Schweitzer still needed to provide additional ethical orientation to make compassion into viable social ethic. Yet because Darwin's evolutionary social instincts became a rational thought process for the evolving hominids, Schweitzer now had a

theoretical basis to extend ethical compassion beyond the immediate family to all of humanity, and even for the natural world too, through conscious reflection. Schweitzer believed the circle of ethical consideration *must* be widened to include all life, not just for the sake of those non-human lives, but in order to firmly secure it in a person's ethical character—a lesson he took from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Schweitzer in many ways anticipated the American wildlife ecologist and environmental ethicist Aldo Leopold who also wrote that extending ethics to animals, plants and the land too was also an evolutionary possibility for our species.³¹

For these reasons, Reverence for Life would be claimed by Schweitzer to be simultaneously a rational, natural, and even a universal ethic. It would also be described as an absolute and spiritual ethic. Yet because the natural world is capricious and cannot serve as mirror for our social ideals, Schweitzer only takes Darwin's social instincts and, as discussed in the last chapter, Schopenhauer's will-to-live theory to secure an elemental ethic that was compatible with science. He then turned back to Cartesian consciousness to create a mystical, monistic, and life-affirming interpretation of the natural world. But this life-view never subsumes the scientific worldview. The scientific worldview is the dominant reality and the idea of a universal will-to-live is always thought of with a certain air of unreality about it—such beliefs are always deemed to be merely possibilities and mysteries, never scientific facts (p.308).³² To use Nietzsche's metaphor here, Reverence for Life views nature with her *veils of mystery* still intact. Yet Schweitzer also feared allowing rational thought to go too far in speculative excess. The will-to-live of rational consciousness is therefore kept elemental and only in its extended life-view does it become a type of mysticism. This allowed the dualism of the head and heart (which is to say, scientific knowing versus the mystical wanting in lived experience) to coexist in a

delicate harmony with the monistic life-view of rational consciousness. The deeper significance of this belief system will have to be explained in the next chapter.

Conclusions

To recap the findings of this chapter, and returning for the moment to Schweitzer's own words that began this discussion, he had stated outright that it was thoughts on Nietzsche that set the stage for that day in 1915 when the Reverence for Life ethic emerged as the answer for the crisis in civilization. The preceding discussion on Nietzsche's philosophy with its wrestling with evolutionary naturalism and the resulting implications for ethics allows us to say specifically what it was that Schweitzer would take and reject from Nietzsche.

The first is the idea that there are two kinds of truth: one scientific and one cultural. This would be retained in Schweitzer's philosophy. Nevertheless, Schweitzer never rejects scientific facts as being false or in any way biased the way Nietzsche did. For Schweitzer, culturally meaningful truths must always be correlated to the best available science. But that said, society still needed a cosmology that upheld the value and special dignity of life—all life, human and nonhuman alike—that natural science seemingly could not do by itself. This is why Schweitzer offers a mystical and poetic interpretation of Schopenhauer's universal will-to-live theory for his own Reverence for Life ethic, as was described at the end of Chapter 2.

But Schweitzer still needed two more things to make this cosmology complete. Somehow he had to substantiate the claim that compassion was both a scientific fact and something dependent upon rational consciousness. This would come out from his reading of Charles Darwin. Yet he would state a different conclusion than the one Nietzsche made concerning the naturalness of compassion—a position that brought him back to

Schopenhauer and his elemental morality of *pitié*. Nevertheless, for Schweitzer this morality would not be grounded in Buddhist metaphysics as it was for Schopenhauer, but in Darwin's own views that held that social instincts were both evolutionarily naturalistic and at the same time still required rational reflection for their actualization. This then was the second component he needed for his ethic.

But Schweitzer still needed one more thing to establish a complete foundation for his philosophy of civilization. He needed a different starting place for philosophy than the one created by Descartes—which in philosophical parlance is referred to as an 'ontological' first principle for rational consciousness. This would become the New Rationalism, a project that was inspired in large part from Nietzsche's own views on philosophy, culture, and naturalistic possibility. From a purely philosophical point of view, this is perhaps the most innovative aspect of Schweitzer's entire corpus of work, and what sets him out as a truly original philosopher in his own right.

Chapter Four

The New Rationalism

To briefly revisit the findings of the last two chapters, Schweitzer saw triumphs and flaws in both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. In each philosopher he found something to secure his Reverence for Life ethic. But not only that, Schweitzer saw a certain complementarity between their very different philosophical systems. To put it simply, Schweitzer believed both *nearly* had it right, but each had fallen victim to particular errors. He spells-out his assessment on page 248 of *The Philosophy of Civilization*:

Nietzsche and Schopenhauer ... are the only thinkers in this continent who philosophize in elemental fashion about the will-to-live, [yet make the mistake to] venture to follow the paths of one-sidedness. Each completing the other, they pronounce sentence on ethics of European philosophy by bringing into daylight again the elemental ethical thoughts contained in life-negation [with Schopenhauer] as in life-affirmation [with Nietzsche], thoughts which philosophy was keeping buried. Arriving as they do at the [error of the] non-ethical by thinking out to a conclusion [in one-sidedness], one in life-negation, the other in life-affirmation, they corroborate together the statement that the ethical consists neither of life-negation nor life-affirmation, but in a mysterious combination of the two.

This was Schweitzer's project. He would seek out that 'mysterious combination' of the two lines of thought with his Reverence for Life ethic. From Nietzsche he would take a natural life-affirmation that honours the person in the world as a true personality,

but not abandon social ethics as he did. To do this, Schweitzer would likewise maintain the special place of cultural truths over the nihilistic facts of natural science. Yet he also believed philosophy must be informed and correlated, always, to science. Schweitzer would therefore seek out those elemental scientific truths that would keep the life-view of Reverence for Life from speculative excess—specifically, these were the will-to-live theory and Darwinian social instincts. Schweitzer also agreed with Nietzsche that the human species could find another path different than the one exemplified by the chaotic struggle within natural world order. Humanity is both of nature and beyond it: we have the power to choose.

But Schweitzer also saw Schopenhauer's life-negation as valuable. It was a way to have a higher calling beyond the naturalistic instinct of self-preservation. A balanced view on life-negation and life-affirmation would become a vital part of his Ethical Mysticism. For Schweitzer, altruism emerges from a deep meditation on the personal will-to-live that brings forth a mystical realization and an ethical impulse to help other life achieve its highest possible development, even sometimes through self-sacrifice. This is a most curious transformation from Nietzsche's egotism. Even Schweitzer admits that in a sense, "it is not through kindness to others that I am gentle, peaceable, forbearing, and friendly, but because by such behaviour I prove my own profoundest self-realization to be true" concerning the will-to-live (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.315). In precisely this way, Schweitzer sought to combine Nietzsche's deepened egotism with Schopenhauer's image of the self as the "mirror of the world" (*The World as Will and Representation*, Volume II, p.380). In effect, Ethical Mysticism takes the impulse toward selfishness and aims it outwards so that it is vicariously fulfilled through others. It thus becomes a type of virtue ethics—a subject to be addressed at the conclusion of this chapter.

How he would achieve this great cosmological synthesis comes, somewhat expectedly, through a particular kind of philosophy called hermeneutics. This branch of philosophy examines the social person in society. Originally hermeneutics only dealt with the problem of interpreting the ancient text of extinct cultures, but has since grown to become a philosophy of contemporary cultures too. This is what Schweitzer did with his own hermeneutics. As will be shown here in this chapter, he began with a hermeneutical framework to address the problem of trying to come to an understanding of the historical Jesus in the New Testament scriptures, and then later he adapted this same hermeneutic philosophy for understanding people across contemporary world cultures and for linking all life in the biosphere in a common ‘essential’ way (ontology). Schweitzer did this by creating a new first principle for consciousness that was different than the one developed by Descartes. Schweitzer’s project, which he called the New Rationalism, was deeply informed by Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the universal Will.

As a trained natural scientist (a medical doctor) Schweitzer had no use at all for Schopenhauer’s Platonic Universals. *But* the doctrine of the Will as a common link between individual will-to-live lifeforms was accepted by him. This was because using the will-to-live as a way to explain the physiological development of all life (etiology) is a philosophical claim in harmony with natural science. For this reason Schweitzer can assert that “the will-to-live is everywhere present, even as in me” (The Ethics of Reverence for Life, p.230). Nevertheless, while empirical science can investigate the physical facts of life, “like all science ... it can lead me only to the mystery of life, which is essentially in me, however near or far away it may be observed” (p.230). The deeper significance of this statement will be explored in a moment. But in general, what he is saying is that natural science can lead us to the recognition that the same physiological

processes take place in all life, and that this biology is essentially all the same no matter the species. Yet the ‘mystery of being’ cannot be known this way—or for that matter, can it ever be the subject of rational knowledge. This mystery had to be experienced through a different way of knowing, a *pre*-rational kind of knowing, an intuitive pure knowing—by way of something Kant called the “sacred shudder” [*Schauer*] felt in the presence of the power of nature (Hadot, p.270). In ordinary language, this is called the sublime.

Schopenhauer had written that all the individual wills-to-live are united through the unitary cosmological Will. He also said that the feeling of the sublime brings this connection with other life to our consciousness awareness; this is the ‘intuitive pure knowing’ mentioned back on pages 53 and 54. For Schweitzer, compassion over another’s suffering was *one* such intuitive path to this experience; witnessing another sentient being in deep pain brings about a ‘sacred shudder’ called empathy. Likewise, people who have been deeply wounded (physically or spiritually) can also become newly sensitive to pain in others; they are sometimes so moved so as to be very compassionate people as a result. His particular expression that there exists a ‘brotherhood of those who bear the mark of pain’ is about the transformed and sublime character of such persons. In this way the experience of compassion creates (or rather reveals) an *essential* bond between different people, drawing them back to their simple and common humanity. Compassion restores humanity back into proper relation with itself, and potentially it can also bring humankind into ethical harmony with the whole natural world too.

But more importantly, at least to this particular investigation on philosophical questions, compassion was the means by which Schweitzer saw a pathway opened up to the inner ‘essence’ of another life. The question for us here is how does he justify this claim in academic terms? This is a particularly thorny question since an essence in this

context is a reference to what is called the ‘thing itself’ (*Ding an sich*) in philosophy, which Kant had declared was absolutely unknowable. Schweitzer’s solution to this age-old problem in philosophy is breathtakingly innovative. He would do it through a hermeneutical analysis of existence.

But first, by way of introduction to this new way of thinking about the nature of existence, it needs to be kept in mind that Schopenhauer’s universal Will is *unitary*, which means that it is always undivided even though it is present in separate wills-to-live; different life was still ‘one being’ at a deeper metaphysical level. While the will-to-live theory was seen by Schweitzer as a way of describing empirical physics, the unitary cosmological Will (i.e., the *universal* will-to-live) as a common essence of life was in large part, but not exclusively, metaphysical. Schweitzer accepted Schopenhauer’s theory of the unitary Will as something substantiated through Nietzsche’s concept of a life-affirming cultural truth (the synthetic *a priori*) as discussed in the last chapter. Also, as mentioned at the end of Chapter 2, this would become the basis for a monistic life-view in Ethical Mysticism.

The upshot of having the Will unitary was that Schweitzer could claim historical distance would not block essential humanity from experiencing itself: an intuitive connection could be created between discrete manifestations of the will-to-live even across the horizon of time. This connection is made in his hermeneutic that he reveals in the last chapter of his famous study on the historical Jesus. To describe it, however, it will be necessary to discuss the particular context in which he presented it. This means going into a detailed recounting of his discussion on the historical Jesus in the New Testament scriptures. Only then can Schweitzer’s hermeneutical New Rationalism be brought out in its own context immediately afterwards. One thing to be attentive for in

the following exposition of Schweitzer's scholarly research is the profound influence of Schopenhauer even here when discussing Christianity.

The Hermeneutical Analysis of Being

“Those who are fond of talking about negative theology can find their account here” (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p.478). Schweitzer in the final chapter of his critical study on New Testament scholarship began to write about the historical Jesus in terms of negative theology. This move struck many as unexpected since the preceding analysis had been aimed at revealing how prior scholarship had romanticized the life and theology of the historical Jesus to suit the expectations of each researcher. Schweitzer claimed that because Jesus does not greet us as an author, there is an impenetrable barrier separating the present day scholar from being able to know this person using the tools of historical science. While much could be learned about late Jewish eschatological thought, the researcher simply cannot fully place him- or herself in the mental worldview of this enigmatic figure. Schweitzer would instead seek another means not reliant on rational analysis and historical science. This would be by way of negative theology.

But first, before proceeding further I will need to clarify what is meant by negative (apophatic) theology. The apophatic has a range of possible meanings. It can signify a corrective used to transcend the limitations of positive statements concerning the divine or the deity—it is a way to show deference to the ineffability of God. And so, saying that God is ‘love’ would not be appropriate for the divine essence lies beyond even this declarative statement derived from human relational experience. The apophatic thus attempts greater inclusivity in finding words and expression appropriate to the divine as well as being a way to give a methodological ‘nod’ to the impossibility of task. The apophatic thereby safeguards the humility of the exegete.

Yet the apophatic can also mean something fundamentally more than *just* an exegetical methodology. Particularly in the Orthodox East, it is stressed that it is not right to say that God is unknowable—rather, He is “beyond the unknowable” (*hyperagnostos*) to use the phrase employed by pseudo-Dionysius, Maximos Confessor and Gregory Palamas. The point to be taken here is *not* that God is simply something that can ever be fully captured in language, but rather that the essence (*ousia*) of the Godhead is in no way similar to that of human thought. God is not *Geist* and neither is He the God of Descartes who is revealed to the rational mind as His corresponding Image. For Orthodoxy, God is in no way similar (*homoousios*) to ordinary human beings. The distance between Creator and creature is only bridged through Jesus (*Theandros*), not through the Kantian intellect. But this is another subject matter altogether.

It is mentioned here to underscore the fact that Schweitzer’s use of negative theology does not match with either these two standard conceptions of the apophatic. It is something else and something new. Schweitzer would attempt a very distinctive and innovative approach to redressing the problem of understanding historical texts. But Schweitzer was not naïve here. He knew it was not possible to enter the mental worldview of historical person from two thousand years ago. Jesus belonged to a culture entirely different than the one of Schweitzer’s own time, which itself was a particular and culturally defined worldview that shaped his own consciousness. His solution to bridge the distance between the different historical and cultural worldviews was through Schopenhauer’s unitary Will.

Schweitzer would write that “each world-view comprises elements determined by its own time and elements undetermined by time” (p.481). What he is saying is that each configuration of a will-to-live was particular to the individual; the resulting worldview of

that person's will-to-live was defined by its culture and historical time period. Notwithstanding, because all wills-to-live are connected by Schopenhauer's unitary Will, Schweitzer believed that no will-to-live is entirely alien to one's own, "for the same [W]ill, manifested in however varying circumstances, always creates world-views which comply and coincide with its own *essential* nature" (emphasis added; p.481). He is saying here that Schopenhauer's unitary Will constitutes a common essence for all life.

Because of this, Schweitzer believed that a person of today can still relate to the personal strivings of Jesus on a deeper intuitive level such that, "He can be known without much being known about him, and the eschatological element in his teaching can be grasped, even if the details are not always understood" (p.480). Put simply, people are people—that essential humanity will always be relatable through an immediate sympathy and compassion even if this pre-rational sympathetic understanding is not accompanied by a full intellectual explanation of their historical circumstances. Accordingly, he writes, "to know Jesus and to understand him requires no scholarly initiation" (p.480). How this is possible comes from a particular (ontological) claim established in his New Rationalism project.

The New Rationalism

Schweitzer did not simply borrow from Schopenhauer. He sought to advance his philosophy in a new way through what he called the New Rationalism. Schweitzer would begin with a new understanding of consciousness born from a different starting place than the one established by Descartes. He actually attacks Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* calling it "the stupidest primary assumption in all of philosophy!" (The Ethics of Reverence for Life, p.228). Further saying, "he built an artificial structure by presuming a person knows nothing [initially] and doubts all, whether outside himself or within" (p.228). For

Schweitzer, consciousness is not a blank slate of pure *a priori* time or a simple essence as Kant held. Instead Schweitzer asserts that, “When I seek the first fact of consciousness, it is not to know that I think, but to get a hold of myself ... [whereupon I discover] the simple fact of consciousness is this, *I will to live*” (his emphasis; p.227).

This is a deceptively simple phrase. It is not a statement about incipient desire and orientation in a culturally conditioned worldview. It is much more than *just* that. The first principle of Schweitzer’s ontology is in fact a dialectical synthesis of the Cartesian self-aware ego with Schopenhauer’s cosmological will-to-live: it is an ‘I + will-to-live’ formula that explains consciousness. He is describing what Heidegger called the ‘there-beingness’ [*Dasein*] of life. Yet, in contrast to him, Schweitzer presents the inner essence of each person as a unique and complicated nexus consisting of biological factors, cultural historicity and a single thin thread of the unitary Will that united all life *as life*. This is how Schweitzer sought to bridge the gap between cosmology and consciousness. This is the New Rationalism.

As just mentioned, Schweitzer presents something that resembles Heidegger’s *Dasein*. In both cases, consciousness is a projection emerging from historically conditioned origins. The key difference is that Schweitzer does not close off the *Dasein*’s origin entirely, but leaves that one thin thread of the cosmological Will to trace our way back to common essential humanity through a pre-rational intuition. Heidegger’s *Being and Time* was published in 1927, while Schweitzer was writing about an ontological being that existed as a culturally conditioned projection of its own historicity back in 1905—albeit in a book about the New Testament. His definitive ‘I + will-to-live’ formulation for this being in time was first set forth in 1923 and then again in 1936 with an expanded discussion. There is no evidence that the two authors ever read each other’s

works which is itself a bit of a mystery since Schweitzer did claim that he kept abreast of all the significant academic developments taking place in Europe even while away in a remote African jungle. Nevertheless, without clear evidence to the contrary their hermeneutic systems should be considered to have been developed independently.

Now, returning to the main subject, for Schweitzer the being that emerges in the recursive self-awareness at heart of consciousness is the ‘I + will-to-live’ nexus: a biologically, culturally and historically conditioned worldview. In *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* he wrote that “a world-view consists of a [W]ill penetrating and shaping the body of available contemporary thought-forms [of language and culture]” and thereby an individual being becomes implicated and self-identifying with historically and culturally determined factors (p.481). Every worldview includes both the variable elements arising from its historicity and biology in addition to the permanent, unchanging constant of the unitary universal Will. In direct opposition to his famous cousin, the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Schweitzer held that historicity does not entirely subsume essence.³³ Essential humanity remains even if existence presupposes a particular and historically conditioned existence as the object of inner sense—that is, the “*I will to live*” first fact of consciousness. The common thread uniting all essences is the unitary cosmological Will. It always remains accessible to the experiencing subject, not by the cognitive and rational mind, but through a pre-rational intuition such as the sublime of compassion.

The Hermeneutical Horizon

A certain passing resemblance exists between Schweitzer and the hermeneutics of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834). But Schweitzer does not claim to be able to know an author better than he knows himself. Yet he still relies on a certain type

of psychological transference for understanding a historical figure. Nevertheless, Schweitzer's hermeneutics culminate in an apophatic horizon over which the rational mind cannot follow. Only the pre-rational Will remains to fathom the dark abyss, intuiting something of the self-same human presence behind the textual words. His aim is that, as he writes in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, "once accord has been reached between will [of self] and will [of the other], the essence of the world-view is immediately made apparent" (p.484). But no conceptual knowledge comes of this. There is no interpretive claim to be made. There is no objective consequence for the researcher in the interpretative project of bringing ancient texts to a contemporary worldview—at least nothing directly. Schweitzer presents no technique at all for the exegete. This is a hermeneutic aimed at *mystagogy* (a personal initiation into a mystery). And so he ends his book with a most unusual paragraph (p.487, emphasis added):

He [Jesus] comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those men who did not know who he was. He says the same words, 'Follow me!'; and sets us to those tasks which he must fulfill in our time. He commands. And to those who hearken to him, whether wise or unwise, *he will reveal himself* in the peace, the labours, the conflicts and the sufferings that they may experience in his fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery they will learn who he is ...

This is exactly what Schweitzer did when he undertook his humanitarian mission in Africa—he was following after the historical Jesus in order to try to understand him in ways historical scholarship could not. He was seeking to experience a union with Jesus through service to the least of his brethren. While presented in the context of hermeneutics, his goal is not an imagined psychological transference to give the

researcher an ability to know an author better than he knows himself. Nor does it appear that Schweitzer seeks divine illumination in order to give humanity words encapsulating a spiritual knowledge gained through direct mystical experience. The “capacity for divination” he wrote about in his 1936 article entitled *The Ethics of Reverence for Life* seems to be just limited to revealing an *ethical* essentialism through the sublime of compassion. This is Ethical Mysticism.

Religion and Elemental Morality

Schweitzer’s Jesus could perform no miracles. In fact, Schweitzer goes on to write, “The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publically at the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the kingdom of God, who founded the kingdom of heaven upon earth, and dies to give his work its final consecration, never existed” (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p.478). Schweitzer’s Jesus was only a deeply thoughtful and ethical thinker who had seen clearly where the path of love must lead: it was to allow himself to be broken on ‘the wheel of history’ to fulfill what he thought was required by Jewish eschatological belief to bring about the Messianic Kingdom, and to serve as the very atonement for the rest of the humankind to save them from the tribulation (*The Psychiatric Study of Jesus*, p.52).³⁴ As mistaken as the historical Jesus was about his ability to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth, his actions reveal a complete surrender of personal will to live-out an ethic of love born of the same pre-rational sublime of compassion as the one at the heart of Reverence for Life.

What Schweitzer says this means for Christianity today is this: “The truth is that he [Jesus] cannot be an authority for us at the level of understanding, but only at the level of the *will*. His role can only be that of a powerful influence which elicits hopes and longings inherent in us and inspires us to heights and to a clarity we would not achieve if

dependent on our own devices and without the influence of his personality” (emphasis added; *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p.482). It is important to note that there are no supernatural metaphysics in this statement, only something akin to Schopenhauer’s understanding of grace (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.290). This was Schweitzer’s prescription for liberalizing religion. But his understanding of Christianity was *not* the grounding for his Reverence for Life ethic—instead, it was the other way around.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, elemental morality was his solution for uniting the Reverence for Life philosophy with an actively engaged ethic (Ethical Mysticism). The key passage from *The Philosophy of Civilization* is as follows (p.240):

Nor does [Schopenhauer] need ... to sever all connection with Jesus and religious ethics. He can appeal as often as he likes to the fact that his philosophy only establishes what has always been accepted by the piety of Christianity and of the [Hindu] Indians as the essential element of the moral ... Elemental morality now once more obtains its right place in a thinking connection to the universe.

For Schweitzer the elemental morality for both philosophy and religion is a self-sacrificial love aimed at promoting other life through compassion. But here it must be kept in mind a very unusual aspect of the German language and the German way of looking at the world. The words for intellectual [*Geistig*] and spiritual [*Geistig*] are the same. In English, however, they are very different and sometimes even diametrically opposed concepts. Yet in German the rational mind is synonymous with a person’s very soul. This fact explains much of German intellectual history including, for example, Hegel’s philosophy of *Geist*. For this reason, great care is required when trying to

determine when Schweitzer is referring to the academic intellectual [*Geistig*] or the religious spiritual [*Geistig*] in *The Philosophy of Civilization*.

Take for example a famous sentence from the English translation of this book: “There must come about a spiritualizing [*Vergeistigung*] of the masses” (p.336). Also, this sentence: “The only thing that can help us is that we renounce the power which is given us over one another. But that is an act of spirituality [*Geistigkeit*]” (p.337). In both cases the italicised terms contain the same root, *Geist*. Because of this, the English translation here is very misleading. A better turn of phrase would be ‘an intellectual awakening’ in both cases because of the specific contexts in which he uses the terms. He is calling for people to begin thinking about the elemental questions of life and about the state of civilization in which they find themselves. He says as much in the very next sentence in the first example: “The mass of individuals must begin to reflect about their lives, about what they want to secure for their lives in the struggle for existence, about what makes their circumstances difficult, and what they deny themselves” (p.336). The same context is present in the other case as well.

And so, to put it in its most simple and clearest terms, a religion without any divinity is merely an intellectualized form of mysticism—and for Schweitzer specifically, an Ethical Mysticism. The way he himself describes it is this way: “The way to true mysticism leads up through *rational thought* to [a] deep experience of the world and our will-to-live” (emphasis added; p.81). By rational thought Schweitzer means philosophy. He is not preaching Christianity in *The Philosophy of Civilization*, only a mystical appreciation of the natural world that comes by way of his unique synthesis of the philosophical systems of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Jesus was an ethical teacher, yes.

But for Schweitzer he was no God—and this is why some Christians ungraciously called him an Antichrist (Melamed and Melamed 2003, p.181).

Schweitzer's metaphysics do not look past empirical reality. Schweitzer was a natural scientist. For him the elemental nature philosophy of the will-to-live and the cosmological causality of the universal Will were truths in harmony with science and, at the same time, were also revealed intuitively within rational consciousness. The 'I + will-to-live' nexus becomes a type of naturalism that yields an ethical worldview while upholding human dignity and moral agency. The hermeneutic that appears at the conclusion to *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* was not aimed at illuminating ancient texts but rather revealing the essence of humanity. It was one part of his larger Reverence for Life project—a project which would also include a virtue ethic.

A Virtue Ethic

For Schweitzer, the sublime of suffering – the cringe at seeing someone in terrible pain, the profound angst of a parent's worry, the inconsolable loss in grieving – reveals that there truly is a pre-rational bond uniting the self and the other. Pain diminishes the essence of existence and love nurtures its development. But not only that, Schweitzer also saw here a principle of rational pleasure (*eudaimonia*) not based on calculations between various self-sought desires, but aimed at promoting the physical, emotional and spiritual development of the ones we love. Moreover, because this concept of pain and pleasure has a greater range and is not limited to the Kantian intellect, Schweitzer's virtue ethic can be inclusive of promoting the wellbeing of all life—not just family and friends, but extended to all of humanity and even the natural world too.

Schweitzer would describe this virtue ethic in the last written piece about the philosophical grounding for Reverence for Life. As previously mentioned, he began with

a mediation that leads to the discovery that “we find the simple fact of consciousness is this, *I will to live*” (The Ethics of Reverence for Life, p.227). We value our own existence and want to further our own desires in life. Schweitzer calls this recognition “the first spiritual act” (p.229). But he says we must embrace the nihilistic fact that, as mortal beings, we will die someday. A truly rational being must come to accept that his or her life is dependent upon cosmological circumstances and biological facts beyond their control—this leads to the “second spiritual act” of resignation (p.229).

The person now stands in a precarious place. An antagonistic tension exists between the self-aware person and the positivistic material cosmos that will cause them to age and die someday. This is the dualism of Reverence for Life. Only two choices are presented to such a person: a retreat into an unthinking life of self-seeking egotism or to meditate further to discover that, during the time we possess, people possess a unique spiritual freedom that arises from being recursively aware of our motivations and actions. The pre-rational will-to-live can then overcome the intellect which has become resigned to the fact that immortality is denied to us. At this moment we discover that “there is within each of us a modulation, an inner exaltation, which lifts above the buffetings with which [cosmological] events assail us” (p.229). The will-to-live thereby allows us to “triumph ... over whatever happens to us” despite naturalistic necessity (p.229).

The exact inner ontological alchemy here is not spelled out by Schweitzer. He only says that such a person has “passed beyond” mere resignation and now discovers a new state of being wherein “resignation to the will-to-live leads directly to this first virtue: sincerity” (p.230). A new disposition has arisen. The person now becomes resolved to live *sincerely* and honor their own will-to-live through the only avenue left open to them. They must devote their elective freedoms to cherishing other lives because

“if I am thinking [and sincere] being, I must regard this other life than my own with equal reverence. For I shall know that it longs for fullness and development as deeply as I do myself” (p.230).³⁵ The dualism has now given way to a monism of the universal will-to-live to become an Ethical Mysticism.

These words recall those of Schopenhauer who identified compassion as a love extending to the other when the reality of ‘I and not-I’ disappears. This is Schweitzer’s opening to a reverence for *all* life. But Schweitzer cannot use Buddhist metaphysics or theology to establish his case. It instead comes through the New Rationalism that engages Descartes’ first principle from a hermeneutical perspective—and it all depends upon a claim of a common essence to all life.

A New Problem?

The basis for Schweitzer’s essentialist understanding of human nature was born of Schopenhauer who had turned to the study of causality in time (etiology) as a way to mitigate subjectivity and to demonstrate that causality actually does exist outside the perceiving self. But when it came to the study of living beings, Schopenhauer had to establish the will-to-live in the subjective self first and then infer its existence in outer phenomena: “the direct knowledge of which lies nearest to us ... leads to the indirect knowledge of all the others” (*WWR-2* §22, p.111). This is perhaps where Schopenhauer’s philosophy stands on its weakest point. He can only argue as follows: “Knowledge of the identical in different phenomena and of the different in similar phenomena is, as Plato so often remarks, the condition of philosophy. But hitherto the identity of the inner essence of any striving and operating force in nature with the will [in the inner self] has not been recognized” (p.111). He thus concluded that the phenomenal other was *essentially* the same as the experiencing self. But this is no proof at all, only uncritical inference.

Understandably, Nietzsche would attack Schopenhauer on this very point. Nietzsche would make his Will to Power, not a unitary force, but myriad and competing forces both outside the experiencing self and within. And so, “to every soul there belongs another world; for every soul, every other soul is an afterworld” (*The Portable Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Third Part, “The Convalescent” §2, p.329). Michel Foucault, taking his cue from Nietzsche here, would thus declare that nothing at all exists that can serve as the basis for an essentialist ontology, for “nothing in man—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men” (*The Foucault Reader*, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” p.87f.). Much of Nietzsche’s philosophy of the Will to Power was an outgrowth and reaction to Schopenhauer’s philosophy of the Will: where Schopenhauer has Platonic Idealism subsisting phenomena, a unitary cosmological Will, an ethic of compassion, and bodily asceticism, Nietzsche instead upheld the Heraclitean chaos of the sense world, manifold naturalistic wills, Darwinian competition, and a Dionysian life-embrace. His work changed philosophy forever.

Nietzsche unfroze the river of becoming, and humanity has been washed into a postmodern sea. Inter-personal disclosure proceeds through the medium of language signs. Each body is like a text written in memory and enclosed in words; the ‘essence’ of humanity and community is generated through and accorded with ever-changing and evolving cultural narratives. Belonging and identification within a group is the process of self-inscription to these cultural stories; the self is thereby read *into* these texts, erasing and transcribing elements of the particular for a sense of new essence created inter-personally with the other-worldly other. There is no other essence to humanity than this. Arguably, this anti-essentialist turn in philosophy can be traced to Nietzsche—but was he

right to reject essentialism entirely? This last question will have to be answered in the next chapter as we turn to specific criticisms of Schweitzer philosophy.

Conclusions

We have outlined Schweitzer's New Rationalism project, showing how it presents a new description of consciousness that is different than the one established by Descartes. It was also shown to support a type of virtue ethics. This new beginning was needed to rid European philosophy of its biases against nonhuman life, and to substantiate the claim that the sublime of compassion creates a real connection to another life. But as just mentioned, this creates a particular problem for philosophy—essentialism. Nietzsche had undermined the postulate established by Kant that all humans shared a similar inner essence (the faculty of *a priori* time) which he called the soul. Schweitzer not only brings this old idea back, but he actually extends it to become a common essence for all life, plants and animals included!

More than anything else, this is perhaps the single most objectionable aspect of Schweitzer's work for academics today. Before such a bold new postulate can ever be taken seriously, it will have to be proven by painstaking philosophical argumentation how it overcomes Nietzsche's challenge to Kant since this is now the prevailing truth in academia. The next chapter reviews the many and various attacks on Schweitzer's philosophy, including this one. The key problem of essentialism will be addressed in the first section of that comprehensive redress.

Chapter Five

An Assessment of Historical Criticisms

Albert Schweitzer is very much maligned today as a philosopher. The harsh judgments against his philosophy began almost immediately from his contemporaries. He was not unaware of the criticism (Clark, p.8). Yet he chose to ignore it. Schweitzer believed that his work would speak for itself but he never received critical recognition on his philosophy during his own lifetime. It is possible that he drew comfort from the fact that Spinoza, “whom hitherto everyone had attacked without making any effort to understand him,” remained in obscurity until he was rediscovered by Friedrich Jacobi over a hundred years later (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.190). But time has so far only solidified the opinion that Schweitzer failed to create a philosophy that was in any way significant academically. The following discussion attempts to redress these longstanding misinterpretations of his work, an undertaking that must begin with a summary of the criticism leveled against him.

We begin with Karl Barth and Oscar Cullman who found it incomprehensible that Schweitzer, a Lutheran minister, would create a secular ethic after establishing himself as the foremost representative of liberal Christianity in 1905 with *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Clark 6f.). But the characterization of Reverence for Life as a secular ethic stands in contrast to the view of Claus Günzler, a present-day scholar on Schweitzer, who believes his philosophy is in fact *too Christian*—going as far as to say Schweitzer often comes across as a cliché Good Samaritan.³⁶ Other modern day interpreters, such as Mike Martin, instead find his philosophy pantheistic (Martin 2002, p.166). This is contrasted by the view of H. Richard Niebuhr who concluded that Schweitzer’s work is

henotheistic (i.e., believing all world religions support the same deity) and yet was insufficiently inclusive of the world's abiotic features (Clark p.99). The point to be taken here is that, clearly, these assessments cannot be simultaneously true. Only two possible explanations can account for this—either Schweitzer's work is so muddled that it has led to these widely contrasting views, or none have yet read his work correctly.

Other criticisms were more penetrating to the core of Schweitzer's philosophy. The Swiss theologian Emil Brunner alleged inconsistency between Schweitzer's claim concerning the absolute equality of all life and his medical practice that required him to kill millions of pathogens daily to maintain sterile surgical conditions (Clark, p.6). Peter Singer and Edward Johnson advance this same criticism today (Hay, p.50). Simply stated, ethics demand value hierarchies. But Schweitzer seemed unwilling to recognize this basic fact. As a result the prevailing opinion today is that Schweitzer was merely a sentimentalist, though a remarkably admirable one. As a philosopher, however, many regard him as little more than being of the 'armchair' variety—a great man who espoused beautiful but wholly impractical beliefs.

It is certainly possible to approach Reverence for Life as *just* an ethical worldview espoused by a powerful personality. But without a clear and solid foundation in a self-consistent and academically defensible philosophy, regarding Reverence for Life this way opens it up to the counter charge that it is mere sophistry—which is to say, persuasive rhetoric that will move and inspire those inclined to accept the conclusions but not something that is *necessarily* true as matter of philosophical argumentation. This chapter therefore undertakes a comprehensive review on the exact nature of these criticisms in order to determine if Schweitzer is best regarded as a true philosopher or merely a humanitarian of uncommon wisdom.

Complicating this investigation is the sheer volume and variety of the criticisms levelled against him. Sadly, this will be a long and somewhat tedious chapter as a result. For the sake of clarity, the discussion will proceed by addressing the different types of criticisms ‘one by one’ until each has been outlined and countered pursuant to the findings presented in the previous chapters. Only in this way can Schweitzer finally be proven to be a worthy successor to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Summary of Criticisms

Very generally speaking, the criticisms of Schweitzer can be categorized as follows: (1) Reverence for Life fails as philosophy due to inconsistencies and poorly grounded argumentation; (2) Reverence for Life is not philosophy but based in Christian theology and as such cannot be considered either a necessity of logical thought or a suitable basis for ethics in modern pluralistic societies; (3) alternately, Reverence for Life is seen by others as too mystical and pantheistic, and thus falls victim into the same problems identified in the previous criticism; (4) Reverence for Life is seen by some as too anthropocentric by giving the human species special cosmological status in the biosphere; (5) others however have found that Reverence for Life promotes a ‘guilt mongering’ mentality which makes it insufficiently anthropocentric and insensitive to the basic needs of people for their own wellbeing; (6) Reverence for Life is also seen as impractical and incapable of becoming a workable ethic in terms of individual morality; (7) closely related is the claim that Reverence for Life is excessively subjective and sentimental, showing it not to be a true philosophy but merely generalized ‘truisms’ and ‘maxims’ for moral reflection; and lastly (8), Reverence for Life is said to give insufficient guidance for practical governance in civil society.

Before this investigation turns to an analysis of these criticisms, it needs to be kept in mind that Schweitzer never defended himself against his detractors. Schweitzer's unbreakable silence struck many as an admission of failure, that he was giving an unspoken acknowledgement and conceding to his detractors that his philosophy was indeed fundamentally flawed. This made him a magnet for any and every kind of slander. But a private letter from 1963 actually reveals that his silence was something else entirely (*Letters: 1905-1965*, p.331):

My strategy consists in never responding to any attack of any kind whatsoever. That has always been my principle, and I have stuck to it loyally. In the long run no one can fight against silence. It is an invincible opponent. Nor does anyone have to defend me. It is my lot to go my way without combat. It is my lot to pave the way for the spirit of reverence for life, which is also the spirit of peace. I am quite dumbfounded by the fact that I have been granted such a splendid calling; as a result, I go my way, spiritually unhindered. A grand, calm music roars within me. I am permitted to see the ethics of reverence for life starting to make its way through the world, and it elevates me beyond anything that anyone can reproach me for or do to me.

Schweitzer's humility in this statement is breathtaking, especially when considering that his detractors had not just maligned his philosophy. In some cases they were calling him outright a self-seeking hypocrite, an incompetent doctor, a racist, and even an Antichrist by those conservative Christians who were offended by his scholarly work on the New Testament. Despite this, it is not incumbent on the scholar of today to become a defender of his personal character. Schweitzer's life-example of personifying

Reverence for Life stands alone as unimpeachable testament. No one can cast stones unless they cared for as many terminally ill patients or delivered as many infants as he.

This investigation is therefore limited to certain academic question relating to the influence of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on the development of Schweitzer's Reverence for Life ethic and how these findings redress the longstanding academic criticisms of his work—that is all. No one needs to defend the man himself. It only falls to the scholar of today to analyze his works to determine the academic merits of his philosophy. With this in mind, the following discussion will discuss these criticisms and offer an assessment of the same in light of the research presented in the previous chapters.

Many of the criticisms itemized in the list given on page 104 overlap in the literature and are repeated by different scholars in various combinations; there is an odd form of synergy here where one criticism actually reinforces and confirms another. Untangling this mess for the reader therefore poses certain challenges. The criticisms will be treated thematically pursuant to that list for the sake of the greatest clarity and to reduce repetition as much as possible. But due to the enmeshed complexity here, certain ones will have to be revisited after each interwoven thread is separated from the whole. For example, the allegation that Reverence for Life is Christian theology disguised as philosophy will have introduced in response to criticism two and then revisited in criticism seven after certain related issues have been addressed in the intervening discussion. The last criticism, number eight, will be saved for the final chapter.

1. The Charge of Philosophical Shortcomings

One of the most penetrating and perceptive criticisms of Schweitzer's Reverence for Life ethic was set forth by Ara Paul Barsam (2008), a scholar who received his training at Oxford University specializing in Schweitzer. Barsam questioned how a

person can bring forth his or her own inner-self as an object of representation for the knowing mind. This revisits the ‘new problem’ of essentialism identified at the end of the last chapter and strikes at the very heart of *Reverence for Life* because, as Barsam writes, “following Schopenhauer, Schweitzer sees this [will-to-live theory] as the basis on which the knowing subject understands itself as identical with the [universal] will [and] as thing-in-itself” (p.10). The underlying difficulty here, according to Barsam, is the idea of “direct cognitive contact with the [Kantian] thing-in-itself inside us” (p.10).

The basis for his criticism appears to derive from commentaries by the hermeneutic philosopher Martin Heidegger who argued that the there-beingness (*Dasein*) of rational consciousness is a psychological projection unable to fathom its own origins. According to this line of thought, what is actually being contemplated upon cannot be the Kantian thing itself but a rational concept invented by the mind. As such, Barsam concludes that Schweitzer has failed to identify a true *pre-rational* essence for life—we are thus back at the original Cartesian claim that only species with rational minds who are capable of conceptual knowledge can be the subjects for philosophy and ethics. Barsam therefore concludes that “as an exercise in metaphysics, Schweitzer’s doctrine of the will as thing-in-itself is flawed ... [and] collapses under analytical probing” (p.10).

Barsam says the real issue here resides with Schopenhauer who Schweitzer relied upon (p.10; see also Barsam 2002, p.218). Curiously though, he does not identify this as a critical structural flaw that sinks *Reverence for Life* before it can set sail. Rather he takes Schweitzer as presenting the universal Will and the will-to-live as being “theological concepts and not solely philosophical ones” (p.6). With this revisionist twist, Barsam proceeds to recast the will-to-live as merely a spiritual “analogy” used to transfer the sense of self to another life through sympathy and compassion (p.14).³⁷ With

this change in place, he says the whole world can then be seen as a manifestation of the will-to-live where every other being is now *imagined* as another ‘self’ since “although this may sound like radical subjectivity, Schweitzer believed (and needed to believe) everyone *would* recognize this feeling” of altruistic sympathy for other life as if it were one’s own (his emphasis; p.14). Barsam describes the analogy as a psychological trick based in ecstatic religion that creates an emotional attachment, and he argues that this is precisely how Schweitzer intended to draw persons into an ethical relationship with the rest of the world.

To summarize Barsam’s argument, he is criticizing the philosophical will-to-live theory for being simultaneously the ultimate object of inner subjectivity and an ascription for objects in the phenomenal world. Put simply, just as the tongue cannot taste itself, so too it is claimed that the mind does not have access to its pre-cognitive origins. But, as outlined in the previous chapter, Schweitzer’s hermeneutical understanding of consciousness accounts for the historical and cultural factors that shape personal identity, yet he does so in such a way that still allows for cognitive contact with the Kantian thing itself at the heart of consciousness. Moreover, Schweitzer is able to extend this self-recognition of the will-to-live to other life through Schopenhauer’s philosophy. This is something he specifically indicates in the following passage (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.237; emphasis added):

The world, [Schopenhauer] says, I can understand only by *analogy* with myself. Myself, when looked at from outside, I conceive as a physical phenomenon in space and time, but looked at from within, as will-to-live. Everything, accordingly, which meets me in the world of phenomena is a manifestation of the will-to-live.

The criticisms of Barsam take on a new light in terms of these findings. He is certainly right by saying it is by way of an ‘analogy’ that the experiences of the other are perceived as affecting the will-to-live in one’s inner self. But this is not a psychological trick, nor is it romanticism run amuck or any kind of theological postulate. Rather, Schweitzer is relying upon Schopenhauer groundbreaking work that established the will-to-live as the essence of the self and the other.

The analogy mentioned on the prior page is how Schopenhauer escaped ‘the lair of the skull’³⁸ as discussed in Chapter 2 and at the end of Chapter 4—which is to say, how he dispelled the Cartesian doubt about the reality of the natural world as it appears to human perception. Philosophy has always struggled with the problem of solipsism (i.e., the possible unreality of the outer world) and Schopenhauer acknowledged the weak non-definitive nature of his argumentation. But he contends that the alternative of “theoretical egoism” (solipsism) has to be considered rhetorical deceit and that “as a serious conviction ... it could only be found in a madhouse” (*WWR-2* §19, p.104). The reality of the external world *must* be conceded if philosophy is to be taken seriously and this holds true even if its existence can only be established by way of Schopenhauer’s analogy to the experiencing self.

Empirical science supports and confirms the cosmological claim that the will-to-live exists externally to the experiencing self. All species are given an orientation to life through the biological will-to-live and there is an identifiable will-to-live for each and every life-form in nature—what we would call DNA today. Scientific findings also support the view that there is/are an evolutionary force(s) which Schweitzer poetically interprets as a Creative Force. Schweitzer follows Nietzsche here in interpreting science through an ‘artistic lens’ to create a life-affirming cultural truth. He feels he can do this

because of the mystery of life as it appears from the perspective of a person's life-view (i.e., the New Rationalism). For Schweitzer, the question why anything exists at all, or why should life strive to perpetuate itself against all the natural forces set against it, or why people seek after deeper meaning in an apparently meaningless cosmos are all unanswerable scientifically. He says all we can know for certain is what is contained within our will-to-live—life itself is good, and “evil is what annihilates, hampers, or hinders life” (*The Ethics of Reverence for Life*, p.230). This is all the direction we need in life to become ethical beings.

The analogy employed by Schopenhauer allowed him to conduct an analysis of causality in the natural world from a philosophical perspective and thereby establish the existence of a cosmological Will. The analogy also allowed him to argue that this unitary Will was a common essence for all phenomenal reality; the cosmological Will was the Kantian thing itself which is something that Heidegger said did not exist. This brings us to the key issue with respect to Barsam's criticism of Schweitzer: essentialism.

Nietzsche would attack the idea of a common essence to humanity, and Schweitzer was not ignorant of this. He was also acutely aware that the natural evolutionary forces are myriad, not as single thing called causality. This is why he considered the hermeneutical analysis of being so crucial. He needed a defensible first principle for rational consciousness (ontology) and he established it by having the first fact of consciousness the 'I + will-to-live' nexus. Schweitzer's essentialism is not based on the Kantian soul as a common and simple essence to humanity, but rather Schopenhauer's Will. His ontology also reflects the complexity of biological and cultural factors that makes each person a unique phenomenon, just as Nietzsche had argued. Yet he also believed that no life is entirely alien to another. Schopenhauer's analogy thus

allowed him to keep the door open to an essentialism that was experienced through the sublime of compassion.

Nevertheless, it could still be said that Schweitzer stands on no firmer ground than does Schopenhauer. Like him, Schweitzer upholds a claim of essentialism inferred through an analogy to what is experienced within a person and extrapolates it to confirm the existence of similar wills-to-live externally. And so, we may ask, are Schweitzer's arguments here about essentialism *necessarily* true?

An elemental nature philosophy is one claim, and one that can be defended as being coherent, self-consistent and grounded in a first principle of cosmological causality. But an 'apophatic hermeneutic' founding a New Rationalism that supports an essentialist ontology for all life, that is another matter altogether. In the end, all we can say is that essentialism is a life-affirming possibility arising from the 'I + will-to-live' nexus in rational consciousness. For Nietzsche the validity of any truth claim is found in life-affirmation and to use his words, *who could venture to denigrate those means?* By this measure the essentialism of Reverence for Life cannot be dismissed as a mere 'analogy' romanticising the imagined experiences of other life, but a true and real foundation for ethics. Against the seas of nihilism and in the chaotic waters of post-modernity Schweitzer offers humanity grounds for a new philosophy of civilization. But before we can pronounce him a true successor to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the other criticisms of his work must still be redressed.

2. Christianity and Elemental Morality

As mentioned in the introductory comments at the top of this chapter, historical and contemporary commentators on the life and works of Schweitzer have arrived at widely divergent conclusions concerning Reverence for Life. Many early critics came to

perceive moral and theoretical ambiguity in Schweitzer's work. Others provided favorable assessments of Schweitzer's philosophy but do so under the mistaken conclusion that Reverence for Life was either specifically a Christian ethic or some kind of universalist religion arising from Schweitzer's perspective on the historical Jesus and the apostle Paul. Yet as already discussed in Chapter 1, such language does not appear in the primary work on Reverence for Life, *The Philosophy of Civilization*.

How 'Christian' is Reverence for Life is an important question to consider. As both a biblical scholar in historical criticism and a theologian, Schweitzer had a quite complex relationship to Christianity and this is reflected in his writings. Nevertheless his philosophy remained secular even though in his personal life and letters he would speak freely about religion. Even then it must be remarked that Schweitzer's Christianity was rather unorthodox. His personal letters to his future wife Hélène Bresslau reveals this in very personal confession.

While undoubtedly meant playfully, he wrote to Hélène that an eternity in heaven with Saints Loyola and Jerome would be unbearable: "No, I decline. Rather to hell. The crowd will be much more congenial. With Julian the Apostate, Caesar, Socrates, Plato, and Heraclitus one can have a decent conversation" (*Letters, 1902—1905*, p.54). More noteworthy is a letter from 1902. After reading Ignatius of Antioch in Greek and becoming quite frustrated with his hatred of the visible world, Schweitzer responds that "the saint would not be pleased with me if he knew how much nature distracted me. Is it strength or weakness to live in such a mystical union with nature, to feel the effects of its smile and tears deeply in one's soul?" (p.43). But perhaps the most sensational of all, in a letter from 1904 (p.53), Schweitzer ponders whether atheism should be considered a religion—after all, did not Jesus himself die an atheist with his question from the cross

about being forsaken by God? His frustration with tradition and orthodox faith would seem at first glance to suggest Schweitzer was at heart an agnostic. But he still preached and preached sincerely about creating the Kingdom of God on earth. In a letter from October of 1905 he passionately writes that, "... I know what revival is, for I feel that Jesus revived me when I was immersed in my scholarly research and He said to me, 'Go where I need you.' And I *will* follow him" (his emphasis; *Letters: 1905—1965*, p.5).³⁹ Schweitzer truly felt that his medical work in Africa was very much "serving at the outpost of the Kingdom of God" itself (p.28).

So, what do we make of this? A key conclusion of this investigation is the interface between philosophy and religion, which is something that remains constant throughout Schweitzer's entire body of works. This is the idea of elemental morality which he took from the works of Schopenhauer. Not only would this become the lens through which he would see his own Christian faith, it was also the answer he needed to redress certain philosophical questions concerning the Reverence for Life ethic. Put simply, the common thread here is Schopenhauer, not Christ. This is because in his critical analysis of Schopenhauer's philosophy, Schweitzer found a way to establish the interface between religion and philosophical ethics. It was through what he called elemental thinking (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.240).

As discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, this is the philosophical lens for how Schweitzer saw his own faith (see also *Christianity and the Religions of the World*, p.76f.). Schopenhauer also provided him with an ethical framework to establish compassion as an elemental morality in harmony with both Jesus and evolutionary science. Schweitzer's Reverence for Life philosophy is therefore not secretly declaring that Christianity encompasses all other faiths, or that Schweitzer saw

his brand of liberal Lutheranism as being inclusive of other scriptures and religions—quite the opposite in fact.⁴⁰ Rather the claim was that the rootstock of Reverence for Life's elemental nature philosophy could be explicated into a worldview that was compatible with any world religion or none at all. The common ground is established through secular philosophy before it becomes diversified and particularized for any world culture. This is how Reverence for Life can become a philosophy for *all* civilizations, not just the Christian ones.

With this in mind, the exact criticisms levelled against Schweitzer can be outlined and redressed. We begin with Timothy Dansdill (2007) who made special note of a passage in *The Philosophy of Civilization* in which Schweitzer appears to endorse a Christian understanding of dominion over nature (p.71). In this passage Schweitzer discusses his vision of a new rationalist ethic emerging from the Reverence for Life elemental nature philosophy: “This leads to a lordship of the spirit over the powers of Nature, to the perfecting of the religious, social, economic, and practical association of men, and the spiritual perfecting of individuals and of the community” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.98). Dansdill takes the idiomatic language of ‘lordship’ here to mean that Schweitzer had given an “unwitting endorsement of the ethos of divine dominion” which is something incompatible with the spirit of modern environmental ethics (p.75). He further notes how this apparent claim by Schweitzer hinders its popular acceptance in today's increasingly secularized society. But not only that, deference to scriptural authority would greatly undermine Schweitzer's assertion that Reverence for Life is somehow a necessity of logical thought (p.78).

Dansdill is certainly correct in saying that Schweitzer often promoted an anthropocentric vision with respect to non-human nature and that he gives the human

species special and elevated standing in relation to the rest of the natural world. (This is something to be discussed further in response to criticism 4 later in this chapter.) But this cannot be the ‘Dominion’ from the Genesis creation narratives. For one thing, as the Orthodox Priest Igor Cvetkov charges, “Albert Schweitzer is not a theologian, because in his study of Christ he was not interested in Christianity but [only] in the person of Christ” (Kizima 2007, p.97). While quite overstated in saying that Schweitzer was not interested in Christianity, the point remains that Schweitzer’s scientifically-minded understanding of religion allowed for no supreme Deity and no special revelation to humanity through Holy Scriptures. For him, Jesus was only an ordinary human being who possessed an unfathomably profound moral character.

This fact is highlighted in one of the most important studies on the life and legacy of Schweitzer which was prepared by Jackson Lee Ice. His nearly completed manuscript was edited and published posthumously in 1994 by his family and professional associates. The book represents three decades of Ice’s research into several controversies that came to surround Schweitzer, including whether he believed in God at all. Ice would conclude that Schweitzer held to no conception of the metaphysical divine, whether defined traditionally, as any kind of *Weltgeist* (pantheistic world spirit) nor even as sociological construct used “for the purpose of arousing religious emotions and ethical sentiments” (p.10). This last point, however, is not exactly correct since Schweitzer does use idiomatic references to religious themes throughout his works. But Ice was right that, even here, there is not a sense Schweitzer is drawing upon theistic authority but only illustrating a point with widely known religious imagery and terms.

Schweitzer’s metaphysics, if they can be described as metaphysics at all, do not look past empirical reality. It is an elemental nature philosophy of the will-to-live as it

becomes synthesized within ontological consciousness (which Schweitzer termed the New Rationalism) which grounds a type of devotion he called a ‘mysticism of reality’ (Ethical Mysticism). Ice would therefore conclude that “the knowledge of the will-to-live [is arrived at] through reason and *not* by revelation or faith” (emphasis added; p.11). He supports his claim by pointing to Schweitzer’s own comments from a personal letter written in response to a question as to whether he believed that religion was necessary for Reverence for Life (p.9):

Hence there arises the question whether the religious ethic of Love is possible without the belief in an ethical God and World Sovereign, or knowledge of this God, which can be replaced by a belief in Him. Here I dare say that the ethical religion of love can exist without the belief in a world-ruling divine personality which corresponds to such an ethical religion.

Put simply, the philosophical grounding of the elemental nature philosophy precedes the theological applications and not the other way around. Curiously however, this is not Ice’s final assessment. Even though he noted that the will-to-live concept emerged from philosophical reflection and not theology, because of what seemed to him to be the apparent inconsistency of Schweitzer’s arguments Ice would instead decide that the phrase Reverence for Life was holophrastic in that “it means and represents many things for Schweitzer” (p.12). Ice contextualized his conclusion this way because of certain of Schweitzer’s comments which have been misunderstood by his contemporaries.

Take for example, Schweitzer’s famous declaration, “The ethic of Reverence for Life is the ethic of love widened into universality. It is the ethic of Jesus, now recognized as a logical consequence of thought” (*Out of My Life and Thought*, p.232). Such talk

however was saved for his autobiography. In his instructions to the publisher, dated June 5, 1931, Schweitzer indicates that the autobiography is merely his own reflections and not a follow-up to his philosophical work. He therefore asks that, “In advertising the work, please avoid anything noisy since this would not be in keeping with either the spirit of the book or me” (*Letters: 1905-1965*, p.120). Rather he says of the book, “Its meaning lies in the way it takes a position on the spiritual issues of our time by focusing on *one man’s experiences*. It has turned into a kind of confession” (emphasis added; p.120). Caution is therefore required in trying to discern hidden meaning in *The Philosophy of Civilization* through the lens of his autobiography, especially with respect to any suspected Christian aims in his philosophical works. For Schweitzer, Reverence for Life harmonized with his Christian faith as *one man’s experience*—he was certainly not saying that everyone had to become Christian before they could be ethical!

Reading Christianity into Schweitzer’s philosophical works on Reverence for Life is like a botanist trying to establish the taxonomy of a new species based on the characteristics of its flowers and fruit. What they fail to appreciate is that the visible floral structures are supported by a different species of rootstock upon which the Christian elements have been grafted. The interface of the philosophical with the religious in Schweitzer’s thought is one of the most distinctive aspects of Schweitzer’s work and what is most perplexing to his readers. The subtle distinction here will be revealed further as this discussion turns to the related issues of pantheism and mysticism. A definitive determination as to whether Reverence for Life is merely Christian theology will have to be given in relation to criticism number seven, after the related criticisms in sections three through six are redressed.

3. Mystical Pantheism

One of the conclusions made by Martin (2007) is that Reverence for Life becomes, in effect, a kind of mystical bio-theism emerging from its metaphysics. “Although Schweitzer’s spiritual beliefs are not pellucid, they veer toward biotheism: the view that all life in its creative aspects constitutes a sacred force – a universal, infinite Will to Live, of which each organism is a part” (p.32). This is potentially problematic because the divine would be situated within the self and at the same time metaphysically connected to all other life in Nature. This would make Reverence for Life *not* Christianity but its own religion or potentially an elaboration on Schopenhauer’s own distinctive interpretation of Buddhism.

According to Barsam (2002), Schweitzer’s early exposure to Indian thought had a formative and lasting influence on him. In particular Barsam detects a strong presence in Reverence for Life of the Jain doctrine of *ahimsa* which upholds the ethical principle of nonviolence for all sentient beings. “Schweitzer reacts to a great range of intellectual stimuli, assimilating, modifying, picking and choosing, and then gradually constructing his own ethics ... Among the significant influences of Jesus, St. Paul, and others, Schweitzer’s rapport with Jainism and *ahimsa* helped him articulate and discern the meaning of ‘reverence’ [for all life]” (p.245).⁴¹ The implication here is that Reverence for Life is, in effect, an eclectic mishmash of many religious doctrines that have been uniquely synthesized by Schweitzer to become a new universalist religion in its own right. Moreover, this alleged ‘new religion’ includes a strong bio-theistic character that arises from its secret Indian heritage. If correct, such devotional bio-theism would stand in considerable tension with traditional Western perspectives within Christianity and the other the Abrahamic faiths. While philosophically inclined persons of any faith may not

have a problem with any of this, Schweitzer's project to find ecumenical common ground through an elemental morality could be greatly compromised if it was *also* required for people to declare allegiance to this brand new pantheistic religion.

As already argued in response to criticism number two, Reverence for Life is not a religion. It is a philosophical argument. But Schweitzer knew that a philosophical truth does not automatically become a living ethic within society. "Our great mistake ... is thinking that without mysticism we can reach an ethical world- and life-view, which shall satisfy [rational] thought" (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.303). This is why a second step for his philosophy was required by Schweitzer, through what he called Ethical Mysticism. Its basis is derived from two principles. The first is the philosophical recognition of the will-to-live existing in every life, and the other is an elemental moral of compassion. These two principles are combined by Schweitzer in the New Rationalism project to become the grounding and orientation for a mystical worldview. How this was achieved was discussed in Chapter 4.

It is *this* particular aspect of his work that has sown so much confusion about Reverence for Life. Ethical Mysticism, however, is not necessarily tied to traditional religion (see pages 95 and 96 of Chapter 4). As mentioned in the first chapter, Schweitzer follows Schopenhauer in presenting mysticism as "an exaltation beyond our own individuality, a feeling of the sublime" (*WWR* §39, p.206). And so, in the final synthesis of elements from philosophy and natural science to form the basis for an Ethical Mysticism, any number of religious or non-religious conceptions is possible, including a pantheistic bio-theism. This is because a life-view is particular to each person and their cultural background. But the claim to universality only arises from its philosophical grounding, not from any of the possible expanded religious life-views.

Here it is important to note that the religious character of Ethical Mysticism comes from only the nature of devotion itself. Whether to God or a philosophical ideal, devotion causes a person to forego self-seeking ends for some greater good. Parental sacrifice for the sake of their children falls into this latter category and would not be considered religion. Similarly, Reverence for Life asks for a devotion to deepened world- and life-affirmation. How Schweitzer can possibly ask for that kind of deep conviction to what is in the end merely a philosophical ideal is an important question, and one that this work as a whole will try to place into perspective. Here it will only be mentioned that it begins with a naturalistic inclination toward sympathy and calls upon people to bring themselves, the other, and the non-human world to the greatest personal and/or natural development as possible (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.278). The personal experience of this devotion can become, at least for some, a mysticism much like that which is experienced within religion.⁴²

4. Anthropocentrism

Schweitzer held that humans had a special status above other animals because our species alone had the potential to become aware of the universal will-to-live. This set us apart amongst beings that are otherwise equal in their will-to-live. A short passage from an early sermon is illustrative here (*A Place of Revelation*, p.16f.):

Nature teaches cruel egotism, interrupted only for a short time by the urge it has placed in its creatures to offer love and help to their young for as long as needed. But that the animal loves its own young with self-sacrifice even to death, and thus can empathize in that instance, makes it more horrible that it is denied sympathy for creatures unrelated to itself. The world, delivered up to ignorant egoism, is like a valley shrouded in

darkness. Only on the peaks above there is light. All must live in darkness.

One creature alone may ascend to see the light: the highest creature, *man*.

He may achieve knowledge of reverence for life; he may aspire to knowledge of sharing and of compassion; he may step out and transcend the ignorance in which the rest of creation languishes ... here, in [this] one existence, life as such comes to consciousness of itself.

Humans alone have the potential to become aware of the universal will-to-live, and this mean for Schweitzer that humankind becomes the thinking aspect of the evolutionary Will: "I become [an] imaginative force like that which works mysteriously in nature, and thus I give my existence a meaning from within [when directed] outwards" (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.283). The anthropocentrism of this statement is obvious. But it is not the exaltation of the human species, only the designation of a particular responsibility to the ones who are to think for the unconscious and capricious Creative Will of nature. This could be the cause of much mischief on our part, and indeed it has. What direction human thought *should* take the evolving biosphere is not really specified by Schweitzer, but the anthropocentrism is still bound by Reverence for Life. Schweitzer indicates that our creative agency only finds its actualization when directed selflessly at the biosphere.

This is not the Dominion of domination that Dansdill feared. This is because, as Schweitzer writes, "In us [,] beings who can move about freely and are capable of pre-considered, purposive working, the impulse to perfection is given in such a way that we aim at raising to their highest material and spiritual value both ourselves and every existing thing which is open to our influence" (p.282). This is humility and altruism, not the aggrandizement and privileging the human species over and above lower lifeforms.

And for this reason, “Ethics consist, therefore, in my experiencing the compulsion to show to all [other] will-to-live the same reverence as I do to my own” (p.309). This then is the true nature of Schweitzer’s mysticism: “Whenever my life devotes itself in any way to life, my finite will-to-live experiences union with the infinite will in which all life is one” (p.313). Schweitzer’s philosophy reverses the power relationships that would ordinarily be expected of anthropocentrism. As the ones who think for the unconscious Will of nature, it falls to humans to redress the sufferings and injustices in the world, both the natural one and human society too.

Humans alone have the potential to act as moral agents. Because of this, every potential moral agent saved creates an opportunity for further actualization of the Reverence for Life ethic. This is why, very generally speaking, Schweitzer’s ethics can be said to place the saving of human life as its highest calling. It can be inferred from his life example that Schweitzer also directs moral agents to favor of those animals that can suffer, with the ethical prioritization being generally proportional to the sentience of that nonhuman life—for example, higher primates and mammals over fish and insects. Notwithstanding, the call of ethical responsibility is boundless, and Schweitzer *will not endorse* any kind of relative ethic or altruistic prioritization (a subject discussed further in the next section). He admonishes his readers that even dying worms on a sun-baked sidewalk should elicit our intense pity (*Kulturphilosophie III*, p. 403), and that not even one flower should be plucked for idle amusement (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.318), for “is it not possible that they feel and are sensitive even if we cannot demonstrate it?” (*A Place for Revelation*, p.25).

Schweitzer has set up a strong dichotomous tension between boundless compassion and an ethical response that is generally proportional to the relative sentience

of the nonhuman life. One consequence of this has attracted particular criticism in the literature: how does a person deal with the intense feelings of guilt that arise from not being able to prevent the suffering of all the life we are suppose to pity? We cannot after all stop to save every dying worm when walking down the street, the effort would be endless and futile—and having fresh flowers for a holiday table centerpiece shouldn't be a grievous moral sin, or should it? These are the issues we examine next.

5. Guilt Mongering

Mike Martin (2007), a professor of philosophy at Chapman University, identified certain flaws in Schweitzer's philosophy but nevertheless still provided an overall favorable assessment of Reverence for Life as an environmental ethic. Criticisms include an expanded discussion of points made in his earlier works such as that the worldview of Reverence for Life is excessively subjective and overly "guilt mongering" about the necessary death of non-human life to provide for human wellbeing (2007, p.26f.; also Martin 2002, p.166). Also identified as a concern was the tendency of Schweitzer to take a "microscopic" focus on individual and immediate wellbeing rather than taking into account larger social and political considerations (p.72f.). Nevertheless Martin concludes that, "although his metaphysical belief in an overarching Will to Live *distorts* some of his central ideas, the key elements in his ethics survive intact after the problematic aspects are set aside" (emphasis added; p.41). To this end he looks to take lessons from Schweitzer's life and written works and identifies five moral ideals in particular: authenticity, compassion, gratitude, justice and peace. Martin then expounds on these Reverence for Life virtues to show Schweitzer's continuing relevance with respect to such important ethical topics today as human rights, social justice, responsible decision-

making in environmental resource management, and achieving world peace through non-violence.

Many of the criticisms made by Martin have already been already addressed in this chapter. But the question of Schweitzer's so-called 'guilt mongering' needs to be examined at length. Martin begins by writing that "Schweitzer says his ethics makes absolute demands that render us guilty each time we kill" (p.40). This, he concludes, is entirely unrealistic because, put simply, it is not possible for people to live without participating in the destruction of other lives in some way. Take dietary decisions for example. A person cannot survive nutritionally on lettuce alone and even if they restrict themselves to a strict vegetarian diet that allows only for the consumption of nuts and seeds for protein, the incipient life within these foodstuffs will be destroyed. The naturally teleology of the will-to-live is to germinate, sprout, reach maturity and reproduce, and so potential future life has been prevented from coming into existence even with a fruitarian lifestyle. No one can possibly escape the trap of guilt set by Schweitzer with his absolute demands in *Reverence for Life*.

Martin remarks that, "Most of us, however, would be crushed by the comparable feelings of guilt, assuming we could take seriously Schweitzer's extreme beliefs about guilt" (p.40f.). Martin therefore offers the reader a modified view in that we should instead look at *Reverence for Life* as a call "to stop killing thoughtlessly, to think before we kill ... [and that Schweitzer actually] intends that we should think *well* by exercising good moral judgment" before making those necessary and practical decisions about the basic necessities of life (his emphasis; p.41).

Even so, there is another problem here. Schweitzer would appear to have impeached himself over his own ethic. As a medical doctor, Schweitzer routinely killed

pathogens and parasites by the countless millions to save human life. He also killed lower lifeforms such as river fish to nourish sick animals back to health under his veterinary care. Even more suspect is an incident where Schweitzer once shot hawks to save fledgling weaverbirds because he was so moved by the cries of distress from the adult birds who were unable to protect their young (p.40). Apparently, Schweitzer had anthropomorphized the suffering of the defenseless birds being attacked by the hawks and decided to defend them to honor *his own* psychological need to help the helpless. This would seem to contradict his claim about the intrinsic value of all life. Hawks after all are birds of prey that need to eat flesh to survive, just like the weaverbirds need to eat seeds which is itself a type of predation on plant germination. Which life is more deserving of its existence and how did Schweitzer finally decide? Not only is there at least the aura of hypocrisy here, but Schweitzer's life example sometimes seems to reveal an extremely relative and subjective measure on the value of that life.

To live one must destroy. Even vegetarianism takes life, albeit plant life—it is still life nonetheless. All life shares equally in will-to-live. This is why Schweitzer declared that “the ethics of reverence for life [can] know nothing of a relative ethic” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.317). The duty to preserve all life is absolute and always remains absolute. Schweitzer remained steadfast and refused to lay down rules for every possible situation where life-taking and life-saving conflicts arise; he feared this would externalize the morality in a codified object for rational cross-examination, leaving it vulnerable to egotistical rationalization, depreciating negotiations, and ultimately superficiality of conviction. Reverence for Life is a moral compass, not a systematized guidebook. Instead, we find another rubric and a different means to create a realistic, living ethic for society.

Schweitzer declared that every life taken incurs a guilt [*Schuld*] requiring atonement (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.317f.). But the so-called ‘guilt mongering’ that Martin is writing against was not really a part of his philosophy, at least not in the way he characterizes it. In truth, the problem here is not with Schweitzer and his philosophy, but with the English translation of the German words *Schuld* and *schuldig*. The text prepared by C.T. Champion for the English publication of *The Philosophy of Civilization* translates these particular words as ‘guilt’ and ‘guilty’ respectively, which is very misleading. They carry the particular connotation of a disempowering disgrace in English. To be guilty is to have been judged by someone to have done something wrong: a guilty person is a morally bad person; it is a mark of shame. In translating these words that way, Schweitzer’s philosophy becomes colored with a very heavy-handed and oppressive judgmentalism that rubs many people the wrong way.

But the German words *Schuld* and *schuldig* actually have a different set of meanings and associations. They can mean guilt or guilty such in the common expressions: “*Der Mann is schuldig!*” (translation: “The man is guilty!”). Or, “*Es ist meine Schuld*” (translation: “It is my fault”). Yet the words can also mean simply that a debt that is owed. For example, “*Ich stehe in deiner Schuld*” (translation: “I am in your debt”). Or, “*Ich schulde dir drei Euro*” (translation: “I owe you three Euros”). It is actually in this sense of owing a personal debt that Schweitzer uses the words *Schuld* and *schuldig*. He is not saying that people are morally wrong or at fault for destroying a will-to-live in eating food, but only that the taking of any life incurs a life-debt that must be repaid through ethical service. This is the true reality of his absolutism. It is a call to greater consciousness about how one’s decisions impact the nonhuman world, and a constant reminder to live one’s life with a deliberate awareness to try to give back to the

world and society *more* than a person takes for him- or herself. We thereby become obligated to be conscientious moral beings for the daily food and commodities we take from nature.

What Schweitzer is describing is perhaps best encapsulated by Henry David Thoreau's aphorism from *Walden*, paraphrased here, that 'the cost of a thing is the amount of life which is required to be exchanged for it.' Thoreau was specifically referring to one's own life spent in debt or in service to another person for the means to purchase the necessities of life. Peter Brown (2001) however widens the meaning to also include the plant and animals life that had to be destroyed to provide humans with the economic commodities they consume (p.61). In this way, Brown opens up Schweitzer's philosophy to a whole new level of consideration, that of quantifiable economic analysis on humankind's ever-growing and uncompensated debt to the natural world. This is a subject that will be explored in the final chapter.

With this in mind, we can look at the question of whether Schweitzer lived up to his own ethic. Schweitzer was neither naïve nor a hypocrite in this respect. As a medical doctor, Schweitzer knew that "the necessity to destroy and to injure life is imposed upon me" (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.316). Therefore, he wrote that he often had to "choose between the ethical and the necessary, and, if I choose the latter, must take it upon myself to incur guilt [*schuldig*] by an act of injury to life" (p.324). Likewise, he said that each person in life must similarly "decide for himself in each case how far he can remain ethical and how far he must submit himself to the necessity for destruction of and injury to life, and therewith incur guilt [*Schuld*]" (p.317). The unavoidable guilt requires a recompense for each ethical trade-off made, and the atonement must take the form of devotional service to others such that each act of altruism is "attempting to cancel

part of man's ever new debt [*Schuld*] to the animal world" (p.318). Accordingly, Schweitzer cautioned that "we must perceive every act of destruction always as something terrible and ask ourselves, in every case, whether we can bear the responsibility as to whether it is necessary or not" (*A Place for Revelation*, p.27). It has been rightfully said that Ethical Mysticism is a lived philosophy "with calluses on its hands" (Meyer 2002, p.35n.49). It makes people directly and fully responsible for the decisions they make—and not just in the immediate sense, but also with respect to the larger ethical, social and ecological repercussions. Unthinking egotism is not a valid lifestyle. Schweitzer is saying that people must roll up their sleeves and get to work at making the world a better place for the entire 'commonwealth of life' in the biosphere—to use Peter Brown's phrase here.

Schweitzer *did* practice what he preached. He made real world decisions about the necessary destruction of life for a greater good such as saving the lives of his patients—human and non-human alike. He also knew he would fall short of his own absolute ethic. But by rising again to atone with even greater conviction to help another life, Schweitzer sought to repay that ever-increasing debt and thereby inspire others to help him in the greater cause of establishing a new philosophy of civilization. Guilt [*Schuld*] thereby begets renewed determination, deepened sensitivity and humility. It builds true character. In this way Reverence for Life allows for larger social and ecological visions to become manifested through its 'microscopic' and individualized focus. It aims to change hearts and minds.

Using this criterion and Schweitzer's life and works, an *informal* scale of responsibility and prioritization can be discerned. Nevertheless, the taking of life is never justifiable in the sense that consequentialism presents its logic, for the same action may

serve or act against the actualization of the Reverence for Life ethic at different times or in different challenges to human conscience and rationalized egotism. Moreover, all decisions that take life incur a debt—always. Only those actions that serve to redress suffering or promote the Reverence for Life ethic itself can serve as partial payment in a never-ending atonement of lifelong devotion. Schweitzer himself stopped eating meat in the last few years of his life because he felt that he was no longer giving back enough to justify the death of a sentient animal merely to satisfy his palate. He ate lentil soup instead (Brabazon 2000, p.495).

6. Impracticability and Inspiration

As mentioned above, Schweitzer was opposed to any form of consequentialism for *personal* morality; political decision making will be discussed in the next chapter. Reverence for Life is unapologetically deontological—which is to say, it supports an absolute ethic that refuses to make concessions to mitigating circumstances and special exceptions. Regardless of the situation, Schweitzer points a finger at us and charges that ‘*we are responsible for the lives around us.*’ This is the reason why academics have found Reverence for Life utterly unworkable and unrealistic.

This tension between a conclusion that demands moral agents to honour each and every life irrespective of species and the seeming impossibility of this task is not something overlooked by Schweitzer. As he points out in his 1936 article entitled “The Ethics of Reverence for Life” (p.130), this is the whole aim of his philosophy:

An absolute ethic calls for the creating of perfection in this life. It cannot be achieved; but that fact does not really matter. In this sense reverence for life is an absolute ethic. It does not lay down specific

rules for each possible situation. It simply tells us that we are responsible for the lives about us.

Schweitzer believed that an absolute ethic is needed to keep people and society forever striving for new levels of justice and social progress. The practical considerations of life will always, by the same logic, leave us always falling short of that ideal, never reaching that infinitely receding horizon of perfection. But rather than merely accumulating guilt over which people have no power to atone as has been alleged, the absolute ethic instead becomes the very engine that drives Ethical Mysticism.

Schweitzer believed that the ‘microscopic’ focus on individual and particular life must never be lost in an ethical calculus of larger goods and lesser evils. The tension here is preserved and accentuated by Schweitzer, intentionally so. On one hand, the role of guilt (that is to say, accumulating personal debt) becomes a necessary safeguard against those looking to offhandedly justify or tolerate evil. Schweitzer considered the greatest evil of all an excuse for necessary evils because “the good conscience is the work of the devil” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.318). It is an easy matter to come up with some kind of convenient story to pretend that a self-serving decision is morally acceptable for ‘the greatest number’ or ‘in the long run’ when in reality it is all pretence justifying one’s exclusionary and selfish behaviour. Consequentialist logic can be dangerous. Only an absolute ethic can defeat the incipient evil hiding in the human spirit.

Schweitzer also knew that only the power of example manifested in *individual acts* of compassion and under this deontological ethic could have a chance to inspire others. As Schweitzer himself said, “Do something wonderful, people may imitate it” (Cordero 2007, p.131).⁴³ The Reverence for Life ethic was intended to be actualized precisely in this way. An opportunity exists for someone to influence the moral character

of another person through the example—in a sense, it allows something latent to emerge in the witness, and it gives them permission to behave likewise.⁴⁴ A person can thereby recruit additional moral agents to their cause. This is something he had become aware of from a life-shaping event in Schweitzer's childhood.

The incident was re-enacted for the Academy Award winning 1957 documentary by directors Jerome Hill and Erica Anderson entitled "Albert Schweitzer." In the scene, Schweitzer recalls that as a seven or eight-year-old child, an older boy had recruited him to shoot stones at birds from slingshots. Despite his conscience, and "in obedience to his nod of command," he took aim with him (*Memoirs of Childhood and Youth*, p.40). But just then Church bells rang out, and the young Schweitzer regained his conviction and chased the birds away to save them from the other boy. An echo of this event appears in a key passage of his autobiography.

When considering the future of humankind, he writes: "If men can be found who revolt against the spirit of thoughtlessness, and who are personalities sound enough and profound enough to let the ideals of ethical progress *radiate from them as a force*, there will start an activity of the spirit which will be strong enough to evoke a new mental and spiritual disposition in mankind" (emphasis added; *Out of My Life and Thought*, p.241). But Schweitzer was far too humble to present himself as such a figure. "I would fain prove myself worthy. How much of the work which I planned and have in mind shall I be able to complete?" (p.242). Yet perhaps history may show that his life and works were indeed profound, and that he did in fact help evoke a new mental and spiritual disposition in humankind—albeit yet burgeoning, but which may still come to greater fruition.

Today we would call this social phenomenon a dynamic within evolutionary psychology, a carryover as Nietzsche would say from humankind's 'herd mentality'.

Simply stated, leaders attract followers. This dynamic exists beneficently in the social movements inspired by Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., both of whom led by example in the face of active persecution. This dynamic also exists in the ‘bandwagon effect’ of politics as well as in ‘contagious’ crowd violence that leads to riots.

As a child, Schweitzer saw the power of this himself. An echo of this event may have played a role in his decision to impulsively rise and defend the weaverbird hatchlings from hungry hawks. Ethical conviction takes its strength from a deep subjectivity since compassion *is* psychological and the impulse to act comes from a pre-rational reaction to suffering. This is both a strength and potential flaw in such an ethic. There is an obvious danger that impassioned altruism may miss the ‘big picture’ and result in a greater harm—let’s say for example if the hawks in question were an endangered species and the weaverbirds were over-populated, depleting their resource base and collectively facing starvation. He does however leave a door open to deal with these larger considerations.

Schweitzer promoted an elemental nature philosophy through Reverence for Life that intentionally left the overall vision of its manifestation to be interpreted for situation-specific cultural and historical contexts. Therefore, it does allow for a specific vision toward which altruistic impulses may be directed, such as the aforementioned Land Ethic of Aldo Leopold (a subject to be discussed in the final chapter). Even so, Schweitzer considered the microscopic focus on individual life necessary for keeping such larger visions from obscuring the consequences to individual lives from the necessary trade-offs. Notwithstanding, as will be detailed in the final chapter, he did allow for the necessary work to be done regardless. He is just exceptionally heavy-handed in lording this sense of debt [*Schuld*] over us for each and every sacrifice of a living being.

7. The Charge of Sentimentality

Karl Barth (1886-1968) is without a doubt *the* most important historical figure to have ever examined Schweitzer's work, and yet his criticisms and commentary for the most part has been overlooked in the subsequent scholarship. While the aim of the following discussion is to examine the charge of sentimentality, it will also allow us to remedy this huge oversight in scholarship and give us one more chance to revisit the allegation that Reverence for Life is merely theological ethics disguised as philosophy. These concerns, which were introduced above in criticism two, can be brought to a full conclusion now that the related problems of mysticism, anthropocentrism, guilt mongering and impracticability have been addressed. The following brief discussion on the difference between theological ethics and Reverence for Life, while fascinating in its own right, is also needed to give context and to set the stage for Barth's final determination as to whether Schweitzer's work can be dismissed as errant sentimentality.

Barth took up the question of Schweitzer's Reverence for Life ethic in his *Church Dogmatics*. From the onset Barth indicates an irreconcilable problem he has with his fellow Protestant. He declares that the starting place for theological ethics cannot be what Schweitzer sets forth, because "where Schweitzer places life we see the command of God" (p.324). Not only is Schweitzer's theological liberalism and views on the historical Jesus opposed to Barth's own Christology that upholds more traditional perspectives on divine revelation, but Schweitzer's Reverence for Life project develops from philosophical meditations on the mystery of life—not the Gospels. Nevertheless, Barth is still willing to consider Schweitzer's Reverence for Life ethic seriously. His comments and criticisms are revealing.

Barth begins by indicating that, “we shall have to remember that with human life as our real problem, we must take seriously the problem of animals (and a certain sense even of plants) as a marginal problem for ethics” (p.333). Barth writes that people can indeed seriously err before the eyes of God with respect to the improper treatment of non-human life. He even recognized that humankind could ruin the global environment in that “... there is so much senseless waste and destruction from which a reverent humanity should refrain in this sphere and of which it has obviously been guilty to its own destruction” (p.351). So too, in immediate sense of ethics, Barth writes that it is possible to “murder an animal” if the killing is not performed with a reverential attitude toward God (p.355). He further warns that killing an animal “is at least very similar to homicide” and, because of this, humankind’s lordship of dominion over nature comes with the terrible knowledge that each and every killing is the “annihilation ... of a single being, a unique creature existing in an individuality which we cannot fathom but also cannot deny” (p.352). This special relationship between humankind and animal life is underscored with exceptionally stark language: “Whenever man exercises his lordship over the animal, and especially across every hunting lodge, abattoir and vivisection chamber, there should be written in letters of fire the words of St. Paul in [Romans 8:18] ... concerning the ‘earnest expectation’ [*apokaradokia*] of the creature – for what? – for the ‘manifestation of the children of God,’ and therefore for the liberation of those who now keep them imprisoned and even dispatch them from life to death” (p.355).

These are quite the amazing declarations, and at first glance would seem to put him on the very same page as Schweitzer. But the argumentation substantiating these points comes from a very different set of premises and this is where his criticisms of Schweitzer come into play. They all come down to a simple problem. Put simply, Barth

is a theologian and he attacks Schweitzer for not establishing his ethics likewise. In Barth's opinion, Schweitzer and all those who likewise advocate a naturalistic ethic are 'tyrannically' elevating life as it is revealed in creation to become "the actual ethical lord, teacher and master of man" (p.326). This is not acceptable to Barth for several reasons. For one thing, "the Word of God is addressed to man ... [and] man is not addressed concerning animal and vegetable life, nor life in general, but concerning his own human life" (p.323f.). Nevertheless, the human being does not exist independently from other people. Rather, "man's creaturely existence as such is not his [own] property; it is a loan ... in the broadest sense it is meant for the service of God" (p.327). And this service is to be expressed in light of the fact that "man is determined for fellowship" with others (p.332) because "as God addresses man, He also speaks to him through the solidarity which exists between him and other men" (p.331). In this sense and this sense only that human actions toward non-human life become a subject for theological ethics. People are charged with the duties to the plant and animal world because of humankind's overall communitarian responsibility to other persons in their greater service to God. While plants and animals are morally considerable beings because of this circumstantial relationship, religious reverence must only be directed toward the Creator and *never* at His creations (Romans 1:25).

Schweitzer in contrast does consider each and every life *intrinsically* morally considerable and not because it is circumstantially related to human affairs—and he actually *reverences* this life, not the Creator. This is a direct contravention of the Scriptural prohibition in Romans 1:25. Plainly enough this is not a Christian theological argument like the one set forth by Barth, not even close. And while Barth agrees with Schweitzer that non-human life is indeed a serious ethical consideration, he cannot join

with him in reverencing life as such. Rather, Barth says the proper disposition is a “respect for life” and names the subtitle to this Section (§55) of *Church Dogmatics* thusly to both honour Schweitzer and critique his central thought with this turn of phrase.

Nevertheless, Barth’s deep respect for Schweitzer still leads him come to his defence against the charge of excessive sentimentality and the alleged impracticability of his Reverence for Life ethic (p.349). The key passage reads as follows:

We certainly cannot dismiss it [Reverence for Life] as ‘sentimental.’

Nor may we take the easy course of questioning the practicability of the instructions given, let alone the wider consequences and applications.

The directness of the insight and feeling revealed (not unlike those of Francis of Assisi), and the constraint expressed, are stronger than such criticism. Those who can only smile at this point are themselves subjects for tears.

Barth goes on to recount a story of a German theologian during the First World War who felt compelled to travel whenever he could to a certain weir near Bamberg to rescue snails that would be caught in it and perish. Barth writes that even in this “bizarre action” there was also sublime nobility present (p.350). As for the central question of what demands can non-human life place on humanity to redress its suffering, Barth concludes, “it may well be insolvable and barely tangible, but it is genuine and cannot be ignored” (p.350). Barth insists Reverence for Life cannot be discredited as errant sentimentality even though its highest ideals may seem overly romantic and impracticable. While Schweitzer’s moral compass may not point in a direction that many willingly concede is a necessity of thought, it does indeed point truly.

Final Assessment

Albert Schweitzer is much maligned as a philosopher today, unfairly so. His silence made him an easy target over the years and the accumulating misunderstanding, criticisms and personal slanders became a snowballing synergy of self-referential condemnation. In a sense, Schweitzer shares a small part of the blame here—silence can be misread and his works were not specifically written with the technicality an academic audience needed in order to be able to recognize it as true philosophy. Because of this, it was an easy matter for academia to push it aside as merely a collection of moral truisms and general reflections about life and society. Reverence for Life has not been seen as something workable into a true system of ethics, let alone to actually become a new philosophy for civilization itself.

Without the needed validation from academic philosophers, what was left of Schweitzer's legacy is only the life example of the man himself. Schweitzer accomplished much, but he was only one man. His legacy is impressive and the humanitarian missions he inspired continue to make a difference here and there. But that is all. In academia, Schweitzer's ethics have been unfairly dismissed as overly sentimental and philosophically muddled. But a careful reading of his work, sketched out here, reveals all these criticisms to be unfounded. His philosophy may appear unsystematized in individual publications and projects with particular aims, but his thought *is* systematic when examined across the entire corpus of his written works.

Schweitzer had engaged in a critical deconstruction of prior philosophical systems to look for those elements that could be recovered for a new philosophy of civilization. The chapters up to this point have shown that this is exactly what he did, and those elements were synthesized into a unique philosophical articulation as a new foundation

for ethics. Promoting the fullest development for all life is what he sets before each rational moral agent as their duty. This holds true for both furthering one's own the life and for the other life in the natural world too—individually, collectively and even evolutionarily.

The question of how Schweitzer can single out humans in an ethical system based on naturalism comes from the fact that people possess the unique combination of a Cartesian self-aware 'ego' and a cosmological will-to-live.⁴⁵ In human beings, the cosmological constant of the will-to-live becomes entwined with the Cartesian ego to form the core of their rational consciousness. This allows humans to become moral agents in a world otherwise deterministically controlled by instincts and natural laws. This then addresses the first set of criticisms that Reverence for Life fails as philosophy. Schweitzer's thought is more profound than he has thus far been given credit for in academia.

The grounding for his Ethical Mysticism came through establishing the elemental moral of compassion as the linkage between philosophy and religion. As discussed in response to criticism two, Schweitzer saw Christianity through the lens of Schopenhauer's philosophy. This is how he made his faith intelligible to his scientifically trained mind. And because of this, it is not correct to say that Schweitzer has disguised Christianity (or any other religion) as his philosophy, but rather that his philosophy extends into mysticism where it connects to the ethic of the historical Jesus. In context of his own personal religious outlook, somewhere in the undefined middle ground between philosophy and religion, in a place where all deep thought becomes mystical, Schweitzer found an understanding of Jesus that allowed Christianity to coexist with philosophy and natural science. For Schweitzer, mysticism is the flower of philosophy and devotion to an

ethic of altruism is its cherished fruit—that fruit can be plucked and shared within any culture or religion. It was not something only meant to be palatable for Christian tastes, but a philosophy for *all* of civilization.

But one final criticism has not been addressed yet. Can Reverence for Life support a social ethic in context of the practical governance needed in civil society?

This is the subject of final chapter.

Chapter Six

A Philosophy of Civilization

This investigation necessarily had to proceed through several interrelated controversies surrounding Schweitzer's Reverence for Life ethic. These included the supposed philosophical shortcomings, its anthropocentrism, the so-called guilt mongering, the apparent inapplicability of its absolute demands, and the inherent sentimentality of compassion. Also examined was the subject of the claimed inseparability of Christianity from the Reverence for Life ethic. It has been shown that Reverence for Life begins as an elemental nature philosophy, not theology, and that only Ethical Mysticism can become a religious worldview. Reverence for Life is mystical, yes. But it is not something limited to *just* Christians. Rather, he himself declared that, "My appeal is to thinking men and women whom I wish to provoke to elemental thought about these questions of existence which occur to the mind of every human being" (*Out of My Life and Thought*, p.199). This was a philosophy for everyone. Yet one last subject from the set of criticisms leveled against him still needs to be addressed. Schweitzer's Reverence for Life philosophy must now be investigated in relation to its feasibility for practical governance in civil society.

We will begin by taking note of the comments by the acclaimed biographer of Schweitzer's life, James Brabazon (2002). In reflecting on the state of the world in this new century, he wrote that if Schweitzer were alive today he would say these words to us: "Very sorry, but I told you so" (p.5). Schweitzer was deeply concerned about the development of ethical personhood in the face "enormous industrial organizations" and other threats to individuality such as nationalism, fascism, and fundamentalist religion

(p.5f.). In Brabazon's opinion, these economic institutions are now more dangerous to humanity than Hitler and Stalin ever were (p.11). A sensational claim to be sure. He supports it by pointing out that crushing and dehumanizing economic realities are now silently reducing countless millions to destitution and starvation, all the while wild nature is being erased from the face of the earth by corporations chasing after that last dollar for the bottom line as the demoralized billions simply sigh in resignation saying, "that is just the way it is." This, Brabazon writes, is what Reverence for Life sought to oppose. Its power lies in the fact that "it takes away our excuses" for doing nothing (p.15). Change can only arise from individuals with strong ethical character, and only then will the institutions that collectively control our lives be reformed. "That is why reverence for life is just as important now as when Schweitzer first spoke it—and always will be. The difference is that now the soil is far more fertile" (p.21). At the turn of the new century Brabazon believes that the world is finally ready to hear what Schweitzer had to say.

While the aim of this dissertation has been to examine a single question relating the philosophical debt Schweitzer owes to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in the development of his Reverence for Life ethic, the subject of his continuing relevance today can be explored when redressing the last remaining criticism concerning practical governance. This is where Brabazon's comments will be revealed to be prescient and quite correct. Even so, it has to be kept in mind that Schweitzer only provided a few direct references to these particular issues. Nevertheless, his commentary together with the ethical principles contained in his philosophy can be brought forward and compared to other thinkers with whom he shares similar concerns. Such a comparison will allow for Schweitzer's pioneering work to be appreciated in its own right and at the same time reveal the enormous contributions he can continue to make today. In part, this comes

about through a certain complementarity his elemental nature philosophy can add to the proposals for practical governance in the works of such important figures as Aldo Leopold, Colin A.M. Duncan, and Peter G. Brown.

As previously mentioned, the final two volumes of Schweitzer's great work, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, were never completed. Part of the reason why was because it was not necessary. At the heart of *Reverence for Life* is an elemental nature philosophy that was always intended by Schweitzer to provide the seeds of thought to be developed by those 'thinking men and women' for particular cultures and times. His project, in a sense, would have been self-defeating he created something that could *only* have found its audience with early twentieth century European sensibilities. As a true philosophy of civilization, he needed to reach beyond the confines of his own worldview to find those elemental truths that were unchanging in human history. From this solid foundation for his philosophy, Schweitzer wanted the elemental truths of *Reverence for Life* developed by other thinkers for places, times and contexts he could not anticipate. The possibilities for its expression in terms of practical governance are therefore nearly endless. Discussion however will be limited to the aforementioned three writers with whom Schweitzer shares particular resonance.

I will begin with Aldo Leopold whose own system of ethics mirrors Schweitzer's work in many ways. Curiously, there is no evidence that they ever read each other's writings—they appear to have developed their ethical systems independently of one another. This in part explains certain divergences in their otherwise remarkably similar ethical worldview. For example, Leopold often took the macroscopic view of life by focusing on the 'health' of entire interdependent biotic community. Schweitzer on the other hand tended to focus on the wellbeing of individual life. While many commentators

allege their systems are incompatible for this very reason, my investigation will reveal that this is not the case. There is a natural complementarity here between Schweitzer's work and that of Leopold, and their systems are more nuanced than each sometimes is given credit for. Stated another way, there is not necessarily *always* a stark dualistic opposition between the good of the individual and long term good for the biotic community. But more than that, a harmonization is also possible such that the works of Schweitzer and Leopold can come together to produce a more complete environmental ethic than either alone.

The investigation will then turn to the economic commentary of Colin Duncan. His work explores the question of how to develop strong local economies in balance with their adjoining agricultural and ecological systems. The focus here is not the ethical dimensions of human activity in relation to nonhuman life. Rather, it is problem of redressing the damage to the very 'personhood' of those trapped in dehumanizing economic relationships such as those described by Brabazon at the beginning of this chapter. Duncan's commentary will allow us to return to the central subject in Chapter 1 of my investigation: ethical personhood in economic society. Brabazon was certainly correct in indentifying the centrality of this idea in Schweitzer's philosophy, and Duncan reveals one way how this can be achieved in terms of practical governance. His emphasis on ecologically sustainable agricultural communities united under a local currency reveals a potentially powerful solution to reconnect human-to-human reciprocity in modern economic relations, at least in certain circumstances. Duncan's work can add an important practical dimension to the largely theoretical work of Schweitzer and, to some extent, even for Leopold too.

But even then a complete picture of Schweitzer's thoughts on practical governance is still incomplete. This is why the discussion will then turn to a set of commentaries from Peter Brown. He specifically examined the relevance of Schweitzer's ethics, not only in terms of local governance, but also for the national and international institutions that collectively determine the human relationship with the biosphere. In this modern age of increasing globalization, it is not possible to *only* look at local subsistence and sustainability as an answer to environmental problems. For this reason, Brown offers practical recommendations for replacing and reforming those multinational economic and global governance institutions that are counterproductively disrupting and degrading the very life-sustaining capacity of biosphere—just as Brabazon described.

The world needs institutional reform, and this can only come about through new economic conceptualizations and governance mechanisms that ensure both long-term sustainability and redress past ecological harms. There is only one biosphere and all life is interdependent through it. This needs to become, to use Brown's expression, a planetary 'commonwealth of life' designed for the collective survival of all species. His work will allow us to complete the picture of how exactly Schweitzer's elemental nature philosophy can indeed become practical and effective for civil society. With this overview in mind, we will now begin with an in-depth look at Leopold's Land Ethic before returning to the commentaries of Duncan and Brown.

Schweitzer and Aldo Leopold

The great American wildlife ecologist Aldo Leopold would not be considered as a philosopher in the strict academic sense. Rather, he was a man of uncommon wisdom and ethical vision who, through his scientific training and a lifetime of work in the applied ecological sciences, saw what type of changes that needed to take place for true

environmental sustainability to take place. However, and quite regrettably, many in the domain of philosophy look down on the field of ‘applied ethics’ and this is doubly true for an applied discipline based in scientific empiricism. Academic philosophers instead tend to prefer the ‘pure theory’ of philosophical phenomenology, hermeneutics, existentialism, post-structuralism, social construction theory, or any of the other erudite and specialized theories in favour today. It is for this very reason Callicott (1993) notes that academic philosophers have considered Leopold’s Land Ethic as being, at one extreme, merely incoherent—and at the other, “dangerous nonsense” (p.387).

But by the same token, others in academia would consider his empirical sensibilities Leopold’s foremost virtue since he is not so esoteric as to prevent wide appeal. Even so, some defenders still concede that as a philosophy it is “little more than a noble, but naive, moral plea, altogether lacking a supporting theoretical framework” (p.387). The central problem remains that Leopold does not address those basic philosophical problems of ‘ontological’ existence, Kantian sensory perception, and an accompanying theory of knowledge—which are all subjects that Schweitzer *did* address. This is the first area of where a complementarity can be identified between the two thinkers. Schweitzer wanted his work to be developed further by other thinkers for particular times and places. It is therefore possible to use the writings of Schweitzer to add that missing philosophical dimension needed by academic philosophers to recognize Leopold as something other than merely someone writing about the ‘practical wisdom’ of conservation. This potential relationship of complementarity, however, needs further justification than just merely saying it is there. And so this investigation will now turn a deeper look at both thinkers and their ethical systems.

Leopold is mostly known as the author of a set of nature essays and conservation commentaries entitled *The Sand County Almanac*. Schweitzer as a trained philosopher focused instead on the foundational problems concerning a theory of knowledge (epistemology) and existence (ontology). It is also the case that Schweitzer's primary works predate the modern environmental movement. It would therefore seem at first glance that the two writers were not really focused on the same kind of problems. Yet this is not the case. Leopold's writings actually extend to virtually every area where humankind's relationship to the earth is manifested—from economics, to education, religion and even the deeper spiritual appreciation of nature, subjects that Schweitzer also addressed. In addition, local sustainability and conservation were issues that Schweitzer was concerned about as well, even though this is not reflected in his written works. For this reason, and as a useful aside, this discussion will also take a moment to reveal the depth of Schweitzer's ecological consciousness and sensitivity to conservation. Up until this point Schweitzer has only been shown to be an academic philosopher. But he was much more than that. Just like Leopold, he was very much focused on the practical expressions of his theories in real-world ecological and social contexts.

Schweitzer's Land Ethic

Mougin and Mougin (2007) report that when building his hospital, Schweitzer chose to use local building materials such as timber rather than the concrete and bricks available from the colonial authorities (p.21). One reason for this was his personal economic philosophy of self-sufficiency. He also considered the superior attributes of the local materials in terms of heat dissipation, and wanted to give recovering patients a sense of familiarity in that time of stress by replicating aspects of local dwellings (p.21f.). Not only that, Schweitzer designed the facilities to have innovative passive solar architecture.

He even created a natural filtration water treatment system because he did not want to become dependent on expensive chemicals available from the colonial stores (p.22). Local economic and ecological sustainability was paramount. In all this it must be recalled that Schweitzer was doing such ‘green design’ techniques decades before environmentalism became a buzzword. For him it was merely Reverence for Life expressed in a real-world economic scenario. It was also a pedagogy aimed at moral lessons concerning his philosophy. This is perhaps most clear in the design of his hospital garden.

Local swidden agricultural practice was to ‘slash and burn’ parts of the surrounding rainforest, intensively harvest crops on that cleared land until the soil was exhausted, and then move on to another section of jungle (p.20). With a low population and nearly endless jungle around each village, there was no need for conservation. Yet Schweitzer decided against this practice. He only cleared and terraced a few hectares near the hospital grounds next to the river. Half the land would be cultivated each year, while the other half would be inundated by the river during the rainy season; this replenished the soil with river sediments—just as what happens with the agricultural lands maintained by Nile floods (p.20). Schweitzer also composted food wastes and animal manure to further improve soil productivity in the garden and the nearby orchards (p.20). One aim of this was to showcase his economic philosophy of self-sufficiency to the local people. Schweitzer “intended to set good examples for the community” by not destroying plants and trees unnecessarily (p.20).

Claudine and Damien Mougín are the current directors of Schweitzer’s hospital, and they have brought back these facilities and practices. Twelve nursing stations have also been opened to extend service further into the surround areas, each with “adjoining

gardens to promote market gardening techniques” as part of their greater communitarian commitment for the wellbeing of the Gabonese (p.21). The directors are concerned, just as Schweitzer was, that local soil would become depleted by traditional agricultural techniques and that the people would become “more dependent on foreign food products” as a result (p.21). Mougin and Mougin are worried about malnourishment caused by an improper diet from foreign ‘junk foods’ since “undernourished children [are] arriving at the hospital in an area where water, land, and sunshine are plentiful” just as Schweitzer had seen in his day (p.21). His desire to promote a sustainable subsistence economy for Gabon in harmony with regional ecological systems is continuing today at a local scale. Local sustainability is a subject that is attracting considerable attention in environmental ethics, and will be revisited again when the discussion moves on to the views of Colin Duncan and Peter Brown in a moment.

Schweitzer in relation to Leopold

Schweitzer in many ways foreshadowed the environmental ethicist Aldo Leopold, whose own Land Ethic was developed in response to wasteful land use patterns he observed in North America. While meagre in comparison to the great essays of Leopold, Schweitzer was indeed concerned about long-term ecological sustainability and teaching these virtues to the communities living on that land. Schweitzer even went as far as paying locals to bring orphaned animals found in the jungle to him so that they could be raised under his veterinary care and returned to the wild—and he would occasionally write about it with unbridled joy (*The Ethics of Reverence for Life*, p.238f.). Teaching ecological consciousness was indeed part of his greater ethical worldview; there is a common connection here with Leopold on the practical governance of environmental resources within a worldview that includes the local biotic community.

Leopold's nature writings are hailed as being among the most beautiful American prose on this subject ever created, easily the equal to the works of Henry David Thoreau and John Muir. For those who have read *The Sand County Almanac* know the purity and passion of his expression, for those who haven't read it should. His book is an unquestioned masterpiece of its genre. Leopold begins with anecdotal stories from his own experience of working with the land in one year, taking the reader from the cold snows of January month by month to the December winter once again. The stories each contain a simple moral lesson about environmental history, or are about the lives of animals, or simply portray the breathtaking beauty and harmony of nature. His book appeals throughout to age-old wisdom about living in ecological reciprocity with the local biotic community. The book in its final edited form (it was published posthumously) also includes a series of philosophically minded essays about the human relationship to nature. It is here where his famous land ethic is presented to the reader, and it is given clearly and simply: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (p.262).

Readers will instantly recognize a very similar axiomatic principle in Schweitzer's own ethic: "evil is what annihilates, hampers, or hinders life ... goodness, by the same token, is the saving or helping of life, the enabling of whatever life I can to attain its highest development" (The Ethics of Reverence for Life, p.230). The difference between the two remarkably similar adages is that Leopold focuses on the collective biotic community while Schweitzer first considers the actions that affect particular life. Some such as Callicott claim that for this reason Reverence for Life "provides no possibility whatever for the moral consideration of wholes—of threatened *populations* of animals and plants, or of endemic, rare, or endangered *species*, or of biotic *communities*, or most

expansively, of the *biosphere* in its totality” (his emphasis; Callicott 1987, p.391, see also Callicott 1986, p.250). Not so. As was detailed in the last chapter, Schweitzer’s philosophy combines an absolute ethic with a debt [*Schuld*] based ethical consciousness for those personal decisions that fail to live up to that standard.

Accordingly, it is permissible in Schweitzer’s system to eat meat, shoot birds, chop down trees, kill harmful bacteria, or do any of the other ethical trade-offs that people must to do to live truly moral lives. He only asks that people bring a conscious awareness of the repercussions of their actions on each and every living being—and take that debt [*Schuld*] awareness and turn it into a deepened sincerity to repay those trade-offs through good actions aimed at promoting life in others. Schweitzer’s own life decisions in the construction and operation of his hospital show that he himself made such trade-offs between clearing the minimum amount of jungle in order to provide a greater good for the nearby human and biotic community through his medical and veterinary care. This was his ethical *Schuld* repayment consciousness in action. As such, Reverence for Life does expand from an individualist focus to include greater conscientious action directed at the betterment of the whole biotic community, and potentially even for the biosphere in its entirety too. Therefore, Reverence for Life can indeed support Leopold’s Land Ethic.

By the same measure, and despite what uncharitable academic philosophers allege, Leopold’s ethic is also much more substantial than he is given credit for. Leopold borrowed a key philosophical principle from the American pragmatist Arthur Twining Hadley (1856-1930) to ground his Land Ethic (Norton 2003, p.15). In an essay from 1923, Leopold revealed his debt to him with the following words: “How happy a definition is that one of Hadley’s which states, ‘Truth is that which prevails in the long run’!” (*The River of the Mother of God*, p.96).⁴⁶ What he is doing here is quite profound

and not obvious at first glance. In a most innovative way, Leopold uses Hadley's principle as an *empirical* test for any ecological philosophy. Specifically, Leopold adopts those cultural beliefs that have allowed earlier societies to survive in particular geographical regions; these cultural truths have been determined by this empirical measure to be verifiable *Truth*. It is for this reason that Leopold cites the ecological wisdom of Isaiah and Ezekiel in his Land Ethic, and further why he wrote an entire essay entitled "The Forestry of the Prophets" about ecological awareness in the Hebrew Bible (p.71-77).⁴⁷ The ancient Hebrews had acquired empirically verifiable, culturally defined ecological *Truth* that helped them survive as a viable community. Leopold combined science, religion and philosophy in such a way that he arrived at something remarkably similar to one aspect of Schweitzer's own project. As it will be recalled from Chapters 3 and 4, Schweitzer took Nietzsche's idea that a culturally defined truth must be evaluated on the basis of whether or not it is ultimately life-affirming and correlated to the best available empirical science. This is where its *Truth* was to be ascertained. For both writers, a cultural truth must be based on, but not limited to, scientific findings.

The correspondences with Schweitzer run even deeper if we consider the following words from Leopold (emphases added; *The River of the Mother of God*, p.97):

And if there be, indeed, a special nobility inherent in the human race—a special cosmic value, distinctive from and *superior* to all other life—by what token shall it be manifest? By a society decently respectful of its own *and all other life*, capable of inhabiting the earth without defiling it? ... [or as one that unthinkingly destroyed other species] and thereby exterminated itself?

Leopold echoes Schweitzer's anthropocentrism discussed in the last chapter. Schweitzer, just as Leopold does, presents humanity as the thinking aspect of the biosphere and as the ones who must assure the collective and best common good for all. But it is an anthropocentrism of humility and stewardship, not exclusionary exploitation and unthinking domination. It is not an entitlement, but a responsibility.

One last commentary will be outlined here. Schweitzer in his absolute ethic refused to lay down rules for when ethical trade-offs can be made, or to tabulate the exact proportional repayments that have to be given in each case. He is not a consequentialist in that sense. How that personal sense of debt is to be repaid is quite subjective, but this is not a flaw in *Reverence for Life*. It is trust. Leopold's Land Ethic is similarly undefined and nonspecific in this respect. The reason why is exactly for the same reason as Schweitzer (*The River of the Mother of God*, p.337):

If the individual has a warm personal understanding of land, he will perceive of his own accord that it is something more than a breadbasket. He will see the land as a community of which he is only a member, albeit the dominant one. He will see the beauty, as well as the utility, of the whole, and know the two cannot be separated. We love (and make intelligent use of) what we have learned to understand. [...] Once you learn to read the land, I have no fear of what you will do to it, or with it. And I know many pleasant things it will do to you.

Schweitzer likewise declared that "it is not by receiving instruction about the agreement between [the] ethical and necessary, that a man makes progress in ethics, but only by coming to hear more and more plainly the voice of the ethical, by becoming ruled

more and more by the longing to preserve and promote life, and by becoming more and more obstinate in resistance to the necessity for destroying or injuring life” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.317). Like Leopold, Schweitzer believes and *trusts* that each individual “alone has to judge this issue, by letting himself be guided by a feeling of the highest possible responsibility towards other life” (p.317f.). Both writers aimed for changing hearts and minds, and then trusted people to act with true moral character.

It is not possible to fully reveal the potential synergy here between Schweitzer and Leopold. The task would take an entire book, if not several, to show the depth of their thought and how deep the correspondences go between them. This work must be left to other scholars. Since the aim of this dissertation is simply to show that Schweitzer is still relevant today, the discussion provided above can only contribute and point the way for others to carry this exciting work forward even further. An academically rigorous philosophy that fully accounts for the natural world apart from Cartesian perception has been the missing piece to Aldo Leopold the ‘standing’ he needed to be respected in this field. My dissertation has shown that such a theory of knowledge (epistemology) does exist in Schweitzer’s unique formulation of Schopenhauer’s and Nietzsche’s pioneering work. The way is now clear for scholars to look for new ways to combine the ethical systems of these two great figures.

Colin Duncan and Local Economies

One expression of Reverence for Life dealt with economic life. As discussed in Chapter 1, Schweitzer observed certain damaging consequences for the development of moral character emerging in modern market economies. He found that these dehumanizing changes were taking place not only in Europe but also in one of its African

colonies. One of his conclusions was that people were increasingly becoming dependent on industrialized ‘soulless’ institutions for subsistence when previously individual wellbeing had been provided through interdependent communitarianism. Another serious problem was that people in these societies were being overworked and driven to seek unthinking distraction. Little time and inclination was left for developing community relations, or for seeking after personal enrichment and strengthening ethical personhood. Schweitzer’s prescription to remedy this situation was not fully specified. But he does point to the need for society to provide for a more equitable distribution of wealth and to create a subsistence economy wherever possible in order for these community-building relationships to take place.

Colin Duncan (1996) very similarly engaged in a critique of political economy, but did so with the aim of finding ways to re-embed those human relationships in new ecologically sustainability communities. His research focuses on Kozo Uno (1897-1977), a Japanese economist who had come to the conclusions that modern economic relations denied people the opportunity to achieve full personhood (p.146f.). The problem is that, as Duncan explains, “workers have essentially no contact (except by the merest accident) with the eventual users of the goods they make ... This system thus implies a separation of labour from life, and *that* is fundamentally what renders it inhuman” (emphasis in original; p.148). Schweitzer came to the same conclusion about modern economic life (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.87):

The type of man who once cultivated his own bit of land becomes a worker who tends a machine in a factory; manual workers and independent trades-people become [institutionalized] employees. They lose the elementary freedom of the man who lives in his own house and

finds himself in immediate connection with Mother Earth. [...] The conditions of their existence are therefore unnatural.

Duncan also identifies agricultural life as the fundamental unit of historical social organization. He does not call for the abandonment of modern life for a return to rural community origins. Rather, the relationship typified by those more immediate settings can be re-imagined and recreated today in new ways. He begins by widening the definitions used: “By the term ‘agricultural’ I mean here something broader than field-produced, more like ‘life-produced.’ so as to include wood fish, wool, etc., not just vegetation edible by humans” (p.177). The entirety of rural life and the economic exchanges that take place can then be brought under this concept. It is not just the farmer, but the weaver, the village store owner, the baker, the artisan, and everyone else in the local town or village. Duncan then moves to describe ways for “federating agricultural communities with urban areas” under special exchange and taxing arrangements (p.176). The aim of this rural/urban federation would be to allow ‘the best of both worlds’ and to collectively add to the quality of life for all. For example, he writes, “At this point the farmers would have a much-expanded and steady market on which to base expanded production plans. Presumably the farm communities would be happy to spend their credits with city-dwellers who were able to supply specialized services such as education, medicine, music, etc.” (p.177).

The basis upon which these local rural economic communities can operate and be federated with urban centers would be through a new concept of currency: the Local Exchange Trading System (LETS). Prototypes of such a local currency system have already been established, including on Vancouver Island (p.171). The LETS is based on the concept of generalized trading for services and goods; the reciprocity here is not

limited to specific individuals and trade agreements, but circulated throughout the entire community (p.171):

In contrast to barter, however, the two parties need not wait until they can do a reciprocal deal with each other. The vendor may spend the credit (or part of it) with any other person or firm willing to trade under the system. Likewise the purchase may pay off the debt by performing some service or selling some good to some other party. At all times the system is in a state of perfect monetary stability. The absolute value of the money supply necessarily remains zero.

What are the advantages of such a system? For one it is not based on a loaned-debt concept of money under a Federal Reserve type system that obligates repayment at interest. This often leads to obligatory economic expansion into the natural world to find new sources of wealth to repay those loans—such as those activities Brabazon described at the beginning of this chapter. Secondly, it is *one* way in which to envision Leopold's Land Ethic being translated into a functioning economic system in harmony with local agricultural means. But the greatest advantage however, according to Duncan, is that such a system would honour “the cultural basis of personality” (p.179). Capitalism, as it is manifested in the world today cannot do this, and moreover it stands against the manifestation of “full personhood” for people trapped on the treadmills of debt and consumerism (p.179). In addition, the LETS system has “a liberating effect on the self-esteem of many individuals who indeed have nothing of value to offer from the perspective of the conventional, ‘outside’ economy” (p.171).

Restoring the capacity for human development through self-chosen ‘personhood’ in modern economic life was Schweitzer's foremost concern. He saw this as a root cause

of the crisis in civilization at the beginning of the twentieth century. However he did not offer specific recommendation to accomplish this in terms of its civil expression and for practical governance—which is something Colin Duncan does. He argues that the redress for economically disconnected human relations and for protecting bioregional cultural carrying capacity is through “ecologically grounded, strong, local economies” (p.181). The key here is to re-establish “contact with life” through those types of economic relations (including but limited to agriculture) that facilitate inter-personal reciprocity within the community *and* the local ecology (p.177, p.181). It is one way, but not the only way, to make both Schweitzer’s and Leopold’s vision an economic reality in the twenty-first century.

Peter Brown and the Commonwealth of Life

In contrast to the previous two writers with whom Schweitzer’s work has certain resonances, the work of Peter Brown on the other hand is directly inspired by Schweitzer, among others. His numerous articles and books have sought to carry forward Schweitzer’s Reverence for Life ethic in light of modern environmental problems—and moreover, to specify those exact political, legal and economic mechanisms and institutions needed to make his ideas a social reality. While it was remarked that several dissertations could be devoted to revealing the incredible potential for synergy between Schweitzer and Leopold or Duncan, this is easily doubly the case with the works of Peter Brown. The summary here will therefore have to be kept very brief and certainly not comprehensive with respect to the correspondences between their works. What the following discussion will instead seek to do is reveal how the specific findings of this dissertation engage certain aspects of Brown’s works, and to show where future developments can be made with respect to the same.

Peter Brown (2008) says he takes Reverence for Life “as foundational but unfinished, and I propose to build upon it a capstone concept: *the commonwealth of life*” (his emphasis: p.168). He begins by noting the centrality of the Golden Rule as it is reflected in Schweitzer’s works. At the heart of the Golden Rule is the commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself. For Schweitzer, the elemental philosophical truth here is the recognition of the will-to-live existing equally in the other life; he couples this truth with the virtue ethic of living one’s life with sincerity to honour that other life to the best of one’s abilities. However, as previously argued, Schweitzer’s claims are not limited to *just* Christianity. Brown and his co-author Geoffrey Garver (2009) in extending the spirit of Schweitzer’s ethic describe it this way: “Whatever traditions may inform individual practice, a basic framework of understanding can gather all people in the same ‘communion’ ... within the commonwealth of life, to which is due the same respect and *reverence* that we value ourselves” (emphasis added; p.48, see also p.45). Naturally, this is in complete keeping with Schweitzer’s own liberal views on religion as discussed on pages 95 and 96 in Chapter 4.

Peter Brown then takes this principle from Schweitzer and looks for ways to make it a social reality. This comes about firstly through a reaffirmation of three basic human rights within society: a right to protection from bodily harm, a right to free association in religion and political affiliations, and a right to sustenance (Brown 2008, p.20). But this is just the start. The tripartite rights are the precursors for a ‘human capabilities’ development paradigm (originally developed by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen) that recognizes real human personhood includes activities of “doing, being, and relating” not adequately reflected in mainstream economic theory (p.16). In proposing this, Peter Brown has sought to address a central concern of Schweitzer—that of finding ways for

people in economic society to exist as more than just workers and consumers. He has added a real political framework to begin to redress those very problems which I described in Chapter 1. Brown then moves to identify their precipitating cause.

Western civilization rests shakily on three disparate thought systems that have been yoked together and aimed at a nonviable utopian dream of unbridled economic progress. These are the Judeo-Christian-Liberal tradition, the Aristotelian-Cartesian-Rationalist tradition, and the Utilitarian or Neoclassical Economic tradition (p.161ff.). Each supports an unqualified view of humankind's absolute dominion over nature. What is needed, according to Brown, is another way to envision the human place in the biosphere. The human species must move "from a position of privilege in the natural world, to responsible member; from lord to steward" (p.38). He identifies such a vision for humankind in the works of Leopold and Schweitzer. Brown specifically describes Schweitzer as promoting "a respectful affirmation of humanity's place within [the world], responsibility for it, and responsibility *to* it" (his emphasis; p.167). This is a kind of *humble* anthropocentrism that seeks also the wellbeing of nonhuman life within an ethical worldview. This is the true expression of Schweitzer's philosophy—a subject that was discussed in relation to this particular criticism in Chapter 5.

Peter Brown then draws upon the ancient idea of a political commonwealth. But in this case the commonwealth would be governed under a Trusteeship modeled after John Locke's political theories—that is, only after certain modifications to reform his exclusive anthropocentrism and to recover a deeper meaning for his concept of a natural law duty to others (see p.90f.). A commonwealth is a powerful idea in light of the modern ecological crisis, and it draws upon a remarkable history. For Brown and his co-author Garver (2009), this kind of political organization is needed to reflect the very real

ecological interdependence people have with the planet's biodiversity, and as the best way to guarantee equitability for sharing the planet's biotic wealth throughout the biosphere (p.6). While it could be objected that very concept of a commonwealth under a governmental trusteeship would result in undue limits on personal freedom, Brown (2008) notes first of all that "no social arrangement allows unrestricted liberty" (p.100). Moreover, he points out that "the loss of negative (absence of interference) freedom on the part of some people is offset by the increase in positive (having the means to act) liberty on the part of others" (p.100). Put simply, freedom increases for all in such a society.

It could also be objected that Schweitzer's Reverence for Life philosophy is incompatible with such a system. Not so. In his few comments about how a civil authority can be achieved in light of his own democratic libertarian sensibilities, Schweitzer reveals a creative tension in his system that serves to temper individual excess and abuse. Schweitzer was no utopian daydreamer. He realizes tough decisions have to be made to make civil society possible. Just as a shop keeper must fire irresponsible employees "in spite of any sympathy he has for him and his family" (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.232), there are times when an elected official has to make decisions that "sacrifices men and human happiness" for a greater good (p.326). Utilitarian logic does come into play at the level of practical governance. Schweitzer even says that the basic ethical principle of compassion sometimes requires "an *ordering* and deepening, [and] also a widening of the current views of good and evil" if we are to have a viable society (emphasis added; p.310). Priorities for public policy must be made, and ethical trade-offs for which public goods are to be achieved must be decided upon. Nevertheless, these concessions to practical necessity are very much an undercurrent and counterbalance to

the driving force of ethical individualism. Civil authority arises only from individuals coming together, yet because people are imperfect so too their governance can be also. The individualism of Reverence for Life therefore aims to keep the danger of excessive government power curbed and restrained; it is a ‘check and balance’ system that is weighted in favour of the individual as the ultimate ethical authority. “Thus we serve society without abandoning ourselves to it” (p.327). This is in full keeping with Brown’s own views on parsimoniously constituted governments and his position that if ultimately a conflict does arise between public legislation and the individual tripartite human rights, “rights trump” (2008, p.99).

Two last areas of synergy will be discussed between the works of Schweitzer and Peter Brown, areas of perhaps the greatest potential for further development. Brown follows the historical scholarship, outlined in the previous chapter, which had univocally faulted Schweitzer for his reliance on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche for the will-to-live theory (p.168). My present work, however, shows that Schweitzer was a much more astute philosopher than has been previously recognized, and that the will-to-live theory is both philosophically sound and scientifically informed. And while Brown and his co-author (2009) only rely on Schweitzer (specifically, Schweitzer and Leopold together) as “an enduring moral framework” and as “a point of departure” for their own synthesis project (p.50), much more can be recovered from the life and books of Schweitzer to further augment their own innovative work. The following discussion explores new ways he can add to their own project by bolstering their already powerful arguments in science, economics and ethics with Schweitzer’s philosophical credentials.

Brown (2008) begins with his own reading of Darwin where he notes that evolutionary biology shows humanity is only separated from other species by degrees of

genetic difference. In reality, “There are no clear, absolute distinctions between ourselves and other species” (p.8). Here he has created a more scientific conception of the universal will-to-live concept, but not something opposed to it since all life is *essentially* the same in both conceptions. Brown merely provides a way to describe this biological essentialism as an evolutionary unity divided by minor differences that emerged in interdependent co-evolutionary descent rather than something based on ethical intuitionism, which is something Schweitzer does do, at least in part. But Schweitzer’s will-to-live theory is still grounded in empirical science as it was translated into philosophical concepts by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, subjects discussed at length in Chapters 2 and 3. The will-to-live theory therefore can add another vital linkage between evolutionary science and ethics, further augmenting Brown’s own argument.

Brown then moves to develop another science-based conception of the universal will-to-live. The unique activity of life, all life, is an anti-entropic capacity realized in procreation, physiological development and metabolic self-maintenance (p.172). This anti-entropic capacity is something that can be scientifically estimated and measured as Net Primary Productivity in either a particular region or for the biosphere as a whole (2009, p.120f.). Brown and Garver use this concept to create an accounting system of the earth’s total biotic potential. The biosphere’s anti-entropic capacity is dependent primarily on sunlight for photosynthesis and subsequent herbivore metabolism: these are termed ‘flows’ of annual revenue available for the biosphere’s anti-entropic capacity; stored biotic capital such as fossil fuels and standing woodlands are termed ‘stocks’ of previously invested photosynthetic and metabolic activity (p.12, p.57, p.64). From these science-based analogs to economic concepts, they then move to propose reforms to the failed global governance institutions and the misbegotten economic systems that have

resulted in so much social strife and mismanagement of the biosphere's resources. It is here where the present research on Schweitzer can add even more support for their project.

As it will be recalled in the discussion provided in Chapter 5 (see page 127), Brown (2008) drew upon Thoreau's idea of "the cost of a thing is the amount of ... life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run" to include nonhuman lives in part of his overall stewardship economics project (p.61). This subject was brought up in response to the alleged 'guilt mongering' of Schweitzer's Reverence for Life ethic. It was revealed that prior scholarship has failed to appreciate that the German word *Schuld* actually means 'debt' in the context in which Schweitzer employs it. Schweitzer insists that humanity, individually and collectively, has a debt to the nonhuman world that needs to be repaid through conscientious ethical action (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.318). And for this reason, Schweitzer's ethics of debt [*Schuld*] can be combined with the previously described concepts of 'flows' and 'stocks' that Brown and his colleague employ in relation to economic and global governance reforms. What this means is that it can be argued the appropriations of flows and stocks from nature that previously supported biodiversity is a direct ethical problem that demands philosophical consideration as to whether or not such activities can be justified and, if necessary, how that debt [*Schuld*] must be repaid to restore the beauty, resilience and integrity of those biotic communities.

What this also means is that, instead of being merely a point of departure, Schweitzer's Reverence for Life ethic can contribute direct philosophical support to their proposals for redressing the loss of anti-entropic capacity in the biosphere resulting from human economic activity. While Thoreau is an astute and powerful thinker in his own

right, he is simply not an academically trained philosopher and ethicist like he was. Schweitzer's concept of an ethical *Schuld* owed to the human and nonhuman world can integrate Reverence for Life more fully into their project. This new finding of my investigation would securely establish the following claim of theirs in his academically defensible philosophy: "In a whole earth economy based on right relationship, with an expanded view of distributive justice, any use or disruption of resources that impairs the ability of life to flourish in its full diversity would be immoral" (2009, p.94). Beyond just a *basic* moral framework on compassion and reciprocity, Schweitzer as a true philosopher offers a new powerful avenue for relating economics with ethics.

There are also other exciting possibilities for such developments. For example, Brown and Garver propose a way to correlate the criteria of Leopold's Land Ethic (which is to say, the integrity, resilience, and beauty of biotic communities) to ecological science. This is summarized by formula $I=f(PATE)$, which is a measure the regional Impacts that result from a function of total human Population, per capita Affluence, Technological factors, and their Ethical attitudes on social and ecological justice. This famous formula was originally developed by Ehrlich and Holdren (p.76). However, the newly added element of that equation, Ethics (*E*), is tied to the aforementioned tripartite human rights within a reformed Lockean system by Brown. Schweitzer and Leopold are then brought in to add moral weight to the call for a "fair distribution among *all* members of life's commonwealth" (authors' emphasis; p.86). As such, any further substantiation of Schweitzer's and Leopold's philosophical credentials can only add to their already sound and compelling arguments. Besides what has already been mentioned, Schweitzer's ethics can add one more powerful idea to this end. The upshot of Brown and Garver's project is a template for reforming and replacing global governance institutions to ensure

long term social prosperity, distributive justice and ecological sustainability. While these arguments and proposals stand in their own right, they rely on Leopold and Schweitzer to a certain extent for philosophical authority. We may therefore ask whether their moral arguments are valid from a strictly philosophical perspective? Yes—that is, if the same ultimate grounding Schweitzer used for his New Rationalism project is also employed here. Let me explain.

It will be recalled that it was *Nietzsche* who preoccupied Schweitzer's mind and keep him focused on the problem of ethics for that day in 1915 when Reverence for Life suddenly dawned on him. The personal letter that was discussed on page 60 reveals just how important Nietzsche was for Schweitzer. But why, we may ask, was this the case? It is very revealing that Schweitzer would write that Nietzsche had “a religious [*heilige*] reverence for life” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.247n.8). At first glance, this is an astounding claim. The German word here, *heilige*, literally means sacred or holy. But Nietzsche despised all religion, and especially Christianity! He was also never one to hide his venomous hatred for all things coming from the Church: “The Christian resolve to find the world ugly and bad *has made* the world ugly and bad” (emphasis added; *The Gay Science* §130, p.185). His deep unquenchable hatred of Christianity even led him to give what he felt to be a long overdue and much needed an obituary *for the very idea of God*. He felt he had to rid the world of its darkening shadow under which an oppressed humanity cowered in powerlessness (*The Gay Science* §108, p.167).

So why in the world would Schweitzer say Nietzsche had a *religious* reverence for life? The answer is mysticism. Peter Brown (2008) describes it this way: “Reverence-for-life was a mysticism through which the self was not lost but enriched, the individual not suppressed but situated within an ultimately deathless whole” of the universal will-to-

live (p.168). Put simply, what Nietzsche called an artistic and aesthetic interpretation of reality, Schweitzer made into an Ethical Mysticism aimed at the natural world. They were describing the same thing. This was also *exactly* how Schweitzer could make the natural world no longer ‘ugly and bad’ through Reverence for Life. The sacred [*heilige*] Reverence for Life he saw in Nietzsche came from the fact that Nietzsche had valued the celebration of natural life to its fullest potential the highest of all possible virtues. Nietzsche had found a path through ‘the thicket’ to create culturally determined truth in his critique of Kant’s philosophy. Schweitzer could then embrace this same reverence and extended it to all life—human and nonhuman alike. “To relate oneself in the spirit of reverence for life to the multiform manifestations of the will-to-live which together constitute the world is ethical mysticism” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.79). Like Nietzsche, Schweitzer believed the ultimate test of a culturally defined truth was whether it was life-affirming, correlated to the best available science, and (for Schweitzer) if it was also based in the permanent unchanging elemental truths of Reverence for Life. Under this measure, cannot Brown and Garver claim this same authority for their own project?

The way is now open to extend what Brown calls a ‘new story’ that integrates scientific cosmology, religion and economic theory, and establish with it a stronger connection to the academic domain of philosophy. This comes by way of Schweitzer’s engagement of Nietzsche’s own interpretation of natural science to support life-affirming cultural truths and an Ethical Mysticism. As argued in Chapter 3, Nietzsche is *the* most important and influential philosopher in academia today. By drawing on his unquestioned authority, and by connecting this to the specific advancements by Schweitzer to make Nietzsche’s unfinished work a viable social ethic, the project of

Brown and Garver would gain another invaluable inroad into the academic domain of philosophy which hitherto has not been supportive of such figures as Leopold or Thoreau.

A full description of Brown's work and the potential synergy it has with Schweitzer's philosophy is far beyond the scope of this present project aimed merely at showing his debt to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Instead, as mentioned, my aim here has been to show that Schweitzer's Reverence for Life ethic is not only still relevant today, but also that it is capable of supporting valuable ideas in practical governance. In these three figures, Leopold, Duncan and Brown, I have done so. Nevertheless, much work remains for future research by other scholars in the years to come. I will therefore conclude this particular analysis with some general comments on Schweitzer's views on environmental ethics as it relates to economic life.

Other Elements of Schweitzer's Environmental Ethic

Schweitzer never wrote about environmental conservation matters directly, but he does address many of the precipitating causes for the curious social phenomena discussed by Brabazon at the start of this chapter. Schweitzer had come to the conclusion that modern economic life had damaged the psyche of people in society such that people "acquire thereby the mentality of unfree men, in which ideals of civilization can no longer be contemplated with the needful clarity, but become distorted to correspond with the surrounding atmosphere of struggle" (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.88). This struggle, he mentions earlier in the same passage, is "against Nature or the competition of his fellows" in such a way that it exceeds all normal social relations (p.88).

People were becoming hyper-competitive due to the "insecurity" in the economic conditions of their lives, having been deprived of the means of direct self-sufficiency with the new status of itinerant wage-earners in the modern labour market setting (p.10). In such

a competitive work environment they lose the “unbroken consciousness of responsibility” for the wellbeing of their neighbours (p.87). In such unnatural conditions, Schweitzer wrote, a most curious and schizophrenic bifurcation of values emerges. They become ethically individualistic (p.14), even while their other sensibilities and opinions become homogenized with the prevailing spirit of their peers (p.17). A ‘spirit of superficiality’ then takes over the mental life of many people and their social groups through popular media (p.12). Schweitzer was only speaking of the newspapers and magazines of his day. One can only wonder at what Schweitzer would have thought about the popular entertainment programs now available to Western societies through the internet and satellite television.

Schweitzer was describing the psychological dynamics that affect the people resulting from their economic relations. It was the emerging *ethos* of modernity and Schweitzer considered it a dangerous mixture of exclusionary self-seeking coupled with a collective group-think under the influence of corporate, social and political organizations. Today there is an emerging social phenomenon that Schweitzer did not anticipate, a non-communitarian materialist culture that is unthinkingly perpetuating ecological degradation through competitive consumerism. If this is related to the same precipitating causes identified by Schweitzer for the social problems of his day, as I think they are, then perhaps his recommendations also have particular relevance too. They are straightforward yet profound. “If society had so developed that *a continually widened circle of the population could enjoy a modest, but well-assured, condition of comfort*, civilization would have been more helped than it has been by all the material conquests which are lauded in its name” (emphasis added; p.10). Schweitzer also insisted that, “Wealth must

reach the community *in the most varied ways*, if it is to be of the greatest benefit of all” (emphasis added; p.320).⁴⁸

What he was saying is that the economy should have been structured in such a way as to create a more equitable society—one with a better distribution of wealth amongst its citizens so that the fear of poverty and destitution would not influence citizen behaviour, and more personal time would have been allowed for a true communitarian culture to emerge. This is a subject that is gaining attention in the field of environmental ethics today: economic inequality within a society has been correlated with ecological degradation—see, for example, Mikkelsen et al. (2007). Since redressing social inequality is seen as a means to help safeguard the environment, Schweitzer’s commentary can provide additional philosophical support for this research as well as a way to give greater ethical context for considering the larger social and ethical issues of conservation through Reverence for Life.

Conclusions, Appraisals and Criticisms

While on one hand the whole purpose of an elemental philosophy is to allow it to be interpreted and made meaningful for different times and cultures, Schweitzer’s work even on these elements remains fragmentary. What he was able to do consists of only an elemental morality of compassion, a very bare-bones beginning for a virtue ethic, a cosmological constant of the will-to-live (worldview), an ontological first principle of the ‘I + will-to-live’ nexus (life-view), and an apophatic hermeneutic that explained the experience of compassion (essentialism). The aim was to bring these disparate spheres of human existence into a new complete ethical life such that, “*reason and the heart must work together* if a true morality is to be established” (*A Place for Revelation*, p.7), because “the true heart is rational, and the true reason is sensitive” (p.13).

The central question of this investigation concerned how Reverence for Life was built on a foundation derived from the works of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. This analysis has revealed that not only did Schweitzer appropriate and transform certain philosophical elements from their systems, but he also distinguished himself as an original thinker in the development of his self-termed New Rationalism project. These collectively constituted the grounding of Reverence for Life as an elemental nature philosophy.

The influence of Schopenhauer has been well documented in prior scholarship on Schweitzer. But exactly how Schopenhauer's will-to-live theory grounded his philosophy was not well understood, or was presumed to have been a strategic error on Schweitzer's part. It had been thought that his reliance on Schopenhauer pushed Reverence for Life into unsupportable metaphysical excess and made certain of his claims about non-human life appear to be romanticized imaginings based upon mere analogy. This investigation instead demonstrated that the analogy here is not about psychological transference, but rather it was the way Schopenhauer sought to escape the 'lair of the skull' and establish the independent reality of the empirical world. Only then could Schopenhauer engage in an analysis of cosmological causality, posit the existence of a cosmological Will, and have the will-to-live as the Kantian essence for the things themselves. By using these techniques Schopenhauer sought to prove that phenomenal reality exists apart from Cartesian consciousness. For this reason, Schweitzer *needed* the will-to-live concept from him—only Schopenhauer could provide him with a satisfactory linkage between rational consciousness and the empirical world.

Schweitzer had to recover this elemental philosophical truth from Schopenhauer because it was compatible with natural science. Yet at the same time he needed to

divorce the will-to-live and the cosmological Will theories from Schopenhauer's greater metaphysical claims about Buddhist *samsara* and salvation. This is why he turned to Nietzsche and the naturalism of his early works. Schweitzer viewed Nietzsche's Will to Power theory as something that was in agreement with modern biology; its naturalism more closely mirrored evolutionary theory than did Schopenhauer's Buddhist inspired metaphysics of perception. While Schopenhauer created a way to demonstrate that the empirical world actually exists, Nietzsche in turn sought to reveal that sensible reality was actually controlled by myriad competitive natural forces. The naturalistic Will to Power theory was an improvement that advanced Schopenhauer's theory of causality (etiology). However, Schweitzer was not sceptical about empirical science like Nietzsche was, and so he instead held to modern cell-theory to explain the emergence of order from the complex Will to Power biological processes. This is how he could present the will-to-live theory as biology, not metaphysics.

It was through these two earlier thinkers that Schweitzer found a way to place continental philosophy on a solid footing in the empirical world. He needed to be able to claim the will-to-live as an elemental truth for both natural science and rational consciousness. This was the first linkage he was after. The second was an elemental first principle for morality that he recovered from Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion. Schweitzer took Schopenhauer's work here and improved on it by turning to the evolutionary understanding of social instincts by Charles Darwin. Then, with this moral principle now established in natural science, Schweitzer felt he could claim compassion as another elemental truth with confidence.

But Schweitzer still needed one more unchanging natural truth to anchor the Reverence for Life ethic. This would be established through his New Rationalism

project. Schopenhauer's cosmological constant of the will-to-live was shown by Schweitzer to also reside at the core of ontological self-awareness as the 'I + will-to-live' first fact of consciousness. As such, Schweitzer's explanation of existence (ontology) would hold true for each and every person regardless of culture, time or circumstance. In this one bold stroke, Schweitzer dispelled both the ethical anthropocentrism of Descartes and secured a solid foundation for his Reverence for Life ethic. It could now emerge as a cultural truth for all people everywhere, a philosophy of civilization for everyone.

In Schweitzer's opinion, life-affirmation cannot come out of natural science alone. He would instead look to create it out of the life-view of rational consciousness through what he called a 'mysterious combination' of the philosophical outlooks of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Each thinker had aspects he respected. From Nietzsche he would take his focus on developing a well-defined sense of personhood in each individual, as well as his valuing natural life as a basic good in-and-of-itself. From Schopenhauer there was a particular type of life-renunciation in compassionate altruism that allowed for an experience of greater life-affirmation to come through the universal will-to-live. To combine the two thought systems, Schweitzer would take Nietzsche's emphasis on developing strong personhood and join it to Schopenhauer's concept of the self as the mirror of the world. Egotism could then be directed outwards for vicarious fulfilment through Ethical Mysticism. This combination of the two disparate philosophical systems would produce for Schweitzer a very powerful and focused ethical orientation in a 'this worldly' devotion to others.

Schweitzer's diagnosis for the crisis in civilization was simple: people are over-worked and too exhausted by trying to make a living to do much of anything else. The prescription was also straightforward: people need the time, inclination, and the

educational background to be able to meditate on the meaning of life and to conduct their affairs with true moral character. Schweitzer wanted his elemental nature philosophy to step into the gap and give people the seeds of thought for self-reflection. But the original problem remained. How in the midst of busy work lives, raising children, and simply maintaining a household are working people to find the time and the energy to engage in reflections on the larger social and political issues of the day? Schweitzer does not address this problem outside a few comments about the distribution of wealth in society. He was not able to give further direction of how such a society was possible or how to actualize it. The never completed Volume IV of *The Philosophy of Civilization* was to do that.

This highlights the second problem. Schweitzer ignored the academic reader. He structured his arguments in a conversational style aimed at reaching working families—the same ones who for the most part did not have time for such heavy reading. He had sought to create a living philosophy for society and almost missed having any readers at all. However, it is said a book will find its audience, and this is exactly what happened in quite an unexpected way. Schweitzer's *Civilization and Ethics* (Volume II) would be smuggled into Hitler's prisoner of war camps where it was read by and gave comfort to French POWs (*Letters: 1905-1965*, p.261). Schweitzer marvelled at this because his works were considered dangerous contraband, and yet the story was later confirmed by many people (p.261). Then in the collective worldwide soul-searching after the war, Schweitzer emerged as a great moral figure with a simple elementary message of compassion. He was even recognized with a Nobel Peace Prize in 1952. But with the anti-colonialism backlash that gained strength in the 50's and 60's, both his acclaim and his works began to fade from public notice.

Schopenhauer and Nietzsche grew in their prestige even after their works were no longer read for enjoyment by the general public. The strength of their philosophical arguments was recognized in academia, and other thinkers emerged to carry their legacy forward. Such has not happened for Schweitzer, not at least within the academic domain of philosophy as such. This work here has sought to reveal that a coherent and innovative elemental nature philosophy does exist in Schweitzer's Reverence for Life ethic. It includes an essentialist ontology he called the New Rationalism which is based in the hermeneutical analysis of being. This is perhaps the most engaging aspect of his work from an academic perspective since it is an alternative to and predates a similar concept of the human person promoted by Martin Heidegger.

Schweitzer re-engaged epistemology in such a way that is possible to posit the existence of the non-human world. This may sound like a modest claim but environmental ethics has been hamstrung by those philosophers who have drawn support from Heidegger to insist that wildlife, old-growth forests, and everything else that traditional environmentalists have sought to protect have no intrinsic value, and that all the phenomena of the natural world take their very existence as *only* social constructions based in human rational consciousness. An extreme example of this is found with those 'strict constructionists' who deny both the independent existence of non-human nature and scientific facts. While it is possible to argue persuasively for environmental ethics from such a perspective (e.g., see Vogel 2005), Schweitzer provides a way for the scientific worldview and the life-view of human consciousness to coexist without trying to subsume one to the other. Put simply, this will breathe new life into a whole host of important thinkers that have been marginalized in recent years because of the anti-

essentialist turn in philosophy including (but not limited to) John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Schweitzer himself.

Perhaps most importantly Schweitzer highlights the role of the individual in ethics. He insists that the work to create an ethical society is not through new elaborate articulations of theory, but to facilitate individual people in developing ethical personhood through elemental morality. Key to this project was ensuring that people have the educational background and economic security to be able to engage in the reflection necessary to build strong moral character. But he was not an elitist. An ethical worldview ultimately comes from a pre-rational insight (the sublime of compassion) about the will-to-live and so “the difference between learned and unlearned is entirely relative” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.308). Yet modern economic life stood in the way of ethical development; when this happens, “personalities and ideas are then subordinated to [those economic and political] institutions, when it is really these [ethical agents] which ought to influence the latter [social creations] and keep them inwardly alive” (p.16). But *Reverence for Life* holds the hope for something else to emerge.

Whether in colonial Africa or in the urban architecture of Europe, Schweitzer believed the only guarantee for the restoration of civilization lay in the elemental truth given in the will-to-live. Life is good. Moral character can develop from that simple elemental seed when a person comes to see their life to be equally present in the other too through an apophatically informed analogy to the self. All life can then be seen as good and revered as such. Thanks to Schopenhauer, Schweitzer found a way to bridge the distance between self-interest and altruism. This can grow into a religious worldview through Ethical Mysticism that further strengthens as a person engages in moral reflection—or it may remain limited to family and friends, which was also fine.

Schweitzer believed the power of example from moral exemplars coupled with the knowledge that the ethic is absolute would be enough to keep society on the right path.

The only picture for environmentally sustainable communities in the life and works of Schweitzer comes from the construction and operation of his hospital. Yet because he kept his philosophy in elemental principles, he does not stand in the way of such visionaries as Aldo Leopold. Schweitzer's philosophy can be used for communitarian models that include the full biotic community—it is a lived philosophy with 'calluses on its hands' from making those tough decisions. He only holds an absolute ethic over us, lest the power of rationalization be used to excuse the inexcusable. What is necessary is not always right, but may be still necessary (p.317). Schweitzer was not afraid to make those tough and necessary decisions himself. The debt-based *Schuld* mentality was the means to keep excesses in check and the collective soul searching ongoing for how to reverence all life.

Being human with human failings is not a crime. Reverence for Life asks for perfection but only expects constant and earnest striving to this end. This is its power. Falling short of these ideals has great mystical significance because compassion is stronger than love. The truth is love can become broken-hearted. Compassion already is. When a person learns the virtue of sincerity, which I believe includes compassion for the imperfect self, such failures are given an avenue for redemption through the other. Altruism brings the two separate lives together and the true essence of humanity is rediscovered. Healing is found. One's life then moves on with renewed determination and deepened sincerity. Reverence for Life draws its very strength from embracing these elemental truths as a lived and very personal experience. Only then, Schweitzer believed, can a real and sustaining hope for civilization be carried forward for a better future.

Summary Conclusion

Pursuant to the Faculty of Religious Studies guidelines, this dissertation is to include a brief summary conclusion not to exceed three (3) pages in length. Accordingly, the short section provided here provides this required overview concerning the findings of my investigation.

The research aim of this project was to determine the philosophical debt of Albert Schweitzer to Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche in the development of his Reverence for Life ethic. These findings were presented in Chapters 2 and 3 of this document, while Chapter 4 revealed his particular synthesis of certain aspects of their philosophies for his innovative New Rationalism project. Chapter 5 reviewed and responded to historical criticisms of Schweitzer's ethic in light of the findings of my investigation. Chapter 6 moved on to examine the relevance of Schweitzer's work for contemporary environmental ethics. It was here that my research was examined in relation to such important figures as Aldo Leopold, Colin A.M. Duncan, and Peter G. Brown concerning the possibility of extending Schweitzer's principles and thought with respect to economics and civil governance.

Schweitzer's approach to philosophy was to build his system around what he called elemental truths. These were seen as permanent, unchanging truths concerning human nature and existence; they included the will-to-live theory and the universal cosmological Will taken from the works of Schopenhauer. These concepts were transformed by Schweitzer in light of certain criticisms and modifications made by Nietzsche. In brief, it was revealed that Schopenhauer's theories were recast as purely

biological phenomena in order to reconcile these philosophical postulates with the findings of empirical science for explaining physiological development.

In his own words, Schweitzer wrote that he sought to create a 'mysterious combination' for the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. He would do this by combining the individualistic ethics of natural life-affirmation from the works of Nietzsche with the altruism found in the self-sacrifice (which is to say, life-renunciation) from the works of Schopenhauer. This produced a mystical worldview which envisioned that other life was cosmologically connected to the self such that personal fulfillment could be actualized through ethical service to others. This is the reason why Schweitzer's project included a curious worldview that was simultaneously dualistic and monistic.

He wrote that Reverence for Life "must have nothing to do with an ethical interpretation of the [natural] world; it must [instead] become cosmic and mystical" (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.307). In his opinion, it was not permissible to interpret the world of nature as supporting ethics for human society. This conclusion created a dualism between the worldview of empirical science and the life-view of human rationality which aspired to higher ideals for society and ourselves personally. Instead, Schweitzer proposed a mystical monism born out of one element recovered from natural science (evolutionary social instincts) together with the first fact of consciousness (the 'I + will-to-live' nexus). This was the philosophical grounding for an Ethical Mysticism; the New Rationalism with its 'capacity for divination' takes the dualism of the scientific worldview and the life-view of rational consciousness, and synthesises a monism of the universal will-to-live from them. Yet while the *universal* will-to-live concept was metaphysical, the will-to-live concept for *particular* life was seen as a physical truth in harmony with biological science.

Central to Schweitzer's project was 'elemental thinking' as the critical factor for the development of the ethical personhood needed for the restoration of civilization from the dismal conditions he saw at the dawn of the twentieth century. His works however were not aimed at an academic audience, but instead sought to become a 'living philosophy of the people' through ordinary speech aimed at non-academic readers. This was identified as both a strength and a weakness of his philosophy. His books in philosophy had an incredibly significant impact in the mid-twentieth century—resulting in him being recognized with a Nobel Peace Prize—but have since faded from public and academic notice. *Reverence for Life* has not been recognized in the domain of philosophy as being something with significant academic value simply because of his writing style and manner of expression.

My dissertation has sought to reveal the merits of *Reverence for Life* as a true philosophy in the strict academic sense by discussing the intellectual history for the elemental truths Schweitzer used to ground his nature philosophy. I then moved on to discuss the continuing relevance of Schweitzer's work in environmental ethics. Specifically, the potential applications for practical governance were examined in light of similar thought in the works of Aldo Leopold, Colin A.M. Duncan and Peter G. Brown. Schweitzer intended his elemental nature philosophy to be developed into cultural truths for different historical times and places, and certain complementarities were identified in each of these three figures to ideas found in *Reverence for Life*. The discussion of these three writers allowed for Schweitzer's own views to be brought forward for the reader, and also revealed how his elemental philosophy can become specific and clear on questions concerning practical governance today.

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Endnotes

¹ Schweitzer obtained advanced degrees in medicine (surgery), musicology, philosophy, and religion. But to be precise here regarding his religion doctorate, Schweitzer obtained a licentiate degree in Protestant theology and then completed a second qualifying dissertation on the New Testament (specifically, the depiction of the Last Supper in the Gospels, *das Abendmahlsproblem*) to teach at Strasbourg University. This is generally considered a distinction without difference, and usually referred to as simply a doctorate.

² Matthew 25 presents a parable concerning the Kingdom of Heaven and the coming of Christ in His glory to judge the nations. The righteous are declared righteous for having clothed, fed, cared for, and even visited the person of Christ while He was in prison. This causes great confusion to the assembled people since none of had actually done any of these things for Jesus, and so they ask Him what He means. The key verse is then given in Matthew 25:40. “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me’” (NIV). The message is that Jesus commands those who love Him to care for the needy and poor in society.

³ The only available treatment for leprosy was a botanical extract called chaulmoogra oil which would take months or even years to show positive results. Schweitzer therefore had to build and look after separate leper colonies on his hospital grounds.

⁴ The intrinsic here is a reference to the Kantian ‘thing in itself’ behind phenomena.

⁵ Schweitzer’s contributions here are not limited to just the practice of tropical medicine and working with indigenous communities. Giordano and Pedroni (2007) take Schweitzer as being representative of a virtue ethic within the practice of medicine itself, in that “The reverence for the good of the patient is therefore [also] a reverence for the

life and the world of that patient” (p.142). Giordano and Pedroni present Schweitzer as a counter-example to the modern ethos of medicine wherein “medicine becomes [only] an instrumental good, competing with numerous other instrumental goods as commodities within a consumerist framework, the values of which are changeable and dictated by social demand and market variability” (p.143). Giordano and Pedroni turn to Schweitzer as a case study for restoring the doctor/patient relationship within medicine today from its current ‘technocentric’ and economically market-focused morass (p.148).

⁶ This is the author’s own translation from *Kulturphilosophie – Zweiter Teil: Kultur und Ethik* (Vorrede vii-viii). C. T. Campion was personally picked by Schweitzer for the English translation of many of his works including *The Philosophy of Civilization*. Campion’s is therefore considered the definitive translation of this work, and with few exceptions, will be utilized exclusively throughout. Campion’s translation reflects Schweitzer’s approach to philosophy—which is to say, to communicate simply and conversationally the essence of complex philosophical ideas. His approach, however, sometimes fails to capture some of the technical nuances of Schweitzer’s words. Occasionally, therefore, I will be providing my own translation of key passages.

⁷ Nietzsche warned that: “industrial culture [...] is altogether the most vulgar form of existence that has yet existed. Here one is at the mercy of brute need; one has to live and sell oneself, but one despises those who exploit this need and *buy* the worker. Oddly, submission to powerful, frightening, even terrible persons, like tyrants and generals, is not experienced as nearly so painful as is this submission to unknown and uninteresting persons, which is what all the luminaries of industries are. What the workers see in the employer is usually only a cunning, bloodsucking dog of a man who speculates on all

misery” (his emphasis; *The Gay Science* §40, p.107). Schweitzer listed the books by Nietzsche he read, including this one (*The Philosophy of Civilization* p.243n.7).

⁸ Schweitzer specifically complained that students are not taught about the inter-connection of the individual sciences. He anticipated Orr (2004) who wrote that interdisciplinary science must be added to curricula because too many “students graduate without knowing how to think in whole systems, how to find connections, how to ask big questions, and how to separate the trivial from the important” (p.23).

⁹ See “The God of the Market Place: John Stuart Mill and Maximos Confessor on Economic Virtue” (Goodin 2010) for the historical background on the claimed naturalistic foundation for economic utilitarianism.

¹⁰ Once he arrived in Africa, Schweitzer discovered that the absolute dogma of the Paris Missionary Society “played practically no part in the sermons of the missionaries” (*Out of my Life and Thought*, p.142). Though he had come as a doctor only, “not many months after my arrival,” Schweitzer writes, he was invited to engage in some missionary work including examining candidates for baptism and preaching (p.143). Nevertheless, Schweitzer wanted to keep his work here very auxiliary to the work of others and most of the local Gabonese never knew him to be anything other than just a doctor (Wadlow p.26). Schweitzer had come to understand that no one had a right to impose religion upon an indigenous culture (Melamed and Melamed 2003, p.170f.). He would only perform baptisms for expatriates living in Gabon, never for the locals (p.170).

¹¹ Schweitzer was rejected for missionary work in 1905 and instead arrived in Africa in 1913 as a medical doctor. The dates here are significant. The horrific abuses inflicted under the colonial rule of King Leopold II in the Congo region of central Africa only

became exposed to widespread European attention in November of 1905 (Hochschild, p.251). The King was eventually forced to divest himself of his personally owned empire and give over direct control to his parliament: “Reports of abuses against gatherers of wild rubber in the Congo did drop off markedly after the Belgian takeover of 1908” (p.278). The final meeting of the Congo Reform Association was held in 1913, marking an end to that particular nightmare of murder, slavery and torture inflicted upon the African people (p.277). In its place a new economic regime was imposed in Africa, “a new method of forcing people to work that drew much less protest from missionaries and humanitarians: taxes” (p.278). Schweitzer, operating from the French portion of the Congo region, however, was an exception.

¹² Schweitzer wrote that his philosophy does “not seek metaphysics, thinking it can reach a worldview that way, but on the contrary it seeks a worldview first, and then takes metaphysics out from it” (*Kulturphilosophie—Zweiter Teil: Kultur und Ethik, Vorrede ix*).

¹³ Ernst Georg Wilhelm Deecke (1831-1897) was a philologist by training.

¹⁴ The following discussion draws on a 2010 publication of mine entitled, “On First Principles: Arthur Schopenhauer and Bridging the Science/Religion Divide.” Similarly, Chapters 3 through 6 rely and build upon arguments set forth in my other publications, which are identified in the bibliography.

¹⁵ David Hume (1711-1776) was the foremost materialist of his age and delivered a devastating attack on Cartesian rationalism. Hume chided Descartes’ self-conscious ‘I’ as a basis for personal identity, pointing out that in sleep a person becomes insensible to themselves and thus may “truly be said not to exist” under Cartesian logic (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part IV, Sec. 6). For Hume there is no principle of personal

identity and the experience of consciousness is only a consequence of sensory ‘impression’ recorded in memory from external reality. The dissolution of the recursively aware self with sleep, and reemergence self awareness upon awakening, points to a wholly material basis for the experience of personal identity.

¹⁶ According to Friedrich Lange of Marburg (1828-1875) the objectivity of the natural sciences resides exclusively in the common sensory organization of the human brain, and this fact explains how different people can report similar observations for the same phenomena (1881, p.177; also p.202ff.). The seeming mechanical materialism of the natural world is therefore, for Lange, not the result of its intrinsic properties but the categorization of sensible intuitions in the mind as Kant described. So-called scientific objectivity, Lange concluded, is merely shared epistemological subjectivity through the Kantian perceptual manifold. But the mind and the Kantian soul were not limited by the empirical because the mind synthesizes its own inner-world through which humanity retained its special cosmological dignity. Lange attempted to bridge scientific empiricism with the more humanizing traditions of German idealism with his claim that natural science itself exposes “the same transcendental root of our human nature, which supplies us through the senses with the idea of the world of reality, and which leads us in the highest function of nature and creative synthesis to fashion a world of the ideal in which to take refuge from the limitation of the senses, and in which to find again the true Home of our Spirit” (p.364f.). Lange was arguing against the emerging spirit of scientific nihilism which threatened to disillusion society, a project later taken up by Nietzsche.

¹⁷ Schopenhauer externalized the Kantian forms of sensible intuition to prove that nature was not a mental phenomenon. He did this by extending the range of Transcendental

Ideas that exist as the “unbounded extension of their empirical use” as Kant had described (*Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic* §45, p.81).

¹⁸ See for example Escobar (1996) who notes that, “Post-structuralism focuses on the role of language in the construction of social reality; it treats language not as the reflection of ‘reality’ but constitutive of it ... For some, *there is no materiality unmediated by discourse*” (emphasis added; p.326). Post-structuralism, taking its cue from Heidegger’s hermeneutic theory, understands external reality in strictly Cartesian terms, and that the intelligible nature of the sense world is determined and constituted *in its very essence* by human language.

¹⁹ Today we would instead point to the role of DNA controlling biology, something which was only discovered in the 1950’s.

²⁰ Heidegger would go further and said it “does not exist” (*Basic Writings, Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics* §E, p.289). The there-beingness of existence is a projection of its own ontic-ontological structures and “we come to terms with the question of existence always through existence itself” (*Basic Writings, Being and Time: Introduction* §1.4, p.54). This would become a foundational claim for the existentialists.

²¹ Charles Darwin published in 1859, a year before Schopenhauer’s death.

²² Notably and characteristically, Nietzsche would instead call this the “most mendacious minute” of history, that only the so-called clever animals (humans) could possibly mistake our own intellect as something of “such importance, as if the world pivoted around it” (*Portable Nietzsche, Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, p.42).

²³ Schopenhauer believed that this was in fact happening and points to the recent emergence of animal rights organizations and anti-cruelty laws being enacted in Europe for the first time (*On the Basis of Morality* §19, p.180ff.).

²⁴ It should be noted here that in his 1929 work *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, Schweitzer considered mysticism of Ignatius (d.103 or 113 CE) much inferior to that of Paul. According to Schweitzer, Ignatius set forth a too strong sacramental emphasis for achieving a mystical and metaphysical union with God (p.369), while for Paul it is to be found in an ethic of love born in an eschatological expectation of the Kingdom of God—“to live with the eyes fixed on eternity, while standing firmly on the solid ground of reality” (p.333). Mysticism, for Schweitzer, must be this-worldly.

²⁵ This third category refers to a pre-rational intuition of sympathy that enables a person to sense the inner-being of another—a subject discussed at length in Chapter 4.

²⁶ Schweitzer sometimes uses the term *Lebensanschauung* in contrast with *Weltanschauung* as he does here. The former is a reference to an ontological understanding of life derived from *a priori* rationality and the latter being a different conception based solely in a scientific view of the world, evolution, and life-processes. Other times, however, Schweitzer uses *Weltanschauung* in a more general sense that is inclusive of the *Lebensanschauung*, such as when referring to the worldview of Reverence for Life.

²⁷ Nietzsche recalls Schopenhauer here, who had said that “animals are already exposed to illusion, to deception” in understanding representations from perception, but the uniquely gyrencephalic brains allow humans to create abstract concepts for reflection because “that complicated, many-sided, flexible being, man, who is extremely needy and

exposed to innumerable shocks and injuries, had to be illuminated by a twofold knowledge in order to be able to exist” (WWR-2 §27, p.151).

²⁸ See Nietzsche’s pun on Schleiermacher’s name to characterize rational philosophers in the Kantian tradition as ‘veil makers’ in *Ecce Homo*, The Case of Wagner §3, p.321.

²⁹ For an in-depth study on Darwin’s views for the emergence of social instincts through natural selection, see Richards (2008).

³⁰ Schweitzer’s description of the human species as a ‘herd’ animal echoes Nietzsche who had interpreted humanity in this distinctive way through his reading of Darwin.

³¹ Leopold also believed that it was an “evolutionary possibility” for our species to extend ethics to include non-human life (p.239). This is where his thought resonates most closely with Schweitzer. But Leopold argues this point from a somewhat different perspective than Schweitzer. He wrote that, “The extension of ethics, so far considered by philosophers, is actually a process in ecological evolution. Its sequences may be described in ecological as well as in philosophical terms. [...] Animal instincts are modes of guidance for the individual ... Ethics are possibly a kind of community instinct in-the-making” (p.238f.). Leopold sought to bring human society and non-human nature together in a communitarian ethic (Callicott 1987, p.388f.).

³² Schweitzer makes a distinction between scientific knowledge about the world and the mystery of existence (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.308). The key here is the will-to-live. Through Nietzsche, it is seen as a scientific truth in harmony with biology, and as such empirical science confirms “that in and behind all phenomena there is the will-to-live” responsible for its development. But this creates a dualism between the scientific worldview and the life-view from the vantage of rational consciousness. Then through

Schopenhauer this scientific “knowledge passes on into [personal] experience ... [whereupon this] forces upon me an inward relation to the world, and fills me with *reverence* for the mysterious will-to-live which is in all things” (emphasis added; p.308f.). This is the process by which dualism yields to become a mystical monism of the universal will-to-live. Ethical Mysticism emerges from that process.

³³ Jean-Paul Sartre famously declared “existence precedes essence,” an anti-essentialist claim that set him at odds with Schweitzer. In a letter dated May 2, 1956, Schweitzer mentions this dispute and writes that because of this, “We do not talk about philosophy” (*Letters: 1905-1965*, p.266). In this letter to Professor Kurt Leese, Schweitzer writes that he has “become utterly unsympathetic toward existential philosophy” and describes his own work as “*Philosophia naturalis perennis*, the eternal philosophy of nature” (p.266).

³⁴ Schweitzer’s dissertation for his medical doctorate was a psychiatric analysis of the historical Jesus based on what could be identified as ‘historical kernels’ of truth from the Gospels. Schweitzer considers the claim that Jesus may have suffered from some kind of epilepsy or another kind of mental disorder capable of manifesting the apparent symptoms of pathology (e.g., visions, the imagined transfiguration, delusions, etc.). Schweitzer concludes that the eschatological worldview of Jesus was not ‘out of place’ for his time, and that “the only symptoms to be accepted as historical and possibly to be discussed from a psychiatric point of view—the high estimate which Jesus has of himself and perhaps also the hallucination at the baptism—[all] fall far short of providing the existence of mental illness” (*The Psychiatric Study of Jesus*, p.72).

³⁵ Schweitzer writes that “sincerity is the first ethical principle which to appears. However lacking one may be in other respects, sincerity is the one thing he must possess”

(The Ethics of Reverence for Life, p.230). It should also be kept in mind that the virtue ethics of Aristotle were examined by Schweitzer and found advantageous in Reverence for Life. Specifically, the chapters on moral excellence and friendship from *Nicomachean Ethics* were declared “deep and true” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.125).

³⁶ See Claus Günzler’s introduction in *Die Weltanschauung der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben: Kulturphilosophie III*, p.26. Günzler goes on to say that Schweitzer has often been perceived as an overly sentimental “blow hard” Good Samaritan (*kurzatmigen Samariter*). This expression literally means an asthmatic Samaritan, which is a colourful way of saying that Schweitzer was seen by his peers as an inarticulate philosopher who had produced a ‘body of work’ that was stunted and insufficiently developed.

³⁷ A similar argument is found with Mike Martin, who also concluded the ‘analogy’ was psychological trick. Yet he writes, “in Schweitzer’s defense, however, I believe he usually employs anthropomorphic images [of seeing the inner essence of the self in other life] *metaphorically* to elicit bioempathy, independently of biotheism” (emphasis added; p.34). His assessment is that the language of bio-theism is sometimes used as just an analogy and a “powerful rhetorical tool” to create a sense of connection between the self and the other (p.34). Rather than being a purely religious worldview, Martin concludes it is a psychological transference of one’s own inner-subjectivity to other life; their suffering is thereby personalized and, in effect, the non-human life becomes anthropomorphized in the person’s imagination. This, as Martin observes, arises from Schweitzer’s metaphysical beliefs about a universally present will-to-live, which he says “distorts some of his central ideas” (p.41). Martin’s final conclusion is that despite these problems of anthropomorphisms and bio-theism, “Schweitzer’s spirituality contributes to

the boldness with he sets forth a nature-centered ethics decades before most philosophers began to struggle with environmental ethics” (p.41). As such, Reverence for Life is judged to be still relevant today as a passionate articulation of nature spirituality that is capable of addressing many contemporary problems—that is, “once properly understood and in places revised” to fix the philosophical shortcomings arising from Schweitzer’s metaphysical claims (p.98).

³⁸ This is a borrowed phrase originating with Benedict Anderson (1991) concerning Hegel, though for a different context than the point being made here (p.35).

³⁹ As an aside, this letter was his response to the director of the Paris Mission after being rejected for missionary work. This uncharacteristically angry response by Schweitzer reveals the strength of his faith in the face of being challenged on this exact point.

⁴⁰ Schweitzer made an impassioned defence of the Christian faith, *Christianity and the Religions of the World* (1923). This work was published in the same year as *The Philosophy of Civilization*, and was based on lectures given at the Selly Oak theological colleges (University of Birmingham) in February 1922—which explains its strong apologetic character in attacking other religions. Its intended audience was seminary students, and its aim was to show that the Christian religion was not inferior to what some have contested were the intellectually superior religions from India and China. The tone of the work comes across as a ‘pep talk’ to seminarians demoralized by the attacks of historical critics on the sacred texts of the Christian faith, for which Schweitzer himself was to blame for a good part of that scholarly deconstruction with his *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. This context must be kept in mind when considering the uncharacteristic and almost polemical language and arguments he sometimes employs in this book—it is

not a text for respectful interfaith dialogue. The upshot of his arguments is that Christianity and the historical Jesus should be seen as promoting a philosophical understanding of the human person with a particularly strong ethical mandate aimed at the present world. The philosophical grounding for Christianity is, not surprisingly, in harmony with the ethical worldview for his secular Reverence for Life ethic.

⁴¹ In a latter work, Barsam (2008) emphasizes Christianity as the hidden thread in Schweitzer work: “The influence of Jesus in Schweitzer’s thought, and Schweitzer’s belief in the activity of the Will-to-Love to transform the will-to-live to a will-to-reverence, is the unacknowledged yet integral *theological* presupposition throughout his philosophical work” (his emphasis; p.24). Barsam’s book goes on to provide a thoughtful treatment of Reverence for Life in terms of Christian ethics with continued relevance today—an analysis that certainly stands in its own right as *one* possible theological exposition on Schweitzer’s Ethical Mysticism. But this cannot be considered a limitation upon Reverence for Life as being something exclusive to Christians alone.

⁴² As any student of Religious Studies knows, the word ‘religion’ is very hard to define. The problem is that to be an inclusive definition for all those elements of religious expression found in cultures both historically and contemporary, the definition becomes hopelessly vague. The simple word ‘religion’ encompasses the atheistic Theravāda Buddhism at one end of the spectrum and, at the other end it is the very cultural cohesiveness of a traditional society with an animistic worldview in which every part of daily life is informed with religious significance in some way or another. Only in modern industrialized societies does the idea religion become separated from such daily activity as working, eating, recreation and even hygiene. For this reason scholars have had to

distinguish from what at first were presumed to be the original animistic religions of hunter-gatherer societies and what was assumed to be their cultural evolution into formal, textual-based and institutionalized religion such as found in the Judeo-Christian traditions. This understanding was later abandoned since it presuppose animism to be a primitive form of later ecclesial developments in those cultures that produced the same scholars studying these ‘traditional’ societies. Improper value judgements invariably crept in. And so, it is now fairly accepted practice to just speak of religion geographically and historically—the religions originating in the Middle East for example. Now with respect to the question is Reverence for Life religious? It all depends on what is meant. This investigation holds the definition of religion to mean that Reverence for Life is inseparably integral to an established world religion such as Christianity, or as some have suggested to Hinduism or Buddhism via Schopenhauer. My conclusion as argued in this work that Reverence for Life is not dependent upon such religious underpinnings. Could it then be claimed that Reverence for Life is something akin to the animism of a traditional society wherein everything in one’s life is informed by that worldview? My conclusion is that only Ethical Mysticism fits that category, but even then not necessarily so. A parent’s devotion to his or her children is not animistic mysticism but something emerging from biology first. Likewise, Schweitzer’s Ethical Mysticism emerges from Darwin’s social instincts before it *can* be extrapolated into a religious worldview—or not, as the case may be. So again it is concluded that even the Ethical Mysticism of Reverence for Life is not religion either. It is only something may be brought into religion as a personal lived experience or left secular entirely, if the person so wishes.

⁴³ Schweitzer never lost his innate childhood conviction about the sacredness of all life, and he made special note of the need to educate all children through the power of example so they would not grow to fear being seen as sentimental by their peers, and “even [if you] make yourself look ridiculous in front of thoughtless people ... [they too] will also be more moved than they would like to admit by the elementary truth in that which touches them in such unfamiliar ways” (*A Place for Revelation*, p.26).

⁴⁴ I was once asked by an undergraduate student when teaching this material whether the power of example could instead be used to promote a ‘reverence for death’ through evil deeds—that is, could the power of example be thereby turned to produce an ethos of barbarity instead of true civilization? Schweitzer was writing in the wake of WWI and he deeply feared what was happening to Europe. The answer to her most astute question was obvious. It can and it indeed was. Unfortunately the student’s name has escaped my memory. My gratitude goes out to her and all my students for their many contributions to the development of my thought for this present work.

⁴⁵ Schopenhauer had argued that the higher evolved animals also possessed a certain measure of Cartesian recursive self-awareness, and mocks those who claim otherwise: “If any Cartesian were to find himself clawed by a tiger, he would become aware in the clearest possible manner of the sharp distinction such a beast draws between its ego and the non-ego” (*On the Basis of Morality* §19, p.176). Schweitzer similarly mocks those who say that animals do not possess a consciousness like our own. “It seems as if Descartes with his dictum that animals are mere machines had bewitched the whole of European philosophy [...] as if he had never seen a thirsty ox enjoying a drink” (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.297).

⁴⁶ Norton (2003) notes the full context from Hadley's work here: "The criterion which shows whether a thing is right or wrong is its permanence. Survival is not merely the characteristic of right; it is the test of right" (p.15). The Pragmatists rejected *a priori* reasoning and unchanging universal truth; they instead sought experiential and contingent truths, and they drew heavily upon Darwinian Theory and the scientific method (Langston 2003, p.156f.). They believed that such truths revealed "a world still open, a world still in the making" to use Dewey's expression (p.156). Leopold employs the same terminology when he wrote that "Ethics are possibly a kind of community instinct in-the-making" (*A Sand County Almanac*, p.239). Because Schweitzer's ethics are based in elemental thinking, not elaborate *a priori* metaphysics, it is possible to support cultural truths such as those confirmed by Leopold's scientifically informed pragmatism for particular ecological contexts.

⁴⁷ Very notably, in this essay Leopold he says that the writer of the Book of Job should be recognized as "the John Muir of Judah" for his rich and detailed descriptions of the wonders of the natural world (*The River of the Mother of God*, p.72).

⁴⁸ Schweitzer does stress that this must be "through the absolutely free decision of the individual" (*The Philosophy of Civilization*, p.320). What he was specifically arguing against is the confiscation of property by the State. Reverence for Life does not seek fascist ends. It is unclear how he would feel about progressive taxation arrived at through democratic processes within a free society though one suspects that he would not be opposed to it, as the phrase 'in the most varied ways' suggests.