

## PRAGMATIC PESSIMISM OR ON THE “DARK GRAY” OF THE WORLD\*

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### PESIMISMO PRAGMÁTICO O EN EL “GRIS OSCURO” DEL MUNDO

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#### **Abstract**

How can a theory of happiness, based upon the practical use of reason and acquired character, be understood in the thought of Schopenhauer, the great pessimist metaphysic? This article aims to prove that Schopenhauer's pessimism can be better understood if considered, on the one hand, as metaphysical pessimism and, on the other, as pragmatic pessimism. For this purpose, I seek to show that the consideration of Schopenhauer's singular eudemonology is fundamental to fully understand his pessimism.

**Keywords:** Schopenhauer, Metaphysical pessimism, Pragmatic pessimism, Eudemonology, Wisdom of Life

#### **Resumen**

¿Cómo puede entenderse una teoría de la felicidad, basada en el uso práctico de la razón y el carácter adquirido, en el pensamiento de Schopenhauer, el gran metafísico pesimista? Este artículo pretende demostrar que el pesimismo de Schopenhauer puede entenderse mejor si se considera, por un lado, como pesimismo metafísico y, por otro, como pesimismo pragmático. Para ello, trato de mostrar que la consideración de la singular eudemonología de Schopenhauer es fundamental para comprender plenamente su pesimismo.

**Palabras clave:** Schopenhauer, Pesimismo metafísico, Pesimismo pragmático, Eudemonología, Sabiduría de la vida

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## Introduction

If Schopenhauer, considered “the father of pessimism”, delimited the parameters and criteria of his moral foundation and of his theory of knowledge, he did not do the same in relation to what is conventionally called his pessimism. Nor did he specify to what extent this pessimism would relate to notions of ethics, aesthetics, asceticism, and even less eudemonology. In fact, the philosopher who considered this to be “the worst of possible worlds”, that “all in life is suffering”, or that life is venture that does not cover the costs of investment, also elaborated an eudemonology from his notion of wisdom of life (*Lebensweisheit*), as well as drafting a manual of rules for the “art of being happy”. Moreover, we know that in all his writings Schopenhauer used only three times the term pessimism (*Pessimismus*) to refer directly to his own doctrine; none of these occasions appear in the work published during his lifetime<sup>1</sup>.

To a large extent, it was the members of the so-called *Schopenhauer-Schule* (Schopenhauer School), formed by disciples *stricto* and *lato sensu*<sup>2</sup> of the “Buddha of Frankfurt”, who focused on the nature of the master’s pessimism and confronted the *Pessimismus-Frage* in a broad debate that permeated the second half of the nineteenth century in Germany. Much through the influence of this debate, characterizations that take Schopenhauerian thought as pessimistic usually justify such adjectivation from conceptions and concepts from the metaphysics of will. However, if this is so, how could a solely metaphysical pessimism encompass Schopenhauer’s contributions on human happiness in terms of wisdom of life, elaborated from what the philosopher himself called a “abandonment [*gänzlich abgeben*] of metaphysics” (PP 313), in the Introduction to his *Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life* (henceforth, *Aphorisms*)? The question indicates that if we want to achieve a detailed and insightful view of the nature of pessimism in Schopenhauer’s work, we will naturally have to know how to answer whether the passage from the metaphysical to the empirical-eudemonological sphere would mean a passage to some kind of “optimism” and, consequently, whether or not this would contradict the core of a philosophy that postulates a *mundus pessimus*. Would the above-mentioned “metaphysical abandonment” or “metaphysical deviation” also represent a “pessimism abandonment”? Or, if not, *what would be the nature of Schopenhauerian pessimism in the realm of wisdom of life*, given that it certainly could no longer be an exclusively metaphysical pessimism?

## Some positions on issues

The issue presented here about the place of eudemonology before the pessimism in Schopenhauer has already received important positions. In general, such positions stop, on the one hand, at contesting the possible complementarity that notions of eudemonology would represent before metaphysics, or, on the other, at legitimating the former in relation to the latter. But, for this, most of the reflections are restricted to take as a starting point Schopenhauer’s statements on the superiority of his metaphysics (his “real philosophy”) in face of the secondary character attributed by him to writings about happiness. He limits himself to considering the question on the basis of *Aphorisms* in almost exclusive confrontation with the theses of *The World as Will and Representation* (henceforth, *The World*), taking the fact that the first text belongs to the *Parerga and Paralipomena*,

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1 In 1828, in Manuscript Remains (HN) 66 of the *Adversaria* (cf. HN III 464); in 1833, in Manuscript Remains 49 of the *Pandectae II* (cf. HN IV 160); and, in 1855, in the letter of July 15 to Julius Frauenstädt (cf. GBr, XV 393). On the general notion of pessimism in Schopenhauer’s thought, the bibliography is extensive. I limit myself to mention: Beiser (2016); Dörpinghaus (1997); Lütkehaus (1980); and Köhler (1926).

2 cf. Fazio 2009 13-212, Fazio 2007 35-76.

“Minor (or Short) Philosophical Essays” (as the subtitle of the work states), as the only criterion to validate the attribution of a minor importance to the practical-pragmatic philosophy developed there. This is also the tendency of commentators who simply do not recognize the Schopenhauerian Eudemonic as a relevant field for the debate of pessimism and human action. As an example of the latter case, we can cite the reading of Paul Deussen who, dwelling on the theoretical-metaphysical sphere, even goes so far as to lament the fact that the *Parerga and paralipomena*, because they develop (in most of their texts) the “common” and empirical point of view of philosophy, have been Schopenhauer’s most widely read work (159). In the doxographic horizon of Western literature, Nietzsche can be considered the great influencer of the interpretation that takes the philosopher as a thinker who would have spread through humanity his “pessimism drenched with funeral perfume” (2008 59), which would have occurred not only due to the Schopenhauerian definition of existence as pain and suffering, but also due to the conception of negation of the will by aesthetic contemplation, in the sense identified by the author of *On the Genealogy of Morality* as an “ascetic ideal” (1998 § 6, 7). From these perspectives, everything is as if beyond the horizon of the denial of the will, the disapproval of life, mystical asceticism, quietism, Schopenhauer had not offered anything relevant for the consideration of human life and action. It is a matter, in short, of readings - defining a traditional image of Schopenhauer - that recognize nothing or little of the empirical-pragmatic-eudemonological apparatus of this philosophy, enclose themselves in the vicinity of the metaphysical pessimism of *The World*, and only succeed in taking the philosopher’s considerations on happiness, on the practical use of reason, and on life in society as risks of optimism and, therefore, of internal contradiction.

Against these analyses, Franco Volpi, especially in the varied presentations of his editions of Schopenhauer’s Posthumous, sees the theses on self-knowledge and wisdom of life as “compact and unitary” notions in relation to those of metaphysics. Even if he did not dwell on specific issues and concepts, Volpi does not treat the texts of eudemonology - both the *Eudemonology* sketches of the *Berlin Manuscripts* (1826-1829) and the *Aphorisms* (PP I) - as writings less worthy of attention than the metaphysical texts. He considers them, rather, as

points of suture through which Schopenhauer recomposes the metaphysics of pessimism of *The World* with the wisdom of life of the *Parerga and paralipomena*, the theoretical philosophy with the practical philosophy, the speculative dimension with the popular dimension of his system. It is thus consolidated the idea that philosophy must also be understood - far beyond the construction of the theoretical edifice of the metaphysics of pessimism, which teaches that life is not beautiful - as wisdom and the art of living (Volpi 2004 XI, my transl.).

Along the same interpretative line and inspired by Max Horkheimer’s reading of Schopenhauerian compassion (*cf.* Horkheimer 12-25), Ludger Lütkehaus (50-60) maintains that Schopenhauerian pessimism is not a quietism, but can be seen as a philosophy of the “praxis of ‘as if’”, just as compassion can be understood in terms of “active identification”. In this way, negative eudemonology, which teaches thoughtful and rational living, and compassion as “practical mysticism” would form one and the same argumentative basis that points out how Schopenhauer did not limit himself to the metaphysics of an “ontological pathodicy”, but set up wide reflections and formulations towards a practical philosophy.

My interpretation seeks to support the hypothesis that the question raised above can be analyzed by differentiating between what I call *metaphysical pessimism* and *pragmatic pessimism*. Mainly due to the specificity of notions proper to the wisdom of life (such as acquired character, practical reason and prudence) in the face of metaphysical notions (such as the predominance of selfishness

in the motivations for action, immutability of character, etc.), this differentiation would help in a possible definition of the generic notion of Schopenhauerian pessimism, but also in the analysis of whether it remains the same, is modified or acquires other semantics when considered on the empirical-pragmatic-eudemological level. In general terms, *metaphysical pessimism* would respond to the idea of the impossibility of lasting happiness. *Pragmatic pessimism*, on the other hand, would correspond to the idea that the bet on the wisdom of life, even if it delimits the horizons of a relative happiness, is not equivalent to promises of great successes on the practical level or to some optimism, but to *the pessimism of a euphemistic eudemology*, of a life “less unhappy” through the prudent use of reason.

### The metaphysical pessimism

The Schopenhauerian disapproval of the world as an unpleasant and hellish place is due to the observation of its volitional dynamics and the predominance of pain implicit in it, which means the same as the observation of a cosmology as a complex of eternally insatiable desires, motivators of disputes, pains, sufferings and signs of corruption and death. From an objective point of view, and insofar as the will is considered as the will to life, nature is nothing but a continuous tendency (*Streben*) to maintain this life, which occurs through an incessant satisfaction of desires. From a subjective point of view, an eventual satisfaction of desires is translated into feelings of pleasure. Each desire or lack is identified as pain and suffering, “the basis of all willing, however, is need, lack, and hence pain, and by its very nature and origin it is therefore destined to pain” (Schopenhauer 1969a 312). Pleasure is, then, always negative; it can only take place after admitting the reality of a desire or a suffering: “All satisfaction, or what is commonly called happiness, is really and essentially always *negative* only, and never positive” (Schopenhauer WW I 319). According to this, the world, such as it is, should not exist; it would rather be an error or an equivocation, since its general character does not allow the will lasting satisfactions; that is, its “non-being” would be more positive than its existence (Schopenhauer 1969b 41). Therefore Schopenhauer’s appreciation of Calderón de la Barca’s formulation that *el mayor delito del hombre es haber nacido*. That every existence is a mistake that should be avoided is something attested, from a formal point of view, by itself: “[The existence] is a continual rushing of the present into the dead past, a constant dying” (WW I 311). From the physical point of view, just as walking is a fall continually avoided, and breathing, feeding, warming oneself, sleeping, etc. is a succumbing continually postponed, so corporeal life is a dying continually avoided (*cf. Ibid.*). Here is an inescapable conception as a starting point for considering the problem of the foundation of this pessimism, or for recognizing a *mundus pessimus* in its frontal, empirically verified opposition to the doctrines advocating “the best of all possible worlds”.

However, this metaphysical pessimism can be better delimited from a more specific conceptual criterion to the extent that we recognize as its background elements of the Schopenhauerian foundation of morality<sup>3</sup>. From this parameter, such pessimism could be identified under three main metaphysical-moral presuppositions explained by the philosopher himself. The three mentioned presuppositions would be:

1. The recognition of egoism and evil as intrinsic tendencies or as fundamental instincts and impulses or incentives (*Grundtriebgedern*) to the human character: “The chief and fundamental incentive in a human being, as in an animal, is *egoism*, i.e. the urge to existence and well-being”

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3 In this sense, Invernizzi (32-33) states that “[...] Schopenhauerian pessimism has, to say the least, a close connection with the morality of this philosophy, and indeed Schopenhauer insists on many occasions on the necessity of considering the reality in its complex from the point of view of its moral significance” (my transl.).

(BM 190). It is not, then, a matter of “anthropological pessimism”. For although animal egoism does not consist of planned “self-interest” (*Eigennutz*), it would still be “selfishness” (*Selbstsucht*). In the human, however, self-interested egoism knows no limits: “Each carries in himself, as his representation, the single world that he is really acquainted with and that he knows about, and he is therefore its centre [...]. These, then, are the elements from which egoism grows on the basis of the will to life, and constantly lies like a wide trench between one human being and another” (*Id.* 191). In underlining this “magnitude of egoism” (*die Größe des Egoismus*), Schopenhauer comes to the nefarious consideration that “many a human being would be ready to strike another dead simply to smear his boots with the other’s fat” (*Id.* 192). And as much as the skeptical elements regarding the existence of a natural foundation for ethics and the realization of the moral corruption of the world are not enough to deny any possibility of any corner for genuine morality, they are “to limit our expectations of the moral disposition in human beings and [...] to show that the incentive to good cannot be a very strong one” (*Id.* 187). This pessimistic distrust is even greater when one considers that the manifestation of the intrinsic anti-morality tendency in every character is always concealed by the legal order, the need for honor, cordiality, or even education, which is preponderantly disparate to reality and which children receive early on. Were it not for these legal and civil “disguises”, wickedness and cruelty would be the order of the day. Hence the need of “to read crime stories and descriptions of states of anarchy [...]; the thousands that swarm around one another before our eyes in peaceful intercourse should be regarded as just so many tigers and wolves whose bite is made safe by a strong muzzle” (*Id.* 188), to know what is properly the human being in the moral aspect.

2. *The impossibility of character improvement*, added to necessity as the ruler of motives and actions, which makes *compassion*, as a casual and unpromotable motivation, at the mercy of its encounter with a character - the intelligible, innate and immutable character - that is receptive to *this* class of motives. The pessimism outlined in these terms would then allow itself to be identified by the non-recognition of success by experience, culture, religion, or any indoctrination, if these aim at the unchanging and constant individuality. Here it is necessary to presuppose the elementary aspects of the Schopenhauerian doctrine of character taken as intelligible character, empirical character, and also as acquired character (the latter to be discussed in the context of pragmatic pessimism). The thesis of fixity and constancy of character is present in all phases of the philosophical production of the thinker: it is formulated in the posthumous fragment 159, of 1814<sup>4</sup>; it is presupposed during the formulation of the metaphysics of will and the foundation of ethics; and it is repeated again in Vol. II of *Parerga e paralipomena* (II §117).

3. The indication of authentic moral action as *mysterious action*: “*This process* is, I repeat, *mysterious*: for it is something of which reason can give no immediate account and whose grounds are not to be ascertained on the path of experience” (BM 218). Also in this sense, although the overcoming of the “Veil of Maya” may represent the overcoming of the empirically verified pessimism itself, it would be a pessimism that would be justified by the Schopenhauerian opposition to optimism regarding the production of moral action: the immediacy of altruistic actions cannot be taught and disseminated with an ever increasing quantity and intensity. Schopenhauer’s argument, on this point, is precise:

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If all the many religious institutions and moralizing efforts were not to have failed in their purpose,

4 The formulation is as follows: “Weil der Mensch sich nicht ändert, und also auch sein moralischer Charakter durchaus im ganzen Leben derselbe bleibt, und er die übernommene Rolle ausspielen muß ohne auch nur im mindesten aus dem Charakter zu fallen, ihn daher weder Erfahrung noch Philosophie noch Religion bessern kann” (HN I, Die Genesis des Systems § 159 91).

the older half of humanity would have to be, at least on average, significantly better than the younger half. But there is so little trace of that that we hope, conversely, for something good from young people rather than from the old, who have become worse through experience (*Id.* 237-238).

It is in the face of these theses, among others, that one can grasp the differential that Schopenhauer attributes to his foundation of human action and existence in relation to the “optimism of all philosophical systems”, an expression used by the philosopher himself in *On Will in Nature*. In this way, although the thinker did not use the term *Pessimismus* in a direct way to encompass with it the subjects of the three topics listed above, the textual opposition to the optimism of “other systems” allows us to consider such topics as legitimate presuppositions and contents of the so-called *metaphysical* pessimism of Schopenhauer.

### The pragmatic pessimism

In addition to the metaphysical apparatus that grounds the so-called Schopenhauerian pessimism, there are in this philosophy considerations made from an empirical-eudemonological perspective of both human action and existence in general. In order to assume this other philosophical horizon, the thinker asserts, in the *Aphorisms* (*cf.* 313), a “total abandon” from “the higher metaphysical ethical” point of view, which allows us to affirm that the question of the articulation of a wisdom of life with his metaphysical thought was not ignored by Schopenhauer himself. Any incoherence that might present itself to the reader who goes beyond the end of Volume II of *The World* (especially Chapter 49), where we read the defense that our “only inborn error” (634) consists in believing that we exist in order to be happy, to Chapter V of the *Aphorisms*, in which we find fifty-three (53) maxims of wisdom of life, would certainly be because this same reader has disregarded the decisive observations of the Introduction of the same *Aphorisms*, methodological clarifications that allow us to note the coherence between the metaphysical approach and the eudemonological approach to human existence. In the aforementioned Introduction, the thinker states:

Now whether human life does or ever can correspond to the conception of such an existence, is a question that, as we know, is answered in the negative by my philosophy; whereas eudemonology presupposes an answer in the affirmative. Now this is based on the inborn error which is censured by me in the forty-ninth chapter of the second volume of my chief work. However, to be able to work out such an answer, I have therefore had to abandon entirely the higher metaphysical ethical standpoint (*habe ich daher gänzlich abgehen müssen von dem höheren, metaphysisch-ethischen Standpunkte*) to which my real philosophy leads (*meine eigentliche Philosophie*). Consequently, the whole discussion here to be given rests to a certain extent on a compromise (*auf einer Ackommodation*), in so far as it remains at the ordinary empirical standpoint and firmly maintains the error thereof. Accordingly, its value can be only conditioned, for even the word eudemonology is only a euphemism (PP I 313).

This “total abandon” had already been announced before, in a manuscript remain of the *Foliant II*<sup>5</sup>, and, if we recognize it in terms of Schopenhauer’s methodological care, it would be a “deviation” that would guarantee the two perspectives developed by his philosophy, the metaphysical and the eudemonological, which, according to Malter (§ 4), would consist in the very engine of this thought. To this end, the mentioned “abandon” or “deviation” would present itself as strategic: the admission that, on the one hand, there is “real philosophy” (or a philosophy “properly so called”, *eigentliche*

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5 The phrasing is found in a note and reads as follows, in the original, “Ich sehe nämlich hier ganz ab von dem höheren und wahren metaphysisch ethischen Standpunkt” (HN III, Foliant II § 124 268).

*Philosophie*), based on a “superior” point of view, and, on the other hand, there is eudemonology, whose value is conditional and “inferior” (in relation to the metaphysical “superiority”), would not imply contradictions or conflicts of philosophical principles, but would ensure the supplementarity of the two points of view. And so, even if the subtitle of the extensive *Parerga and Paralipomena* classifies them as “Short philosophical Essays” (*kleine philosophische Schriften*), they would not be “secondary” writings, but improvements of the system of *The World*.

If such a “abandon from metaphysics” is recognized as an important moment in the elaboration of this thought, then the main ensuing consequence would be that, in order to be able to take human action under the empirical-pragmatic view, the reading parameters cannot be exactly the same as those adopted under the exclusively metaphysical view. We would have to assume, for example, that philosophy would not only describe what, in general, a selfish, compassionate or evil character would be capable of doing, as allowed by Schopenhauer’s empirical characterology, but, using this same characterology and through an observational psychology, it would also be an instrument with which the individual could find rules of behavior and life in order to alleviate his sorrows and move on in the world. Schopenhauer’s characterology could, thus, be considered from a movement that goes from the emphasis given to the invariable aspect of human nature (intelligible character) to the emphasis and interpretation, within the scope of human action, of its variable aspect (acquired character), which would be perfectible through experience and culture, as well as more directed to the praxis of life.

The notions that Schopenhauer elaborates from the eudemonological point of view presuppose, as we have seen, the idea of an accommodation in relation to the perspective of the “error” of happiness, a concession to the common horizon of philosophy. This, however, still represents a continuity —rather than a replacement— of pessimistic philosophical assumptions from the metaphysical point of view, a finding that motivates our initial guiding question: what would be the nature of the continuity of pessimism in eudemonological terms?

Let us highlight the peculiarity of the question of happiness in Schopenhauerian language: it is a notion that cannot be reduced to the idea expressed by the motto “it is impossible to be happy”, but it also concerns the impossibility of limiting it to a set of maxims that can be adopted as a recipe that ensures human happiness, contrary to what the numerous rules for the wisdom of life elaborated by the thinker may suggest, especially when considered under titles such as “the art of being happy”.

If this is so, the admission of this impossibility already indicates to what extent the hypothesis of what I call *pragmatic pessimism* would be justified. In referring to the level of Schopenhauerian philosophy that does not disregard - but presupposes - metaphysical ethics and pessimism, this formulation would designate a pessimism for life *in* the world, *applied* to the daily and practical unfoldings of the invariable strata of character, viable for the case in which one considers the employment - rather than the suppression - of each personality in the world. It would be a kind of pessimism because, among other reasons that I will indicate below, in recognizing the necessity of the instrumentalizations provided by the intellect to face the “evil of living”, Schopenhauer never takes such instrumentalizations as certain or definitive.

Now, if the reasons that led the thinker to elaborate a euphemistic eudemonology are, in general, pessimistic, the results of this eudemonology cannot be assured and, therefore, these also cannot denote some optimism. It is in this sense that we can consider what Volpi states: “It is precisely from the *pessimistic conviction* that life, that is, human finitude, oscillates between boredom and pain and that this world is nothing but a vale of tears that Schopenhauer takes the exhortation

to face such a situation with the help of the *precious instrument* that mother nature has endowed us with: the intellect” (2008 X). It is impossible not to keep in mind, however, the secondary and limited nature that Schopenhauer attributes to this “instrument” in the face of the primary and always predominant nature of the irrational will.

The use of the term “pragmatic” here does not intend to refer to pragmatism and utilitarianism as philosophical currents, but to the very objective outlined by Schopenhauer to elaborate an eudemonology that considers human actions as object of *utilization* and *application* of maxims. And if these are applications or utilizations (of rules of life), then they cannot only be distinguished by the fact that they are carried out from an empirical-eudemonological point of view, but also by the fact that they assume a “*pragmatic*” approach. The hypothesis of a pragmatic pessimism would be appropriate, then, to the extent that the wisdom of life is considered as the domain of strategies *employed specifically in order* to obtain “the maximum possible happiness”, or the minimum possible unhappiness, although in the molds outlined by a *negative and euphemistic eudemonology*. It would be a kind of “adaptation” of some assumptions - such as immutability and disinterestedness - to the practical sphere, which in the ethical-metaphysical sphere safeguarded the legitimacy of moral action, but also signaled a mystification of ethics by praising the figures of saints, ascetics and anachronists. Metaphysical pessimism, which can be taken by the motto “it is impossible to be happy” —and, instead, only deny the will or the will— is not entirely abandoned on the occasion of the “deviation” from metaphysics. On the contrary, it is adapted to the case of a “life practice” that, from then on, is based on the motto according to which “it is possible to be *less* unhappy”, since, it is worth remembering, even if the spontaneous abnegation of the will remains as a criterion for liberation from the pains of the world, there would be an “indispensable amount of will to be realized” (HN III 127) or an “amount of pain to be avoided”<sup>6</sup>.

But, after all, what would be the expressions or the very content of a pessimism within the Schopenhauerian theory of happiness? To answer in more specific terms and from Schopenhauer’s own handwriting, we could list the following points.

1. The limited scope of the *practical use of reason*, a concept conceived in harmony with the Stoic conception of it, according to what we read in § 16 of Volume I and in chapter 16 of Volume II of *The World*. Schopenhauer recognizes that Stoic ethics is an appreciable and worthy attempt to use reason in order to elevate the human being above suffering. However, precisely because it aims at “beatitude” at all costs and exclusively at the expense of reason, this philosophy would end up being reduced to a “wooden puppet”, deprived of intuitive representation and inner poetic truth. This criticism is based on the thesis that if wisdom in life and prudence can save us from certain hardships, this does not guarantee that they can bequeath us perfection or eternal beatitude, as the Stoics claimed. All the capacity that the practical-pragmatic use of reason has, through rules, to dispose of advice and maxims does not have sufficient force to subtract the human volitional condition. Neither this capacity nor the maxims themselves could be supreme. And Schopenhauer would have indicated the limits of the purposes of Stoic philosophy precisely because he presupposed the impossibility of the practical use of reason to immunize humans from the sufferings intrinsic to life, since there would always be “a complete contradiction in our wishing

6 Safranski uses an expression similar to what is here called pragmatic pessimism when he states that “[in the Aphorisms] the basic pessimism is ‘dampened’ and the wisdom for survival and self-assertion, censured on other occasions, are now given new pragmatic valuation” (Safranski 494-495, my emphasis; my transl.). A “dampened” pessimism, however, does not mean an outdated pessimism. The indication of ideals of wisdom of life represents a pragmatic alternative for the individual not to have to relegate everything to fate, chance, or the necessity of actions, but it is no guarantee of success in the face of the hardships of existence; it aims at a certain “economy of pain”, not the elimination of the possibilities of pain.



to live without suffering” (WW I 90).

2. The conviction that happiness depends much more on what one is and not so much on what one has or represents, since what one is, however, does not depend on the individual. If happiness is described by Schopenhauer as synonym of the individual’s autarchy in relation to the external world, it still brings intrinsically to itself a pessimistic presupposition insofar as it depends on a component that cannot be decided: “Ist demnach das Subjektive, die Persönlichkeit das Wesentlichste so ist [für das Glück] *das Schlimme* davon andererseits, daß das Subjektive gar nicht in unsrer Macht steht, sondern unveränderlich für das ganze Leben fest steht” (HN III 384).

3. The achievement of acquired character as “perfect self-knowledge” or as “the most complete possible knowledge of our own individuality” (WW I 305) is something for a lifetime, depends on the experience of the years lived, and is only achieved through multiple efforts and renunciations. The § 55 of *The World* and the *Aphorisms* indicate to us that this achievement has as a condition a painful experience about “what we want and what we can do”, without which, “must often be driven back on to our own path by hard blows from outside” (*Id.* 304). If these conditions for achieving acquired character reveal the pessimistic part of the eudemonological sphere of this philosophy, the pragmatic aspect of such pessimism can be recognized when the philosopher states that as for personality, “das Einzige was hinsichtlich der Persönlichkeit in unsrer Macht steht, ist daß man sie zum möglichsten *Vortheil benutze* [the only thing that is within our power is *to use* it in the most *advantageous* way possible]” (*Id.* 385). In other terms, all we can do is “to take the greatest possible advantage of the given personality (*die Persönlichkeit benutzen*)” (PP I 320), even if these are always uncertain in the face of the positive nature of suffering, and even if personality is not determined by us.

4. The predominant content of the *Aphorisms’* maxims, which, in general, concerns prudence, the dosage of expectations, and the capacity to bear suffering, presupposes that the main function of such maxims would consist in acting based on the recognition of the hardships that result from the dissatisfaction of the will. This function of the wisdom advice would unfold in a practical positioning of the individual who, with the help of such maxims, could rationally and intentionally restrict his search for pleasures. To do so, it would be necessary that we learn to adapt ourselves “to the imperfection of circumstances and things, and always look out for misfortunes in order to avoid or endure them” (*Id.* 472-473). It is worth noting here that since the point of view considered is no longer the superior, ethical-metaphysical one, then the place of the negation (*Verneinung*) of the will is occupied by the idea of ponderation (*Überlegung*) about the desires to be realized or the evils to be avoided, which can be considered, as I have already mentioned, in the sense of prudence. This is what can be read, among other occasions, in the paragraph of the *Adversaria* entitled *Fortsetzung der Eudämonik (Continuation of Eudemonism)*: “Um nicht sehr unglücklich zu werden, ist das sicherste Mittel, daß man nicht sehr glücklich zu werden verlange, also seine Ansprüche auf Genuß, Besitz, Rang, Ehre u.s.f. [The surest way not to become too unhappy consists in not desiring to be too happy, therefore in reducing one’s pretensions to a very moderate level with regard to pleasures, possessions, categories, honor, etc.] (HN III 599). In fact, in the *Foliant II*, serenity of spirit is taken as the first condition for achieving a possible state of happiness, since it is taken as “the capacity to suffer”.

The suggestive maxims would represent, then, a kind of supply for us to endure the arid traversal through the “worst of all possible worlds”, but without the possession of such tools endowing us with sufficient strength to relativize the nature of this *mundus pessimus*. It would be, at most, the conquest of a way of acting by the individual in his or her inescapable world, whose nature —volitional— will not cease to be the stage of eternal sufferings. Even though our

existence is something that would be better if it were not, the wisdom of life could still help us to endure such existence. However, it is essential to note the limited nature of such wisdom, which can be emphasized when we realize that, even in a text about happiness like the *Aphorisms*, the thinker registers as “supreme wisdom” the denial and rejection of existence, something that is only attainable, however, by rare ascetics and saints.

From this perspective, the “optimistic dogmas” mentioned by Schopenhauer in 1844, in the opening of chapter 49 of volume II of *The World*, as possible maximizers of the search for satisfactions of the will, receive no mention in the eudemonological sphere, since the philosopher already starts from the assumption that the wisdom of life can only have in view the confrontation, with strategy, of human miseries. This allows us to affirm that the eudemonological indications would represent a *continuation of pessimism* on the pragmatic level, but never a passage from metaphysical pessimism to some kind of *optimism*.

Consequently, I do not agree with Jair Barboza when he calls Schopenhauerian thought on existence and human action elaborated from the eudemonological point of view “practical optimism”. Barboza considers that “despite the suffering as the trade of existence, *an optimism* of a practical nature is possible, especially if we are guided by the wisdom of life” (Barboza 2006, my transl.), and that, therefore, “we can define Schopenhauer’s thought as pendular, that is, he oscillates continuously between metaphysical pessimism and practical optimism” (*Ibid.*). Even if with the expression “practical optimism” Barboza intended, at least on this occasion, to indicate the same difference in philosophical tone that I am aiming at here, that is, the conceptual differentiation between the metaphysical and the eudemonological spheres of Schopenhauerian philosophy, I think that it is not possible to recognize any optimism in the last of these spheres, which would mean over-coloring the sphere of the theory of a euphemistic happiness, which ultimately continues to display the same dark tones as the sphere of metaphysical pessimism — perhaps at most with a variation between black and dark gray— with the only difference that the presuppositions of such pessimism are adapted for another purpose.

This is not only because of the points and characteristics of the Frankfurt philosopher’s Eudemonic that I highlighted earlier, but because, in full *The Wisdom of Life*, Schopenhauer asserts that, presupposing as positive the nature of pains, “whoever takes a gloomy view regards this world as a kind of *hell* and is accordingly concerned only with procuring for himself a small fireproof room; such a man is much less mistaken” (HN III 407). “Pragmatic pessimism”, in the sense stated above, would be a more pertinent expression than “practical optimism” to indicate, among other purposes, Schopenhauer’s concern in combating the folly of trying to transform the world’s “theater of woes” into a place of pleasures, using, for this purpose, the uncertain expedients of the wisdom of life.

If the content of the maxims mentioned here indicates the face of a Schopenhauerian pessimism of the eudemonological realm, we come across such pessimism even more when we read the formulation at the end of the Introduction to the *Aphorisms*:

In general, of course, the sages of all times have always said the same thing and the fools, that is, the immense majority of all times, have always done the same thing, namely the opposite; and so will it always be. Therefore Voltaire says: *Nous laisserons ce monde-ci aussi sot et aussi méchant que nous l'avons trouvé en y arrivant* (Id. 314).

The philosopher’s surprising statement about the effects of the advice of the “wise men of all times” would certainly apply also to his own maxims of life wisdom, since the *Aphorisms* would aim

at sowing a supplement in this immense field already worked on by others. And, if this is so, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the above statement represents well the —pessimistic— nature of the author’s projection about the effects of his euphemistic eudemonology. There would be, then, a kind of “eudemonological pessimism”<sup>7</sup> in Schopenhauer, but not an optimism, no matter how contradictory the statement may seem to those who do not recognize the due importance that the peculiarities of this “theory of happiness” require: it is, I emphasize again, a euphemistic eudemonology that, perhaps, would not retain pessimistic traits only if it were elaborated by an adept of the thesis of the “best of all possible worlds”.

## Conclusion

The pessimism of the pragmatic-eudemonological sphere, here called pragmatic pessimism, is supplementary in relation to the properly metaphysical dimension of human existence and, therefore, to the so-called metaphysical pessimism of Schopenhauerian thought. The hypothesis of a pragmatic pessimism can help in delimiting the notorious - even if not very circumscribed - Schopenhauerian pessimism. It is appropriate to the extent that the wisdom of life is considered as the domain of strategies *employed* pragmatically and specifically *in order to* obtain “the maximum possible happiness”, or the minimum possible unhappiness, but in the molds outlined by a *negative and euphemistic eudemonology*, that is, not as an overcoming of metaphysical pessimism, but as a strategy that presupposes it at another level. It would be a kind of “adaptation” of some assumptions, such as the immutability of character, to the practical sphere. With this, metaphysical pessimism, which can be taken by the motto “it is impossible to be happy” (being possible, instead, only to deny the will), is not entirely abandoned on the occasion of the mentioned “deviation” from metaphysics. On the contrary, it is “adapted” to the case of a life practice that, from then on, is based on the motto that “it is possible to be *less* unhappy”.

As I have tried to demonstrate to the extent that it is outlined in the *Aphorisms* as offering maxims for the human being to be the “less unhappy” possible, eudemonology would be fully in tune with the theory expressed mainly in *The World*, according to which each individual, as an elusive sketch drawn by the permanent will, has its price paid “with many deep sorrows, and finally with a bitter death, long feared and finally made manifest (WW I 322). Now, this eudemonology elaborated from a “deviation” from the superior and metaphysical point of view of philosophy would not represent, therefore, any “deviation” from pessimism, since the philosopher already starts from the pessimistic conviction that the wisdom of life can only have in view the *confrontation*, with strategy, of human miseries. The indications of maxims would represent a *continuation of pessimism* (and not an entry into optimism), this time on the pragmatic level.

In this sense, we can conclude that to analyze Schopenhauerian thought without taking into account its pragmatic-eudemonological profile would imply taking this pessimism in a partial way. The eudemonology would represent a less titanic face of a thought that, if it penetrated to the core of the absurd, *grundlos*, and irremediable character of the world, also left to the “human of the world” the wisdom of life as a suggestion of conduct. These would be two perspectives of

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7 I do not use the expression in the sense of the “eudemonological pessimism” of Eduard von Hartmann and Agnes Taubert, who, imbued with an alleged critical and scientific foundation of pessimism, elaborate it in a different perspective and with different elements, namely, in the sense of an “eudemonological calculation” intended to determine the (eudemonological) value of existence and, thus, whether or not it would be preferable to non-existence (cf. Hartmann (36-49); Taubert (1873); and Beiser (152-155). For the perspective taken here of a pessimism of the eudemonological scope of wisdom of life, cf. Neymeyr (1996).

reading the same object, that is, the very volitional and unsubstantiated nature of the micro —and macrocosm, whose intentions can be illustratively differentiated by the metaphors coined by two of our philosopher’s contemporaries: on the one hand, Jean Paul compared “The world as will and representation” to a malinconic Norwegian lake, surrounded by high rocks, in which the sun is never mirrored, but only the starry sky. On the other hand, the poet Adelbert von Chamisso personally suggested to Schopenhauer in Berlin that the “color” with which Schopenhauer had “painted the world” need not be black, but a *dark gray* (Gespr 79). The image of the Norwegian lake could represent the pains of the world, the meaninglessness of life and the impossibility of improving human character as a complex of gratuitous and groundless desires, the immanent metaphysical pessimism that “is not in the sun”, although it exists. Chamisso’s metaphor, on the other hand, would illustrate the conception that the world can be expressed with “softer colors”, which, in a way, Schopenhauer indicated with his peculiar eudemonology — another face of the same pessimism.

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