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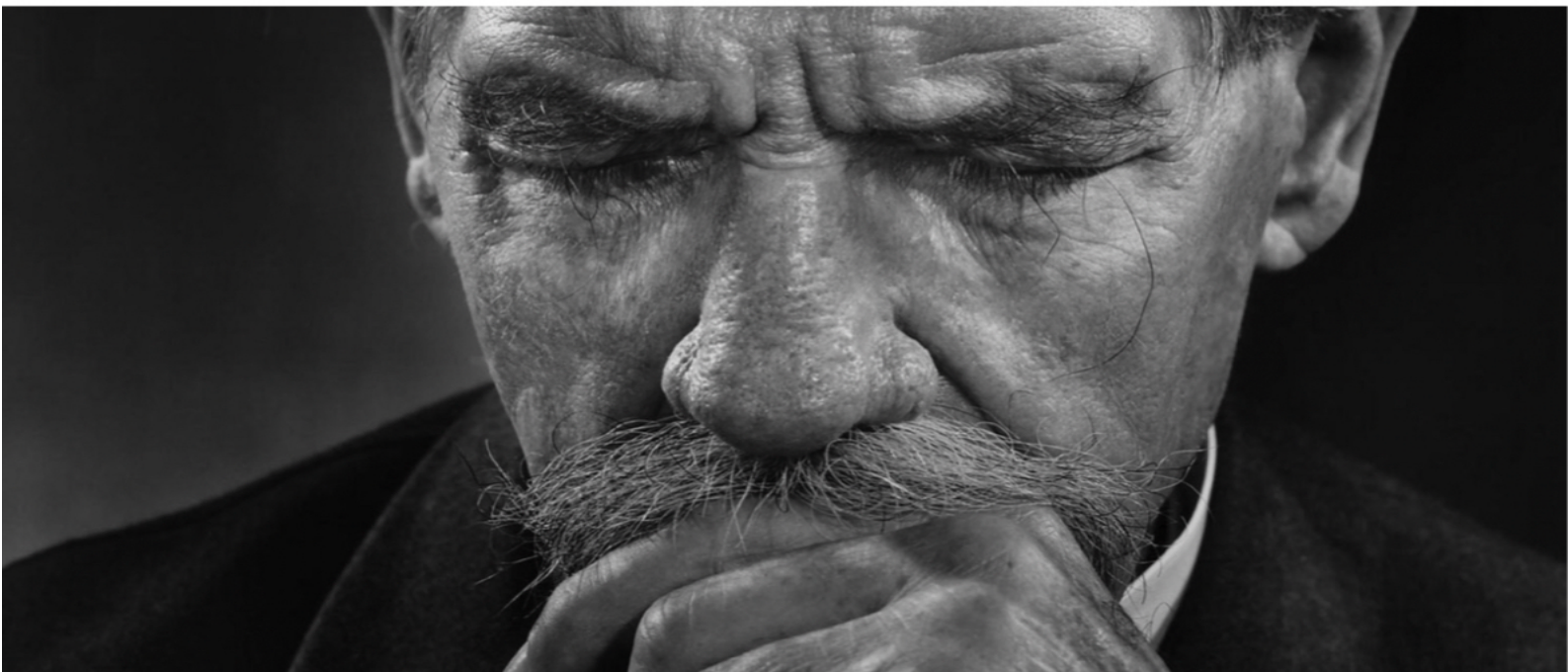

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Introduction

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The papers presented here were all given at a day conference held at Peterhouse on Friday, 10 November 2023. Two of the participants, Ulrich Körtner and Christophe Chalamet, delivered their contributions on Zoom, and the rest were delivered in person. The contributors are made up of experts in what one might term 'Schweitzer Studies' and those who, while boasting a specialism in subjects of relevance to Schweitzer, like philosophy and theology, have not made the latter the subject of their research. This has made for an interesting medley of contributions.

The conference concerned itself with Schweitzer's two volume work on the philosophy of civilisation, originally published as *Der Verfall und Wiederaufbau der Kultur* and *Kulturphilosophie II: Kultur und Ethik* by C.H. Beck in Berlin in 1923. These two volumes were translated into English that same year by C.T. Campion and first published separately by A & C Black as part one and two of *The Philosophy of Civilization*: 'The Decay and Restoration of Civilization' and 'Civilization and Ethics' respectively. 2023, then, marked the hundredth year since the publication of these volumes and the conference was convened to mark this anniversary.

The volumes are important in that they constitute Schweitzer's first published articulation of his philosophy of civilisation. Schweitzer had been thinking about the matters which he discusses in these volumes for some time but had only begun writing the work during his period of internment in the First World War by the French authorities, first in Gabon and subsequently in the south of France. The fruits of this activity, eventually published posthumously in 2005 with the German title, *Wir Epigonen*,[1] anticipates some of what is found in *Kulturphilosophie*, especially material in the first volume of a culturally-critical character, but is in essence a very

[1] Albert Schweitzer, *Wir Epigonen. Kultur und Kulturstaat*, eds. Ulrich Körtner and Johann Zürcher (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005).

different work.[2] So, for instance, in *Wir Epigonen*, Schweitzer spends a good deal of time commenting on issues related to what in broad terms might be termed societal matters (the role of the state, the church, the question of education etc.), none of which are discussed in *Kulturphilosophie*. Schweitzer planned on discussing these matters in a mooted fourth volume with the projected title, *Kulturstaat*. He never got round to publishing volumes three and four in his lifetime, though he wrote a good deal of material pertinent to the third volume,[3] eventually published in the *Nachlass*,[4] and discussed by Percy Mark in one of the essays in this journal.

The two published volumes of Schweitzer's *Kulturphilosophie* could be seen, at least in part as a response to Oswald Spengler's work entitled *Der Untergang des Westens: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, originally published in 1918 and with a second volume in 1922. Although Spengler's work was the subject of much negative criticism on the part of specialist philosophers, it became strikingly popular in the period immediately following the end of the First World War, reflecting the sense of cultural despair and pessimism which characterised that period of time in Germany and elsewhere.[5] Schweitzer knew Spengler (they shared the same publisher, C.H. Beck) and had clearly read his work. Although he shared with Spengler, and many others, the view that the First World War was symptomatic of a pre-existing cultural malaise, where Spengler argued that this was a natural process—cultures grew, flourished and declined like plants and the west now found itself in the final throes of one of those cultures (in Spengler's technical terminology, a culture become a civilisation only in its late stage)—Schweitzer rejected any notion of inevitability to the idea of decline, central to Spengler's thesis, or indeed to revival, and to that effect sought not only to diagnose why society was in a state of decline (*Verfall*) but more importantly, how it could extricate itself

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[2] For the background see Körtner in this journal.

[3] Albert Schweitzer, *Die Weltanschauung der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben, erster und zweiter Teil* and *Die Weltanschauung der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben, dritter und zweiter Teil,* eds. Claus and Johannes Zürcher (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999 and 2001).

[4] Albert Schweitzer, *Werke aus dem Nachlass*, eds. Richard Brüllmann *et al.* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1989–2006).

[5] For a helpful discussion of the work and its effect see Charles Bambach, 'Weimar Philosophy and the Crisis of Historical Thinking', in *Weimar Thought: a Contested Legacy,* eds. Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormack, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 133-49.

from that situation.[6]

In the opening essay of this collection Christophe Chalamet examines the first volume of *Kulturphilosophie*. He begins by making an interesting observation about Schweitzer's self-presentation. Chalamet argues that Schweitzer's reference to decline and rebuilding in that volume suggests the language of Jeremiah from the Old Testament, and Schweitzer's claim at another point in the volume that he is a kind of watchman, reminds the reader of Ezekiel. Schweitzer, then, according to Chalamet, is presenting himself as a prophet; and Chalamet goes on to show how in his account of society's malaise he shows himself to be a prophet in the sense that he both predicts and judges. He draws particular attention to Schweitzer's view that society is over-organised and that through the growth of urbanization at the end of the nineteenth century, many people found themselves cut off from the natural world, all of which contributed to a sense of real alienation. Chalamet also highlights Schweitzer's denunciation of nationalism, to be distinguished from patriotism, and the consequences that Schweitzer sees as arising from the growth of a nationalistic spirit. While keen to praise Schweitzer's perceptiveness on these points, noting how they remain highly relevant today, Chalamet criticises Schweitzer for his nostalgic vision of the period of the Enlightenment, which he tends to idealise in an unrealistic way. This idealisation, in part at least, arises from Schweitzer's view that during that period philosophy was a properly public discourse and philosophers sought to answer questions which were relevant to wider society in a way Schweitzer approved. A significant part of Schweitzer's *Verfall* is taken up with attributing the decline of civilisation to what he sees as philosophy's abrogation of its responsibility to act as a 'guide' to a wider public and its decline, as he would see it, into a regrettably solipsistic state in which issues of its own history and irrelevant specialisms have become the order of the day.

Chalamet concludes his essay by wondering about the extent of Schweitzer's solution, the *Wiederaufbau* or rebuilding side of his project, seen in his reference to the need to become "new men" and to create "new conditions." In different ways, this matter, particularly the former, is addressed in Schweitzer's second volume, discussed here in contributions by Ulrich Körtner and Predrag Cicovacki. After presenting a clear account of the historical background to *Kultur und Ethik*, Körtner summarises the component parts of Schweitzer's philosophical position as we find it in this second volume. He sees it as a response to what Schweitzer perceives as an encroaching nihilism, and makes much of its Enlightenment roots and

[6] For further discussion see Körtner in this volume.

assumptions, while indicating how Schweitzer wishes to move beyond those assumptions by exploring new foundations. He presents the reader with Schweitzer's essentially ethical definition of civilisation and his conscious avoidance of a scientistic approach to ethics. He draws attention to Schweitzer's fundamental assumption that no proper ethical system can be derived from the supposed "meaningfulness of a world interpreted metaphysically." As Schweitzer himself writes: "If we take the world as it is, it is impossible to attribute to it a meaning in which the aims and objects of mankind and of individual men have a meaning also."[7] There is too strange a mixture in the world of cruelty and goodness for that to be possible in the way the great speculative philosophers of the Enlightenment thought would be the case. So, in any ethical system we cannot move from world view (*Weltanschauung*) to life view (*Lebensanschauung*). Instead, the process must be reversed. This leads Schweitzer to assert: "True philosophy must start from the most immediate and comprehensive fact of consciousness, which says: 'I am life which wills to live, in the midst of life which wills to live.'"[8] This apprehension, so Schweitzer contends, leads necessarily to a sense of limitless responsibility to all life, understood as reverence for life. Körtner goes on from this to make the important point that Schweitzer's ethics is not just about responsibility but also about value. As Schweitzer writes: "My life carries its own meaning in itself. This meaning lies in my living out the highest idea which shows itself in my will-to-live, the idea of reverence for life. With that for a starting-point I give value to my own life and to all the will-to-live which surrounds me, I persevere in activity, and I produce values."[9]

Also significant, Körtner contends, is the religious dimension of what Schweitzer is advocating (already alluded to, but in a different context, by Chalamet). This is captured both in Schweitzer's attribution of a divine dimension to being, captured in his view that ethical action is bound up with becoming one with what Schweitzer terms 'endless being'; and in the redemptive language he associates with his ethical viewpoint. Körtner is a clear-eyed critic of Schweitzer. There is nothing logically compelling in the claim that the connectedness of life forms through their wills-to-live leads necessarily to the idea of reverence for life; the idea of boundless responsibility carries with it unresolvable philosophical problems; and the religious substructure of Schweitzer's view would not be

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[7] Albert Schweitzer, *Civilization and Ethics*, third edition, trans. C.T. Campion (London: A & C Black, 1949 [1923]), xiv.

[8] Schweitzer, *Civilization,* 242.

[9] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, xvii-xviii.

widely accepted. But Körtner is clear that Schweitzer's philosophical position carries with it a number of significant insights, seen not least in its strong opposition to a disengaged reasoning, as Charles Taylor has developed that concept, in which the universe is seen in exclusively instrumental terms.[10]

Predrag Cicovacki, like Körtner before him, combines criticism of Schweitzer's philosophical system as it is developed in *Kultur und Ethik* with praise (he calls himself a sympathetic critic). His essay begins arrestingly with the story of how in 1913 the Indian mathematician, Ramanujan, sent a letter to the distinguished Cambridge mathematician, G. H. Hardy. The latter read the letter sensing that there was brilliance there but of an unexpected and not easily defined kind. Cicovacki thinks that as a philosopher Schweitzer is a kind of brilliant eccentric, a bit like Ramanujan, and his essay is an attempt to explore that observation. Part of what he writes, therefore, is taken up with showing Schweitzer's distinctiveness as a philosopher. This is seen in the way he argues his case, in the fact that he is not easily identified with one form of ethical school, in his circumscribed notion of progress, understood exclusively in moral terms, which in logic is problematic (ethics, after all, are not always bound up with progress). Cicovacki also raises important questions about how Schweitzer is able to move from a perceived 'crisis' of civilisation ('crisis' being Cicovacki's own word—'decay' [*Verfall*] not seeming appropriate as civilisation is still with us one hundred years later!) through progress conceived in ethical terms to reverence for life. He leaves the question open but sounds a sceptical note.

Cicovacki also wonders how we should conceive of reverence for life, citing four apparently differing views, some of which are religious, some social and some more ecological in content. After raising a few related questions, he ends by pointing to two enriching aspects of Schweitzer's vision, qualities which are worth reflecting on. One relates to the way in which, Schweitzer's idea of reverence for life, or at least the moral vision contained within it, makes it plain "that moral splendor is part of the gift of life, and that each man has unlimited strength to feel human oneness and to act upon it. He has proved that although a man may have no jurisdiction over the fact of his existence, he can hold supreme command over the meaning of existence for him."[11] This quality of Schweitzer's thinking picks up on Körtner's notion of value, to some extent derivable from Nietzsche—reverence for life

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[10] See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[11] Norman Cousins, *Dr. Schweitzer of Lambaréné* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 220-21.

is not simply about an active compassion, which one might call 'love' (speaking theologically), but about an enhancement of the quality of life led by an individual. The second of the qualities highlighted by Cicovacki relates to personality. This is seen especially in the way that Schweitzer, to quote the late Erazim Kohák, one of the few modern philosophers to engage with Schweitzer in a serious way, "repersonalizes" the relationship between mankind and the environment. Such "repersonalization," contrasted with an exclusively instrumental view of the environment, comes inevitably with compromises (precisely those referred to by Koertner), but these make clear that whatever 'necessary' suffering we inflict upon the environment (Kohák focuses on animals) cannot be automatically justified by reference to our convenience.

Roger Crisp's contribution is of a different order. He concentrates on one aspect of Schweitzer's *Kultur und Ethik*, namely his interpretation of the tradition of British moral philosophy from Hobbes to T.H. Green. After noting, helpfully, the presence in a writer like Ayer and some others of what might be termed a non-rational understanding of ethics not dissimilar to Schweitzer's,[12] he goes on to show how Schweitzer's interpretation of some of these British philosophers is on point (characterising Hume as a utilitarian) but also one-sided (his failure to see why the hedonist tradition is plausible) or potentially misleading (as in his take on Shaftesbury and Green). In the process he questions both Schweitzer's tendency, seen especially in his comment on rationalist ethics, to blur the distinction between 'is' and 'ought', and his claim that the demands of morality and of self-interest are not in conflict with each other. Through focusing on one aspect of Schweitzer's *Kultur und Ethik* (one difficulty of assessing it is that it covers such a vast array of philosophers and philosophical traditions in relatively short compass), Crisp's study, *inter alia*, seems to make clear the very particular prism through which Schweitzer examines those philosophers in whom he is interested.

The final chapter of the journal by Percy Mark combines personal reminiscence (Mark worked with Schweitzer in the early 1963) with remarks about Schweitzer's attempts to

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[12] There is, however, a clear difference between the way logical positivists think that ethics are irrational and the way Schweitzer thinks this. For the former the irrationalism of ethics is based upon the fact that they are emotional. But for Schweitzer: (a) ethics is partly non-rational and partly rational; and (b) it is not non-rational because it is based on emotions but because of its transcendent and mystical foundation that can never be rationally articulated and that is already preserved in the central term *Erfurcht*—yes, there is an emotion there, but of a vastly different kind than what various logical positivists have in mind.

bring his cultural philosophy to an end. Through the publication of the *Nachlass* we have some evidence of what the latter would have looked like.[13] As has already been noted, Schweitzer indicated that he wished to write two further volumes after *Kultur und Ethik*, and he wrote a lot of volume three, though in a less than coherent or satisfying form. Mark notes that Schweitzer's failure to finish volume three has been attributed to the ever-increasing demands of his work in the hospital and his involvement from the 1950s onwards with the anti-nuclear movement. He shows, however, that the real explanation for this failure to finish volume three lies in Schweitzer's inability to create a world view from his thoughts about reverence for life. As Mark writes, "He could not let go the idea that somehow the justification for ethics had to be found within the parameters of the biological science of the time and had to be derived from an evolutionary purpose attributed to this whole vast show; and that no foundation in thought could be established for ethics without this." This is an intriguing conclusion, for Schweitzer had already admitted to himself in earlier work that such a possibility (the creation of a *Weltanschauung*) did not exist; and yet he felt that reverence for life would lead him to the creation of such a thing.[14]

What, then, should we conclude from all of this? First, that Schweitzer had set himself a strikingly monumental task, no less and no more than an attempt to save western civilsation from what seemed to be inevitable decline, captured in a form of nihilism. Whether Chalamet is right or not to view Schweitzer as implicitly presenting himself as a prophet in the first volume of *Kulturphilosophie*, the latter's aim was certainly prophetic in its scope. Secondly, that while in some ways one can see aspects of his project as very much of its time (talk of 'decline', of 'culture' and of 'civilisation', was all the rage after the First World War), his view that (a) philosophy was a key to any rebuilding of such a civilisation just as it had been the key to its decline; and (b) that any future philosophical solution should build upon impulses from the Enlightenment (a kind of revitalised idealism), were strikingly eccentric—as was the way in which he set about that task. Thirdly, that his reading of the western philosophical tradition, predicated upon a set of particular assumptions, was inevitably not always nuanced or wholly reliable. Fourthly, that his own solution, captured, perhaps allusively, in the term 'reverence for life', contains too many aporiai, too much that is only vaguely defined, too much religious

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[13] See n. 3 above.

[14] Mark's conclusion is supported by Claus Günzler. See Claus Günzler, *Albert Schweitzer. Einführung in sein Denken* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1996), 167-70.

overlay to find its place in conventional accounts of modern western philosophy, which the fact of its spartan reception among professional philosophers bears out—and to which Körtner refers. Indeed, as Mark implies, it is by no means clear that had he remained within academia his views would not have remained little more than an eccentric ornament, at least to professional philosophers (in this respect it is interesting to note that one of the earliest detailed responses to Schweitzer's *Kulturphilosophie,* by the Czech philosopher Oskar Kraus, was highly critical, even though Kraus was a friend of Schweitzer and admired him greatly).[15] Fifthly, that in spite of the previous observations, Schweitzer's attempts to bind human personality with ethical purpose, aligned to an interconnected vision of being, conceived very broadly, presents his reader with a compelling vision out of which can grow much that is enriching and pertinent in our present challenging world. The key here is not to remain beholden to Schweitzer's commitment to demonstrating that reverence for life is a necessity of thought, or that from it must emerge a water-tight world view, or a set of self-contained criteria, which enable us to enact reverence for life consistently. Such demands emerge from Enlightenment—dare one say, Kantian—presuppositions, which Schweitzer is seeking in some ways to eschew. Better to read what he says in his *Kulturphilosophie* and elsewhere as a set of intuitively appealing idealistic aspirations based upon a variety of intriguing but not always mutually coherent assumptions.

[15] Oskar Kraus, *Albert Schweitzer. His Work and Philosophy* (London: A & C Black, 1944).

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'*Früher war es anders*' ['It has not been so always']: Schweitzer Between Nostalgia and Hope for Restoration

Christophe Chalamet
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Abstract

Albert Schweitzer's philosophy of civilisation is a striking example of a thinker looking at his own time in order to discern some of the key challenges civilisation is facing. One hundred years later, what can we say about his insights? On the one hand, they appear filled with a deep *nostalgia* for a different, humane world. On the other hand, his critique of the world in his own day remains very pertinent, indeed urgent and quasi-*prophetic*, and is only confirmed by what has happened since they were written. This paper thus examines both the nostalgic and the prophetic dimensions of Schweitzer's analysis and prospective insights on (Western) civilisation.

Keywords

Albert Schweitzer, decay, restoration, Oswald Spengler, biblical prophecy, nostalgia

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Introduction

Reading Albert Schweitzer, for me and I suspect for others as well, is always something of an event, something of a shock. To realise that it is possible—he did it!—to write with such clarity, profundity and power is a source of amazement for me. In less than 70 pages, Schweitzer examines the decadence or the decay (*Niedergang*) of civilisation, the circumstances in our social life that hamper civilisation, the ethical foundation of civilisation, the path towards 'restoration' of civilisation, and, finally, civilisation and world-view. Such a programme, in such a short book, could appear foolish, but Schweitzer is a master storyteller and a profound thinker who does not waste many words to get to the point, and to shed light on the world that was his. When one reads, in the preliminary remarks, that the first draft of this essay goes back to the turn of the century, to the year 1900, then the amazement only becomes greater. A twenty-five year old man began to write this text, in a cultural context that was of course dramatically different from the one in which he revised his first draft, namely between 1914 and 1917 in the middle of the African 'primeval forest' (*Urwald*), before reaching the

publication stage, in a considerably revised form, in the early months of 1923. Between the year 1900 and the year 1923, the collapse of Western civilisation was patent, no one could refrain from seeing it. Could it be that, already in 1900, Schweitzer sensed this looming collapse? And how much did influential works such as Oswald Spengler's book, *The Decline of the West* (1918 and 1922) influence Schweitzer as he completed in book (Spengler talks of an *Untergang*, whereas Schweitzer talks, quite similarly, of a *Niedergang*)?

Religious Overtones

While Schweitzer may have proposed a philosophy of civilisation, the biblical and theological echoes of his theme are nevertheless obvious. Certainly, one does not need the Scriptures or theological learning to speak of 'decadence' or 'decay' (*Verfall*) and 'reconstruction' or 'restoration' (*Wiederaufbau*). But in a cultural context such as Schweitzer's, that is, a context steeped in the Hebrew and Greek traditions, can one ignore the fact that the choice of the terms, the terminology which he chooses for his title, come straight out of the book of Jeremiah, of the famous calling narrative of the prophet, in the fourth chapter of the book that bears this prophet's name? In this narrative, God commissions a reluctant Jeremiah—this reluctance is of course a *topos* in calling narratives in the Hebrew Scriptures—appointing him "over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."[1] Is it a mere coincidence that Schweitzer uses similar verbs as those we find in the

[1] "Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.' Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, "I am only a boy," for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.' Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, 'Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.'" Jeremiah 1:4-10 [NTSVA translation]. Ward Blanton also uses the term "interventions" to characterise Schweitzer's works. Ward Blanton, 'Strangely Immanent: On Schweitzer and a Miraculating Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy', in *Albert Schweitzer in Thought and Action: A Life in Parts,* eds. James Carleton Paget and Michael J. Thate (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2016), 330.

commissioning of Jeremiah by God? Again, it is not necessary to derive these terms from biblical and theological sources, but the connotations cannot and should not be ignored, it seems to me. And this, I would further suggest, confers a certain gravitas on Schweitzer's book, as if he were somehow assuming certain prophetic overtones with his own philosophical voice, with his own "intervention" in the culture of his time.[2] The terms which he uses for the title of his philosophy of civilisation are charged, biblically as well as theologically. Can anyone who has a slight acquaintance with the history of Protestant theology, including Pietism, a history in which Schweitzer was thoroughly trained, not sense in his usage of the word 'regeneration' (see the German title of volume one's fourth chapter: '*Der Weg zur Regeneration der Kultur'* ['The Way to the Restoration of Civilization']) a sort of *clin d'œil* to Protestant theology? I say this not so that Schweitzer the philosopher can be reintegrated into the fold of Christian theology, but rather in order to point out that, even as he writes a philosophy of civilisation, Schweitzer the scholar of theology is not "switched off," as it were, he really is there, lurking in the background, and perhaps not just in the background.

One other example, among others, of Schweitzer's decision to take up the prophetic mantle, is found at the beginning of book, which is a dramatic accusation of philosophy of his day and age: philosophy, which should have kept watch like the watchman in the night, neglected its calling and stopped bothering with civilisation:

> So little did philosophy philosophize about civilization that she did not even notice that she herself and the age along with her were losing more and more of it. In the hour of peril the watchman who ought to have kept us awake was himself asleep, and the result was that we put up no fight at all on behalf of our civilization.[3]

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[2] Predrag Cicovacki notes that Schweitzer, in a different context, namely the denunciation of the destruction human beings are causing, "sounds like an Old Testament prophet." See Predrag Cicovacki, 'Schweitzer and World Religions', in Carleton Paget and Thate, *Schweitzer*, 130. Ulrich J. Körnter also comments on the "soteriological" and "Johannine" "traits" of Schweitzer's ethics. See Ulrich J. Körnter, 'Schweitzer's Ethics in Contemporary Debates', in Carleton Paget and Thate, *Schweitzer* , 181-182.

[3] Albert Schweitzer, 'The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization', in *The Philosophy of Civilization*, trans. C. T. Campion (New York: Macmillan, 1960 [1923]), 8. "*So wenig philosophierte die Philosophie über Kultur, dass sie nicht einmal merkte, wie sie selber, und die Zeit mit ihr, immer mehr kulturlos wurde. In der Stunde der Gefahr schlief der Wächter,*

Now the echo is no longer of Jeremiah, but of Ezekiel, and—let us note this—also to the divine calling and commissioning of Ezekiel by God, as narrated in Ezek. 3:16-17: "At the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me: 'Mortal, I have made you a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.'" Is this not precisely what Schweitzer is doing in his book? Isn't he exercising the mandate of a "sentinel" and giving people "warning"?

Should we then consider Schweitzer's *opusculum* as a modern-day Jeremiad? I raise the question, and so you already see that my answer will tend to affirm this. This is not a pejorative remark. After all, the two-edged sword Jeremiah was commanded to speak out was a *true* word: a word coming from God. Schweitzer is not a Hebrew prophet: I am not fully versed in his biography but as far as I know he was not asked to swallow a book. At the end of the day the questions that matter the most in relation to his philosophy of civilisation are the following ones: what is Schweitzer saying, to his contemporaries and to his readers, up to this day, our own day? Is what he was saying in 1923 relevant to us? Is it true? This, to me, is where the effort is required from us, as readers of Schweitzer's book one century later. He himself denounces philosophy that has become merely a history of philosophy. A bit later, in the third chapter of the first volume, historians are criticised for their lack of interest in shaping civilisation, for their fascination with erudition.[4] And in the preface to the second volume, he asks what remains of philosophy once the scholarly glitter is taken away…[5] Schweitzer could also have challenged theologians in the same manner. Yes, we need contextualisations,

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der uns wach erhalten sollte. So kam es, dass wir nicht um unsere Kultur rangen." Albert Schweitzer, *Verfall und Wiederaufbau der Kultur. Kulturphilosophie, Erster Teil,* fifth edition (Münich: C.H. Beck, 1923), 8. I quote from this edition, translating for the most part directly from the original, German text (I do indicate where the English translation of the German passages is found).

[4] About the historians, Schweitzer writes: "*Statt Erzieher zu werden, blieben sie blosse Gelehrter. Die Aufgabe, durch die sie wirklich in den Dienst der Kultur getreten wären, haben sie nicht in Angriff genommen*." (ET: Instead of becoming educators, they remained mere scholars. They did not undertake the task that would have really put them in the service of culture). Ibid., 28; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 27.

[5] Albert Schweitzer, 'Vorrede', in *Kultur und Ethik. Sonderausgabe* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1960), vii.

historical perspectives, we need sound knowledge and erudition, these are indeed not optional, but we also need to ask ourselves what this all may mean for us today as a society and as a civilisation. Schweitzer defies us to raise these questions.

Prophecy as Premonition and Truth-Telling

Prophecy is often understood as the ability to anticipate future events, to foretell these events. Scholars of religion, perhaps especially theologians among them, sometimes wish to add that prophecy should not be reduced to premonition, for it primarily conveys the notion of a humanly-mediated proclamation which centers not so much on the future, but on the present, or better: on the present insofar as it is orientated towards a future. Prophecy can be interpreted as a word coming from the ultimate, from what lies beyond the finite realm, a word nevertheless addressed to people—a word which encounters people in history from 'beyond' history (if there is such a thing; theologians often tend to believe that there is such a thing, which is no 'thing' of course). Schweitzer's book is prophetic in both senses of the term: it is in many ways premonitory and a word, an intervention, that discloses something about our present situation.

Many examples could be adduced on the premonitory nature of his book. I will simply give this one: Schweitzer grasped, already in 1923, that human beings, as they were leaving the countryside to live in big cities, were becoming more and more foreign to "their own home and to nature." Schweitzer saw this as something "abnormal," as a "serious psychical injury" (*Schädigung*) for the human.[6] What Schweitzer points out in 1923 has only become more manifest in the last century, worldwide: dozens of millions of people, in China alone, have left their rural environment to work in metropolises. What does this massive migration mean for human beings and for their natural environment? Any answer to this question must be nuanced, but few would question the fact that human beings, for the first time since their emergence in history, have grown disconnected from the natural environment. Is this bad news for the environment? Only a nuanced answer can be given, as it has been shown that large cities may

[6] "*Die sich herausbildende Unfreiheit wird noch dadurch gesteigert, dass das Erwerbsleben immer mehr Menschen in grossen Agglomerationen vereinigt und sie dadurch von dem nährenden Boden, von dem eigenen Hause und von der Natur losreisst. Damit ist eine schwere psychische Schädigung gesetzt. Das paradoxe Wort, dass mit dem Verlust des eigenen Ackers und der eigenen Wohnstätte das abnorme Leben beginnt, enthält nur zu viel Wahrheit*." Schweitzer, *Verfall und Wiederaufbau*, 10; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 10.

be better for the environment, at least in some respects. But the striking thing is Schweitzer's acuity in discerning major trends in the evolution of society and civilisation. Of course, one could say that these trends were visible to all—Charlie Chaplin is an illustrious example of an artistic response to the industrialisation of society—but Schweitzer is convincing in his claim that, in the burgeoning new century, the new living and working conditions of human beings, notably their "over-employment" (*Überbeschäftigung*), "stunt" the spiritual dimension of the human.[7]

Schweitzer's assessment could hardly be starker and bleaker: the humanity of the human is at stake. As human beings become less free, less collected (*gesammelt*), less independent (*selbständig*) in their inner (*geistig*) lives, they risk falling into "humanlessness" (*Humanitätslosigkeit*), into "inhumanity" (*Inhumanität*).[8] This is the decay on which Schweitzer focuses in the two opening sections of the book.

How does a reader, a century later, view Schweitzer's assessment? I've already indicated that I take Schweitzer to be in many ways 'prophetic,' in the first sense of 'premonitory.' But I cannot stop there. Reading these sections of his book, I couldn't help but wonder whether a certain nostalgia did not lie behind his strong claims about the utter degradation of Western civilisation and on the progressive de-humanising of human beings in modernity. Has the old modern tale of progress been replaced a bit too quickly and unilaterally by a tale of decay?

"*Früher war es anders*" ["It has not been so always"] Schweitzer writes.[9] Certainly, it was different, even very different; but was it 'better'? And how far back into the past do we need

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[7] "*Die gewöhnliche Überbeschäftigung des modernen Menschen in allen Gesellschaftskreisen hat zur Folge, dass das Geistige in ihm verkümmert.*" Ibid., 11; Schweitzer, "The Decay," 11. Another example of Schweitzer's undisputable 'premonition' concerns the over-specialization in academic and intellectual life. "*In allen Berufen, am meisten vielleicht in der Wissenschaft, tritt die geistige Gefahr des Spezialistentums für Einzelnen wie für das allgemeine Geistesleben immer deutlicher hervor.*" Ibid., 13; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 13.

[8] "*Der Unfreie, Ungesammelte und Unvollständige ist aber zugleich noch in Gefahr, der Humanitätslosigkeit zu verfallen. Das normale Verhalten von Mensch zu Mensch ist uns erschwert. […] Die Affinität zum Nebenmenschen geht uns verloren. Damit sind wir auf dem Wege zum Inhumanität.*" Ibid., 14; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 14. On our "selbstgeschaffene 'geistige' Unselbständigkeit," (ET: "self-created 'spiritual' dependence,") see ibid., 18; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 18.

[9] Ibid., 15; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 15.

to travel to find a civilisation in which the human was less at risk of losing his or her humanity? Schweitzer seems to suggest that, in the 18th century, people still knew how to engage in intellectual debates; this practice, however, has since been lost.[10] And it is on this point that the narrative of decay, or a return to the Middle Ages, becomes less convincing, and that a measure of suspicion may emerge in the reader.[11] If you've watched Ken Loach's latest movie, *The Oak Tree* (2023), you have seen how important debates, in which our humanity is indeed at stake, are conducted, not necessarily in academic halls and in century-old colleges, but in pubs, in this particular case in a derelict pub…

On other aspects of what he sees as the cultural decay of the West, recent developments confirm Schweitzer's analysis. When he laments the sacrifice of "independence of thought," which has led to the loss of "the faith in truth" (*Glaube an die Wahrheit*), when he contrasts the "disorganisation of our inner, intellectual life" (*geistig*) with the "over-organisation" of public life, I cannot imagine many people disagreeing with his verdict.[12]

And yet in spite of this, it is slightly worrying to see Schweitzer claim that things "were different before," and to see him imply that things were better before. For they were not! Is there a period of human history during which the humanity of the human was not at stake, where battles for the soul of the human were not mercilessly and perilously conducted? Isn't the entire history of humanity the history of a battle for the humanity of the human, against all of the forces, human and otherwise, that aim to bring the human into servitude or that aim to bring a complete end to the human?

Whatever smacks of nostalgia in Schweitzer's first volume is worth questioning, it seems to me. But in other instances, Schweitzer issues prophetic warnings to us—prophetic in the second sense of the term, i.e. as an intervention that stops us in our tracks and that claims our complete attention here and now.

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[10] "*Eine Auseinandersetzung zwischen Ideen und Ideen oder zwischen Menschen und Menschen, wie sie die Grösse des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts ausmachte, findet heute nicht mehr statt.*" Ibid., 17; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 17.

[11] On the return to the Middle Ages: "*So sind wir in ein neues Mittelalter eingetreten*." Ibid., 18; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 18.

[12] "*Mit der preisgegebene Unabhängigkeit des Denkens haben wir, wie es nicht anders sein konnte, den Glauben an die Wahrheit verloren. Unser geistiges Leben ist desorganisiert. Die Überorganisierung unserer öffentlichen Zustände läuft auf ein Organisieren der Gedankenlosigkeit hinaus.*" Ibid., 19; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 19.

Schweitzer completed the text of the first part of his philosophy of civilisation in the wake of the First World War. We, in 2024, have been brought back to that era, to the errors that led to this civilisational catastrophe, through the war that Vladimir Putin has started in Ukraine, but also through various regimes across the world which are based on one of the worst ideals of modernity, namely nationalism.

What is "nationalism"? It is not the same thing as "patriotism." "Nationalism" is "patriotism" unbound, absolutised (*gesteigerte Patriotismus*). There is nothing "noble" (*edel*) about it.[13] Schweitzer makes an important point here: he claims that nationalism necessarily leads to war. As such, nationalism is "barbarism."[14] It stands in the way of a worldwide, "human culture" (*Kulturmenschheit*), it "destroys" the very concept of culture insofar as it privileges "national culture."[15]

When Schweitzer denounces the sacrifice of "personal morality on the altar of the homeland, instead of standing in tension with the collectivity, instead of being a force which drives the collectivity to its perfection," his words resonate powerfully with us.[16] The cult of the nation

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[13] "*Was ist Nationalismus? Der unedle und ins Sinnlose gesteigerte Patriotismus, der sich zum edlen und gesunden wie die Wahnidee zur normalen Überzeugung verhält.*" Ibid., 29; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 29.

[14] "*Der Kult des Patriotismus als solcher soll als Barbarei gelten, als welche er sich durch die sinnlosen Kriege bekundet, die er notwendig im Gefolge hat."* Ibid., 30; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 30.

[15] "*Zuletzt genügte es dem Nationalismus nicht, in seiner Politik jede Absicht auf das Zustandekommen einer Kulturmenschheit beiseite zu setzen. Er zerstörte noch die Vorstellung der Kultur selber, indem er die nationale Kultur proklamierte.*" Ibid., 32. "*Der Anspruch auf nationale Kultur, wie er heute erhoben wird, ist eine krankhafte Erscheinung.*" Ibid., 33; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 32.

[16] "*Wenn unter den modernen Menschen so wenige mit intaktem menschlichem und sittlichem Empfinden anzutreffen sind, so ist es nicht zum wenigsten, weil sie fortwährend ihre persönliche Sittlichkeit auf dem Altar des Vaterlandes opferten, statt in Spannung mit der Kollektivität zu bleiben und Kraft zu sein, die die Kollektivität zur Vollendung antreibt.*" Ibid., 20; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 19. It is interesting to note that Oswald Spengler, in 1921, thought he should have titled his own book using the word *Vollendung* instead of *Untergang*, to avoid many misunderstandings. See Oswald Spengler, 'Pessimismus?', *Preußischen Jahrbücher* (April 1921), 73-84.

has been one of greatest source of destruction and horror in recent centuries, and we must acknowledge that this disastrous idolatrous belief is still very much with us, producing new cataclysms, again and again. Countless lives, to this day, are sacrificed by political regimes of various kinds on the "altar" of the nation.

Where does the error and perversion of nationalism come from? What are its roots? Schweitzer mentions the "sense of reality" and our "historical sense" as two origins of nationalism, as two causes of "the external catastrophe" of the war "in which the decay of our culture is completed."[17] Schweitzer's use of the verb "completed" (*Vollendet*) is surprising. He writes as if he was standing at the end of history, when in fact a further, even more horrific stage in the completion of the decay of Western civilisation occurred twenty years after the publication of his book.

Schweitzer was of course absolutely correct to denounce this form of idolatry which, a decade after the publication of his book, would take an unheard of, brutal and evil new shape in Germany. He is prescient, premonitory, and prophetic (in the second, more profound sense of the term) in his attack on the modern cult of the nation. We still urgently have to hear what he is telling us.

Schweitzer's narrative of modern decadence or decay is a sharp critique of philosophy's failure. Philosophy has renounced its responsibility to be a "watchman." It has let civilisation return to darkness, without intervening because it did not even notice what was happening.[18] Interestingly, theology does not come into view here, when one could have imagined for instance a mention of the theological categories of heresy or idolatry. But why would he have

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[17] "*Aus unserem Wirklichkeitssinn und aus unserem geschichtlichen Sinn wurde der Nationalismus geboren, auf den die äussere Katastrophe zurückgeht, in der sich der Niedergang unserer Kultur vollendet.*" Ibid., 29; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 29.

[18] "*Ein Unfreier, ein Ungesammelter, ein Unvollständiger, ein sich in Humanitätslosigkeit Verlierender, ein seine geistige Selbständigkeit und sein moralisches Urteil an die organisierte Gesellschaft Preisgebender, ein in jeder Hinsicht Hemmungen der Kulturgesinnung Erfahrender; so zog der moderne Mensch seinen dunklen Weg in dunkler Zeit. Für die Gefahr, in der er sich befand, hatte die Philosophie kein Verständnis. So machte sie keinen Versuch, ihm zu helfen. Nicht einmal zum Nachdenken über das, was mit ihm vorging, hielt sie ihn an. Die furchtbare Wahrheit, dass mit dem Fortschreiten der Geschichte und der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung die Kultur nicht leichter, sondern schwerer wird, kam nicht zu Worte.*" Ibid., 20; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 20.

done such a thing, which would risk confusing the disciplines and their respective discourses? Even if he adopts some of the language and the posture of the Hebrew prophets, Schweitzer remains within the bounds of the *philosophy* of civilisation which he aims to articulate in these pages. This is worthy of respect.

From Decay to Restoration

What is the 'solution', if there is such a thing, to the decadence Schweitzer is describing? Let us carefully listen to Schweitzer. Here are two passages in which he gives a sketch of an answer:

> No other way for a real renewal of our world can be conceived than that we become, in the midst of the old situation, new human beings (*neue Menschen*), that we become a society in which, through renewed disposition (*Gesinnung*), we conciliate the differences between the peoples (*zwischen den Völker*) and within the peoples (*in den Völkern*), so that cultural conditions (*Kulturzustände*) become once again possible. Everything else is more or less wasted effort, for it would mean sowing not on the spirit, but on external realities.[19]

And here is the second passage:

> Firm ground for our feet is given in ethical ideals of reason (*in ethischen Vernunftidealen*). Are we going to draw from the spirit strength to create new conditions (*neue Zustände*) and turn our faces again to culture, or do we want to draw from the spirit strength from the actual conditions (*den bestehenden Zustände*) and unravel? This is the fateful question which confronts us. The true sense of reality lies in the intuition that we come to a normal relation to reality only through ethical ideals of reason.[20]

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[19] "*Keine andere Art der wirklichen Erneuerung unserer Welt ist denkbar, als dass wir vorerst unter den alten Verhältnissen neue Menschen werden und also eine Gesellschaft mit erneuerter Gesinnung die Gegensätze zwischen den Völkern und in den Völkern so ausgleichen, dass wieder Kulturzustände möglich werden. Alles andere ist mehr oder weniger verlorene Mühe, weil dabei nicht auf den Geist, sondern auf das Äusserliche gesät wird."* Ibid., 37; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 36. (Translation CC).

[20] "*Der feste Boden unter den Füssen ist in ethischen Vernunftidealen gegeben. Wollen wir uns*

These two passages contain strikingly parallel claims. In the first one, Schweitzer speaks of becoming "new human beings" (*neue Menschen*). In the second one, he speaks of creating "new conditions" (*neue Zustände*). Something new needs to occur, and this new reality has everything to do with a renewal of human beings themselves. Of course, the Christian, especially Pauline theological overtones, are unmistakable here too, an observation which barely needs making. The great optimism of Schweitzer arguably lies in his faith in the very possibility of such a renewal, as opposed to his contemporary, Spengler. But note that the possibility of this renewal is spirit-enabled. 'Spirit' does not mean 'Holy Spirit' or God's Spirit, but something more basic and universal, an animating reality which can be found and drawn in differing ways, as Schweitzer makes clear when he distinguished two radically opposed options, one that seeks the spirit from reality as we know it, from "the actual conditions" (*die bestehenden Zustände*), or another one that receives the spirit "from elsewhere" than these present circumstances in which we find ourselves. This "from elsewhere" signals something that, in the minds of readers such as myself, i.e. theologians, may evoke theological matters, but we should proceed carefully here, for Schweitzer points in a different direction than a theological one. The condition for the renewal Schweitzer writes about with both great urgency and great hope is not dependent on a divine intervention or a divine act. It depends on a spirit-enabled, renewed attention to what he calls the "ethical ideals of reason" (*ethische Vernunftidealen*). What are these "ethical ideals of reason"? I cannot say I found a detailed answer to that question in this volume. A broader analysis of his writings would be required in order to adequately answer the question.

Another aspect which is not clear to me is the relation between the individual and the communal in the 'restoration' Schweitzer has in mind. Schweitzer does seem to have an aristocratic view of the relations between the few and the many (or the masses). Hope seems to reside with the few, who may be enabled to think again not on the basis of empirical reality, but on the basis of the "ethical ideals of reason," and then these few, this intellectual elite,

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durch den Geist befähigen lassen, neue Zustände zu schaffen und wieder zur Kultur zurückkehren, oder wollen wir weiterhin den Geist aus den bestehenden Zuständen empfangen und an ihm zugrunde gehen? Dies ist die Schicksalfrage, vor die wir gestellt sind. Der wahre Wirklichkeitssinn besteht in der Einsicht, dass wir allein durch ethische Vernunftideale in ein normales Verhältnis zur Wirklichkeit kommen." Ibid., 37-38; See Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 36. (Translation CC).

might be able to spread this renewed way of thinking and living to others, to the masses.[21] Is this Schweitzer's vision of renewal? What should we make of such a vision? And we should note that this narrative of decadence and renewal implies a moment of 'conversion', which Schweitzer seems to locate within the individual. The echoes of the parable of the prodigal son are unmistakable in this passage: "In order to reach what is meaningful (*Sinnvoll*) out of the meaningfulness (*Sinnlos*) which keeps us prisoners, there is no other way than for each one to again return to oneself (*auf sich selbst zurückkehren*)."[22] The verb "to return" is of course the word of "conversion," of *shuv* and *teshuvah* in the Hebrew Scriptures and in Judaism, of turning around, here of returning not to God but "to oneself," which is exactly what the prodigal son did before embarking on the difficult journey back to his father's estate (Luke 15:17: εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἐλθὼν, "coming to himself," which the NRSV translated as "coming to his senses"). Schweitzer seems to envision or hope for a largescale "conversion" of the masses, who should be awakened to see the grim reality of their world, but this awakening, which is a spiritual awakening, will not come *from* the masses, it will come *to* them, from an elite who has "returned" to the consideration of the necessary correlation between culture and ethical ideals.

Schweitzer's diptych is not quite balanced: he has much to say about the decay of civilisation. We live in an age of decadence, civilisation has crumbled. One had to be completely blind not to see this and to say this, already in 1923. Schweitzer's analysis of the decadence is detailed and, in many ways, compelling. He points out certain issues that would only become more disastrous a mere decade later, with the rise of fascism in various Western European countries, in countries known to many for their extraordinary cultural achievements.

The second part of the diptych, however, is barely sketched, in my view. Schweitzer did of course elaborate further on the main ethical questions, in volume two of his philosophy of civilisation and in subsequent writings. In this first volume, "reverence for truth" (*Ehrfurcht vor der Wahrheit*) is placed before us as an urgent demand, whereas "reverence for life," formulated as such, does not yet appear (it does appear, and very forcefully, already at the end

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[21] See Thomas Suermann, *Albert Schweitzer als 'homo politicus'* (Berlin: BWV Verlag, 2011), who discusses Schweitzer's scepticism about democracy and his penchant for benign monarchies.

[22] "*Um aus dem Sinnlosen, das uns gefangen hält, wieder zum Sinnvollen zu gelangen, gibt es keinen anderen Weg, als dass ein jeder wieder auf sich selbst zurückkehrt* […]." Ibid., 62; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 60.

of the preface to volume two).[23] More importantly, it is not clear that a reinvention of "rationalism" and the "ethical ideals of reason" will save civilisation. Schweitzer may be placing too much hope on them, or more precisely on the human capacity to attain these ideals and to live according to them.

And so, I do not see clearly how Schweitzer's chapters on decay and reconstruction relate to the modern ideology of progress. Certainly, the legitimacy of that ideology was radically questioned by the First World War, but isn't Schweitzer still adhering to it five years after the end of the war? From what I see, in my very limited view, one key aspect has disappeared in Schweitzer's approach of still upholding the ideology or the dogma of progress: the *inevitability* of progress, the *necessity* of progress. In the five lectures Schweitzer delivered in Uppsala on the philosophy of civilisation in 1923, the 'decay' is a fact that can be analysed and described, whereas the 'reconstruction' is a calling, an urgent prescription, and Schweitzer does not seem to think that there is any guarantee that it will occur. This deep asymmetry between the description (of the 'decay') and the prescription (of the 'reconstruction') is startling.

Concluding remarks

There is much we can learn from Schweitzer's philosophy of civilisation. On a series of issues, I've suggested, Schweitzer speaks directly and forcefully to our own historical and cultural situation today. He unveils the threat of nationalism, the fact that nationalism is prone not to peaceful coexistence but to warfare and destruction. He notes how millions of human beings, having been uprooted from their homes in order to live in cities, are losing the sense of being a part of nature, of natural life, and they fall into the trap of an existence which is organised and structured in ways that are dehumanising.

In other words, Schweitzer compels us to think about the very humanity of human beings yesterday, today and tomorrow. He does not convince me when he calls for a retrieval of rationalism and the great 18th century in which philosophy supposedly ruled civil life. His urgent, quasi-prophetic call to think about the ways in which the humanity of human beings is at stake, on the other hand, remains as relevant today as it was one hundred years ago.

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[23] See ibid., 54; Schweitzer, 'The Decay', 53. For the appearance of "reverence for life" in volume two, see Schweitzer 'Vorrede', xv.

II

The Intellectual and Cultural Context of Schweitzer's *Philosophy of Civilization*[1]

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Abstract

'The Decay and Restoration of Civilization' (*Der Verfall und Wiederaufbau der Kultur*) appeared in 1923 as part I of a larger work, *The Philosophy of Civilization.* Part II, entitled 'Civilization and Ethics', (*Kultur und Ethik*) appeared later that same year. In 1999-2000, part III was published in two volumes as part of his *Nachlass*, under the title ' The Worldview of Reverence for Life' (*Die Weltanschauung der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben*). However, long before this, Schweitzer had already spent several years (1914-1918) working on another book entitled *Wir Epigonen* ('We Inheritors of a Past'), which also went unpublished until 2005. If one wants to appreciate Schweitzer's philosophy of civilisation in its entirety, it is necessary to also add to the 'Inheritors' another posthumous volume, 'Civilization and Ethics in the World Religions' (*Kultur und Ethik in den Weltreligionen*). This article analyses the intellectual context and the main features of Schweitzer's philosophy of civilisation, as well as his ethics. The whole of Schweitzer's thought, through which he understood himself to be a renewer of Enlightenment rationality, can be understood as a protest against disengaged reason, which the philosopher Charles Taylor has also famously criticised.

Keywords

Albert Schweitzer, epigonism, *Weltanschauung*, Oswald Spengler, Friedrich Nietzsche, disengaged reason.

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[1] Essential parts of this paper are taken from Ulrich Körtner, '"Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben". Zur Stellung der Ethik Albert Schweitzers in der ethischen Diskussion der Gegenwart'. in *Albert Schweitzer. Facetten einer Jahrhundertgestalt*, eds. Angela Berlis, Hubert Steinke, Fritz von Gunten and Andreas Wagner (Bern: Haupt Verlag, 2013), 99–136. English translation: Ulrich Körtner, 'Reverence for Life: On the Role of Albert Schweitzer's Ethics in Contemporary Ethical Debates', trans. Ana Ilievska in *Albert Schweitzer in Thought and Action: A Life in Parts,* eds. James Carleton Paget and Michael J. Thate (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2016), 177–192, 391–396.

Introduction

One evening in 1899, in the presence of Albert Schweitzer at the Curtius home in Berlin,[2] the remark was made: "Why, we are all of us just nothing but 'Epigoni'!". Schweitzer later recalled that the remark struck him like lightening, "because it put into words what I myself felt". It seemed to him "that in our […] spiritual life we were not only below the level of past generations, but were in many respects only living on their achievements [...] After that evening at Professor Curtius' house I was always, along with my other work inwardly occupied with another book, which I entitled *Wir Epigonen* ('We Inheritors of a Past')".[3]

Clearly, it took years before these thoughts were written down. In the second year in Lambaréné, 1914, Schweitzer began to put his thoughts down on paper in sketches, notes and drafts, aiming at an overall presentation, and by 1917 individual chapters had already been written. Then suddenly, in September 1917, came the order that he and his wife were to be taken immediately to Europe, to an internment camp in France. In chapter XIV of *Out of my Life and Thought* (*Aus meinem Leben und Denken*),[4] published in 1931, he tells how, due to a convenient delay of the ship, he had just a short time to prepare (in two nights) a French outline containing the core ideas of the whole and the structure of the already written parts (chapters I-VII and X). Taking *all* the texts with him was out of the question and so he left them in Lambaréné, entrusting them to the American missionary Ford. It was only in the summer of 1920, after returning from Uppsala, that Schweitzer was once again in possession of the large manuscript package.

However, Schweitzer never published *Wir Epigonen* during his lifetime. It was only published as part of his *Nachlass.*[5] The entire text from 1914 to 1918, apart from other extensive materials and working texts, is available in two large, almost equally extensive parallel collections of text. An autograph table of contents goes under a modified title: 'Civilization and the Civilized State' (*Kultur und Kulturstaat*). Another autograph table of

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[2] At the time, Schweitzer was a guest of the widow of the ancient historian and archaeologist Ernst Curtius (1814–1896).

[3] Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought*, trans. C.T. Campion (New York, Henry Holt, 1933 [1931]), 145-146.

[4] Schweitzer, *Life and Thought*, 163.

[5] Albert Schweitzer, *Wir Epigonen. Kultur und Kulturstaat*, eds. Ulrich Körtner and Johann Zürcher (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005).

contents has the same title, but with the addition: “ancien titre: 'Wir Epigonen'”. The change of title marks a changed or extended plan from the summer of 1915 on. Given that the war had now started, there was no longer any point in noting the decline of civilisation and drawing attention to its dangers. The analysis revealing mere ‘epigonism’ now had to be followed by constructive work. “‘We Inheritors of a Past’ expanded into a work dealing with the restoration of civilization.”[6]

‘The Decay and Restoration of Civilization’ (*Der Verfall und Wiederaufbau der Kultur*) was now to become the title of a separate work, which appeared in 1923 as part I of a larger work, *The Philosophy of Civilization.* Part II, entitled ‘Civilization and Ethics’, (*Kultur und Ethik*) appeared later that same year. In 1999-2000, part III was published in two volumes as part of the aforementioned posthumous edition, under the title ‘ The Worldview of Reverence for Life’ (*Die Weltanschauung der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben*).[7] If one wants to appreciate Schweitzer’s philosophy of civilisation in its entirety, it is necessary to also add to the ‘Inheritors’ another posthumous volume, ‘Civilization and Ethics in the World Religions’ (*Kultur und Ethik in den Weltreligionen*).[8]

As for the versions returned to him in the summer of 1920, Schweitzer used them merely as a deposit of materials for his work on the various parts of *The Philosophy of Civilization*. At any rate, the reference to the “epigoni” is significant for the overall understanding of Schweitzer’s thought on this subject. Schweitzer used the catchword “epigonism” (*Epigonentum*) to characterise the intellectual situation at the end of the 19th century. Through the cultural catastrophe of the First World War, he saw himself confirmed in his judgment and at the same time felt the need to overcome the epigonism that had led to the catastrophe, through a new cultural philosophy and ethics that would promote the legacy of the Enlightenment further, while at the same time providing a new solution to the problems at hand. Such a solution consisted in an ethics of reverence for life, which attempts a synthesis of religion/mysticism and rationalism.

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[6] Schweitzer, *Life and Thought*, 147.

[7] Albert Schweitzer, *Die Weltanschauung der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben. Kulturphilosophie III: Erster und zweiter Teil,* eds. Claus Günzler and Johann Zürcher (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999); and Albert Schweitzer, *Die Weltanschauung der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben. Kulturphilosohpie III: Dritter und vierter Teil*, eds. Erich Gräßer and Johann Zürcher (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000).

[8] Albert Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik in den Weltreligionen*, eds. Ulrich Körtner and Johann Zürcher (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001).

If we ask about Schweitzer's role in today's philosophical and ethical discussion, theanswer is a sobering one. Andreas Urs Sommer sums this up by saying that any reception of Schweitzer's ethics and philosophy of civilisation within academic philosophy has "barely taken place if we overlook its potential to nurture discussions on ecology. [Schweitzer], however, with the catchphrase 'reverence for life' and his charitable work has become the paragon of selfless humanityand thus a constituent part of popular culture."[9] Schweitzer, the humanist and philanthropist, is indeed a great role model; yet for scholarly ethics, he is at best the generator of suggestive thoughts.[10] To this day, the academic study of Schweitzer's work

[9] Andreas Urs Sommer, 'Art. Albert Schweitzer', *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 4.7 (2004), 1063-1064, here 1064. Cf. also Michael Hauskeller, *Versuch über die Grundlagen der Moral*, (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001), 248.

[10] For an example of a laudatory and largely uncritical interpretation see Martin Strege, *Albert Schweitzers Religion und Philosophie: Eine systematische Quellenstudie*, (Tübingen: Katzmann, 1965), which Ulrich Neuenschwander calls in his preface to the work a systematic "Albert-Schweitzer-Catechism" (9). Only a few works present a differentiated and partly critical study of Schweitzer's ethics. See especially Werner Picht, *Albert Schweitzer: Wesen und Bedeutung* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1960); Helmut Groos, *Albert Schweitzer. Grösse und Grenzen. Eine kritische Würdigung des Forschers und Denkers* (Basel: Ernst Reinhardt, 1974), esp. 502ff., 666ff; Friedrich Wilhelm Kantzenbach, *Albert Schweitzer: Wirklichkeit und Legende*, Persönlichkeit u. Geschichte 50 (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1969). Among more recent studies, see Claus Günzler, *Albert Schweitzer: Einführung in sein Denken* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1996); Claus Günzler and Hans Lenk 'Ethik und Weltanschauung: Zum Neuigkeitsgehalt von Albert Schweitzers 'Kulturphilosophie III'', in *Albert Schweitzer heute: Brennpunkte seines Denkens,* eds. Claus Günzler *et al*. (Tübingen: Katzmann, 1990), 17–50, esp. 34–50; Wolfgang Erich Müller (ed.), *Zwischen Denken und Mystik. Albert Schweitzer und die Theologie heute*, BASF 5 (Bodenheim: Philo, 1997); Michael Beyer and Hermann-Adolf Stempel (eds.), *Welt, Umwelt, Ökologie*, BASF 3 (Weinheim: Beltz, 1995); Wolfgang Erich Müller, *Albert Schweitzers Kulturphilosophie im Horizontsäkularer Ethik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); Gerhard Gansterer, *Die Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben. Die Rolle des ethischen Schlüsselbegriffs Albert Schweitzers in der theologisch-ökologische Diskussion*, Forum interdisziplinäre Ethik 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997); Roman Globokar, *Verantwortung für alles was lebt: Von Albert Schweitzer und Hans Jonas zu einer*

has remained a matter for circles of experts, with the exception of general references and a few citations.

An essential reason for the minimal reception most probably lies in the incompleteness of his theory and its inner aporias. It was Schweitzer's intent to build up his ethics of reverence for life, first developed in 'Civilization and Ethics', into a worldview (*Weltanschauung*). He had attempted this several times in his notes for part III, published posthumously, without, however, achieving his goal. In 'Civilization and Ethics', Schweitzer compared his ethics to the chancel of a cathedral.[11] He did not succeed, by his own admission, at finishing this cathedral.[12] Ulrich Neuenschwander, who began work on the posthumous edition (which, after decades, was eventually finalised under the guidance of Ulrich Luz), captured Schweitzer's image of the cathedral as follows: "He was able only to build a bell tower to let the bells sound out throughout the country."[13] The editor Claus Günzler, turning the religiously inspired image into a philosophical one, suggests "the diagnosis of a fundamental failure in making further interesting developments."[14]

Main Features

The elaboration of the first two volumes of Schweitzer's *Philosophy of Civilization* took place during the First World War and the following post-war years. A first version of the manuscript was written in Africa between 1914 and 1917; the final version was preceded by lectures in Upsala, and later also in Oxford, Cambridge, Copenhagen, and Prague. The first ideas and

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theologischen Ethik des Lebens (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universit. Gregoriana, 2002); Michael Hauskeller (ed.), *Ethik des Lebens: Albert Schweitzer als Philosoph* (Zug: Die Graue Edition, 2006); Ara Paul Barsam, *Reverence for Life: Albert Schweitzer's Great Contribution to Ethical Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Ernst Luther, *Albert Schweitzer: Ethik und Politik* (Berlin: Dietz, 2010).

[11] Albert Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, trans. C.T. Campion (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. 1987 [1923]), 313.

[12] See n. 7 above.

[13] Ulrich Neuenschwander, *Christologie—verantwortet vor den Fragen der Moderne: Mit Beiträgen zu Person und Werk Albert Schweitzers*, ed. Werner Zager, Albert-Schweitzer-Studien 5 (Bern: Haupt, 1997).

[14] Claus Günzler, 'Einleitung', in Schweitzer, *Erster und zweiter*, 20.

preliminary work concerning Schweitzer's main work on ethics, however, date back to 1900, when Schweitzer spent the summer at the University of Berlin. Schweitzer's philosophy of civilisation and ethics attempted to provide an answer to the decline of Western civilisation that led to the First World War, without being a mere reaction to the events of the war.

In terms of time and subject matter, Schweitzer's work is thus a counterpart to Oswald Spengler's philosophy of civilisation.[15] The latter's development similarly dates back to the time prior to the First World War, but after 1918 it achieved remarkable popularity as a kind of retrospective sanctioning of the cultural catastrophe and prophecy *post festum*. Despite opposing views, starting in 1923 Schweitzer and Spengler were bound by personal friendship.[16] Both their works, which were written independently of each other, agree at least to the extent that their philosophy of civilisation is mainly a critique of the present situation. Thus, both authors practice philosophy of civilisation as cultural critique. However, while Spengler's morphology of civilisation considers the decline of the West as an unchangeable fate extending over centuries, Schweitzer believes in the possibility of a reconstruction of Western civilisation and a renewal of its ethical foundations.

The causes of cultural decadence rest, for Schweitzer, within the area of philosophy; namely, within the area of what he terms "worldview" (*Weltanschauung*), or "total view of the world" (*Totalweltanschauung*)[17]. According to Schweitzer, the failure of philosophy and of religion, which is not strictly divorced from philosophy,[18] is principally linked to their helplessness vis-

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[15] Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1980 [1918, 1923]).

[16] In the following, this special edition will be quoted: Albert Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik: Sonderausgabe mit Einschluss von Verfall und Wiederaufbau der* Kultur (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1981 [1960]). On the genesis of the work, see Schweitzer, 'Die Entstehung', 5.172–191, esp. 176ff. Here, 188.

[17] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 18.

[18] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 119: "The performance of the partition between philosophical and religious ethics goes back to the error as if one were science and the other non-science. Both, however, are neither the one nor the other, but thinking. ... In every religious genius lives an ethical thinker, and every deeper philosophical ethicist is somehow religious." See also Schweitzer's statement in a letter to Oskar Kraus: "That I mix up the boundary between religious and philosophical thinking has, I believe, always been characteristic of my nature" (The original text is quoted in Strege, *Schweitzers Religion und Philosophie*, 2).

à-vis Nietzsche's ethics and his inhumane doctrine of the will to power. The new path of an ethics of reverence for life—according to Schweitzer the only one still viable![19]—makes no less a claim than to be the only conceivable alternative to Nietzsche's philosophy, without which Nietzsche would retain the last word and the project of Western civilisation would have to be considered a failure.

If one follows Schweitzer, the alternative to Nietzsche's thinking and to nihilism can only consist in a renewal of Western rationalism. The present epoch is characterised as the middle ages. Schweitzer's new ethics programmatically aims at the "liberation from the present Middle Ages"[20]. The ethics of reverence for life is to be seen as the project of a new Enlightenment shaped after the one of the 18th century or in the form of a new Renaissance and a corresponding humanism.[21] The ethics of reverence for life intends to ascribe new validity to the "ethical ideals of reason" of both Enlightenment and rationalism "concerning the development of the individual to true humanity, their position in society, their material and spiritual tasks, the behavior of peoples to each other and their integrating into a humanity united by the highest spiritual goals".[22] For this reason, the thought of Kant, on whose philosophy of religion Schweitzer wrote his doctoral thesis in 1899[23] and who strove for a theoretical foundation of "this strong popular philosophy",[24] has a special significance for Schweitzer, despite the criticisms he made of it.[25] Nevertheless, according to Schweitzer, the point cannot

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[19] Cf. Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 291.

[20] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 32.

[21] On the concept of humanism or the humane and its history, see Albert Schweitzer, 'Humanität', in *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden*: Band 5, ed. Rudolf Grabs (Munich: Beck, 1974), 167-171.

[22] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 16.

[23] Albert Schweitzer*, Die Religionsphilosophie Kants: von der Kritik der reinen Vernunft bis zur Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1899). See H.J. Meyer, 'Albert Schweitzers Doktorarbeit über Kant', in *Albert Schweitzer. Sein Denken und sein Weg,* ed. H.W Bähr (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1962), 66-74; Groos, *Grösse und Grenzen,* 606; and Erich Grässer, *Albert Schweitzer als Theologe,* Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, Band 60, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979), 32. Already in this dissertation Schweitzer is mainly interested in Kant's ethics.

[24] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 17.

[25] See especially Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 196-205.

be a mere repetition of the Enlightenment or even of Kant's philosophy and ethics. Nihilism, the outcome of the history of European philosophy, shows the failure of the previous attempts, including Kant's philosophy, to create a theoretically sound foundation for the ethical ideals of Enlightenment and rationalism.

Schweitzer's ethics is thus understood as rationalism purified through nihilism, as rationalism of a higher kind. Such a rationalism claims to have subsumed in a synthesis, the dualism of knowing and willing,[26] of epistemology and ethics, and also of philosophy and religion. The new thought is a rationalism that has become mystical or a rationalistic mysticism, which at first sight may seems contradictory, since mysticism and rationalism seem to be incompatible with each other. Schweitzer, instead, considers a paradoxical synthesis of mysticism and rationalism to be absolutely compelling. "If rational thought thinks itself to its end, it ends up in a necessarily [!] (*denknotwendigen*) irrational moment. This is the paradox that dominates our spiritual life."[27] In other words: "The thought of reason devoid of presuppositions thus ends in Mysticism," admittedly not in a passive immersion and meditation on God or the universe, but in a thought described as "world-affirming, ethical, active Mysticism."[28]

We want to visualise its main features by starting from Schweitzer's semantics of civilisation and ethics.. First of all, clarification is needed as to what Schweitzer means by civilisation. Civilisation, which conceptually—unlike in Spengler!—is not distinguished from culture,[29] is according to Schweitzer "progress, the material and spiritual progress of individuals as well as of collectivities".[30] Civilisation is, as Schweitzer explains, an instrument of human beings in the struggle for existence, which serves to reduce the pressure of selection. However, Schweitzer's thought must not be misunderstood as biologism. For him, spiritual

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[26] Cf. Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 87.

[27] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 91.

[28] Following Schweitzer, Schopenhauer, Jakob Böhme, Kurt Hübner and Otto Langer, Stefan Grätzel also argues that philosophy without mysticism, even if it carries a high moral potential, has no future. Cf. Stefan Grätzel, *Die Vollendung des Denkens: Vorlesungen zu Philosophie und Mystik* (London: Turnshare Ltd., 2005), particularly 'Vorlesung 2', 13-23.

[29] Cf. Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 37.

[30] Civilisation "is the epitome of all progress of man and mankind in all fields and in all respects, in so far as they are serviceable to the spiritual perfection of the individual as to the progress of progress." Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 35.

progress is more essential than material progress.[31] Spiritual progress, however, is synonymous with ethical progress. Civilisation—"a total progress valuable in every respect"[32]—arises only on the ground of ethical progress. "Culture is the result of an optimistic-ethical worldview."[33]

According to Schweitzer, ethics asks about the possibility of humanity's higher development and spiritual perfection. It is each "human being's activity directed towards the inner perfection of their personality".[34] As such, ethics is not science, but thought. Schweitzer defines science positivistically as "the description of objective facts, the exploration of their connections and the drawing of conclusions from them".[35] According to Schweitzer, however, humanity cannot be objectified in this way. Therefore, no scientific ethics is conceivable, but at most a science of the history of ethics. "There is therefore no scientific ethics, but only a thinking ethics."[36] But thought is an elementary process of consciousness, in which my cognition transitions into experience[37]. Without having to break down the references in detail here, Schweitzer's philosophising has clearly strong commonalities with the so-called philosophy of life.

Now it is not ethics alone, but ethics together with worldview, which founds civilisation. That is precisely why civilisation is the result of an optimistic-ethical worldview. Ethics, for its part, must be integrated into a worldview. This thesis also connects Schweitzer's thought with the philosophy of life.

Schweitzer defines worldview as "the epitome of the thoughts which society and the individual articulate within themselves concerning the nature and purpose of the world, as well as the positioning and destiny of humanity and human being within it"[38]. Without such a defined worldview, which can be optimistic or also pessimistic, no ethics is conceivable, since the latter presupposes an answer to the question of meaning. Civilisation, however, does not develop on the basis of a pessimistic worldview which denies both world and life, but only on the basis of an optimistic-ethical worldview. Schweitzer tries to prove this by reference to the

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[31] Cf. Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 35f.

[32] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 98.

[33] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 103; also cf. 73.

[34] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 72.

[35] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 115.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Cf. Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 89, 83, 158 et al.

[38] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 63.

history of philosophy.

According to Schweitzer, however, all previous worldviews have failed, namely because the previous philosophy has always tried to shape its worldview by means of so-called metaphysics. For Schweitzer the last insight of knowledge is "that the world is for us in every respect a mysterious appearance of the universal will to life," for which no meaningfulness can be claimed in itself.[39] "The world is horrible in its glorious, senseless in its sensible, sorrowful in its joyful dimensions."[40] Therefore, in Schweitzer's judgment, any attempt to derive ethics from the supposed meaningfulness of a world interpreted metaphysically must fail. From this, Schweitzer draws the consequence of reversing the foundational relationship between worldview and life view: "The worldview grows out of the view of life, and not the other way around."[41] However, the sought-after view of life is, according to Schweitzer, the attitude of reverence for life.

Schweitzer famously formulates the basic axiom of his doctrine of reverence for life as follows: "True philosophy has to take as a starting point the most immediate and most comprehensive fact of consciousness. The latter reads: 'I am life that wills to live amidst life that wills to live.'"[42] In this sentence, 'life view' is placed above worldview, willing (*Wollen*) above knowing, and so Descartes' tenet "Cogito, ergo sum" is invalidated by "Vivo, ergo sum." Reverence for life is ethical because it is "captivated by an endless, unfathomable, propulsive will […] in which all being is founded."[43] The fundamental experience (*Grunderfahrung*) of reverence for life is the experiencing of a universal will to live that operates within us and other living beings. In religious language, this turn can be equated with the "mysterious, ethical god-personality that I cannot recognise as such in the world, but experience only as a mysterious will in myself."[44] This universal will to live is outside of the human being, opposed by the particular will to live in the struggle of all against all for survival.

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[39] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 86.

[40] Albert Schweitzer, 'Das Problem der Ethik in der Höherentwicklung des menschlichen Denkens', in *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden*: Band 5, ed. Rudolf Grabs (Munich: Beck, 1974),143-159, here 157.

[41] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 89.

[42] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 330.

[43] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 303.

[44] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 90.

"The world is the gruesome spectacle of the self-divisiveness of the will to life."[45] In us humans, however, the will to life appears as one "which wants to become one with another will to life".[46] Because the universal will to life becomes conscious of itself in us, "an elementary concept of responsibility is resolved"[47] in the attitude of reverence for life. Ethics is now the "subjective, extensively and intensively boundless responsibility for all life entering its sphere, as experienced and sought to be realised by human being inwardly liberated from the world".[48] Therefore, "the basic principle of morality, which is necessary for thought," is: "Good is to preserve life and promote life; evil is to destroy life and inhibit life."[49] Put otherwise, ethics consists in "experiencing the compulsion to give to all will to life the same reverence for life as one gives to one's own".[50]

A strong ethical motive of reverence for life is compassion for everything that lives. Nevertheless, one would fall short if one wanted to dismiss Schweitzer's ethics as an ethics of compassion or interpret it biographically as a mere reflex of the sensitivity for others' suffering that had existed in him since his earliest youth, in particular for the suffering of animals which had been largely ignored by philosophy.[51] "Compassion is too narrow to be considered the epitome of the ethical," for ethics does not only have to do with suffering, but also with pleasurable and active life.[52] "Love says already more, as it embraces in itself the sharing of suffering, joy and striving."[53] And so Schweitzer can assert: "Mainly, reverence for life commands the same as the ethical principle of love. Only, reverence for life carries within itself the foundation of the commandment of love and demands compassion for all creatures."[54] In

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[45] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 334.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 92.

[48] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 327.

[49] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 331, cf. 90.

[50] See also Schweitzer, 'Das Problem der Ethik 157f.

[51] See Albert Schweitzer, 'Philosophie und Tierschutzbewegung' in *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden*: Band 5, ed. Rudolf Grabs (Munich: Beck, 1974), 135-142); Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 199 et al.

[52] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 332.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 158. Cf. Schweitzer's Strasbourg sermon on the double

other words, the fundamental principle of an ethics of reverence for life is universal responsibility for life, which includes compassion and love, but is not exhausted in either.

With this ethics of responsibility for life, Schweitzer believed that he had solved the problems of worldview and meaning (*Sinnproblematik*). The fundamental experience of reverence for life says: "My life carries its meaning in its own self. It consists in living the highest idea that emerges in my will to live […] the idea of reverence for life. Thereupon I give value to my life and all will to live that surrounds me, I hold on to action, and create values."[55] Schweitzer's ethics is thus not only an ethics of responsibility but at the same time an ethics of values which, admittedly, does not take as its starting point *a priori* existing values, but the values that have to be created through the will to live operating within me.

Furthermore, Schweitzer's ethics claims to provide a synthesis of philosophical and religious ethics; and in truth it bears soteriological traits. Johannine theology shimmers through when Schweitzer characterizes his ethics as an "ethics of being different from the world."[56] Anyone who actualizes the fundamental experience of reverence for life knows: "I am delivered from the world."[57]

With this we conclude the depiction of Schweitzer's ethics in its main features. Now in a further line of thought, we ask whether Schweitzer can indeed substantiate the logical necessity of reverence for life, and whether nihilism and the crisis of ethics can be overcome in the only way that he still considered possible.

Questions to Schweitzer's Ethics

Schweitzer's new approach of reverence for life considers itself, as we have seen, as the only convincing alternative to a philosophy that has failed with respect to nihilism in general and Nietzsche in particular. Nietzsche's philosophy of the will to power, which rejects any humanitarian or even Judeo-Christian ethics, is opposed by a philosophy of the will to life, which for its part has multilayered connections to the philosophical tradition, especially to

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commandment of love in *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden*: Band 5, ed. Rudolf Grabs (Munich: Beck, 1974), 117-126, esp. 124f.

[55] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 89. Also cf. 303!

[56] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 337.

[57] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 334.

Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Schopenhauer. The idea of the universal will to life, which opposes the many particular 'wills to life' and reaches self-consciousness in humanity, in whom it brings about redemption, goes back to Schelling.[58] The program of "giving ethical content to self-perfection in the affirmation of the world and life" is connected to Fichte.[59] Above all, however, the motif of universal compassion connects Schweitzer's ethics with the thought of Schopenhauer. Put very simply, one can say that Schweitzer tries to go beyond Nietzsche by going back to the philosophy of Schopenhauer.

When it comes to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Schweitzer's conclusion is: "Life affirmation and life negation are both ethical to some extent; carried to the end, they become unethical."[60] The new approach of reverence for life is an ethics of affirmation of the universal will to life, which for the sake of this affirmation includes the particular negation of life. For Schweitzer, negation of life consists in the insight that every life exists at the expense of other lives. One could simplify this assertion by stating that Schweitzer has a synthesis in mind which is supposed to subsume in itself the moments of truth of both Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's philosophy. The question remains whether Schweitzer succeeded in such a synthesis.[61]

The main problem that arises at this point is: how can I arrive at a universal responsibility for life from the realisation that I am a life that wills to live among life that also wills to live?

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[58] See F.W.J Schelling, *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*, ed. Walter Schulz (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975).

[59] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 308 and cf. 214-224.

[60] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 267.

[61] On the problem of the logical necessity of his ethical principle, as claimed by Schweitzer, see also Dieter Birnbacher, 'Sind wir für die Natur verantwortlich?', in Dieter Birnbacher, *Ökologie und Ethik* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980), 103-139, esp. 127ff; Manfred Ecker, 'Evolution und Ethik. Der Begriff der Denknotwendigkeit in Albert Schweitzers Ethik der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben', in *Albert Schweitzer heute: Brennpunkte seines Denkens,* eds. Claus Günzler *et al*. (Tübingen: Katzmann, 1990), 51-81; Jean-Claude Wolf, 'Ist Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben ein brauchbares Moralprinzip?', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 40.3 (1993), 359-383; Norbert Hoerster, *Haben Tiere eine Würde? Grundfragen der Tierethik*, (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2004), 21-31 [chapter 2]; Christian Illies, 'Ehrfurcht statt Begründung? Albert Schweitzers Versuch einer Grundlegung der Ethik', in Michael Hauskeller (ed.), *Ethik des Lebens: Albert Schweitzer als Philosoph* (Zug: Die Graue Edition, 2006), 189-209.

To this Schweitzer responds that with reverence for life, a fundamental concept of responsibility is immediately given. But is this really the case? Why should the realisation that I am life that wills to live amidst life that wills to live compel me to promote and preserve the lives of others? Is not precisely the brutal struggle for survival and my attempt to assert myself in the struggle a fitting consequence of the fundamental experience of my will to live? In other words: Is it not precisely Nietzsche with his doctrine of the will to power that draws the only correct conclusion from the fundamental experience invoked by Schweitzer? Is not the life that is affirmed precisely that of devouring or being devoured?

Of course, Schweitzer does not want to say this. Thus, he implies that the experience underlying reverence for life confronts us with a universal will to live, which in the language of religion is to be equated with God. This divine will to live, however, urges man to create values and to realise ideals. Of course, it must be countered that for Schweitzer these values and ideals are by no means derivable from nature or the evolutionary process as such, but are the relics of a philosophy and an ethics of values, which already tacitly presupposes what it wants to derive. Schweitzer claims that in the concept of will the idea of responsibility is implied. But this is not the case. Logically, there is no path leading from my will and the will of other life to a concept of responsibility.

Now it may be objected that, according to Schweitzer, the fundamental experience of one's own will to live in the midst of others' will to live is more than the experience of one's own particular will. It is the experience of a universal will to live that becomes the instance before which I can feel responsibility. "In us free-moving beings, capable of a deliberate, purposeful activity, the urge for perfection is given in such a way that we want to bring ourselves and everything that can be influenced by us to the highest material and spiritual value."[62] This knowledge is supposed to be included in the experience of reverence for life, which is so elementary that Schweitzer can speak of an 'instinctive' reverence for life.[63] But this is to be questioned too. It must be denied that from the axiom, "I am life that wants to live, in the midst of life that wants to live," we can conclude that there is a universal will to life that compels the creation of values and the realisation of ideals.[64] In fact, if reverence for life is supposed to contain a concept of ideals and values, it is by no means an elementary experience of our

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[62] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 302.

[63] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 299.

[64] Cf. Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 298, 303. Original text: "as the will to live, it is the will to realize ideals."

existence, but a highly complex idea, which cannot deny its connection to certain varieties of a 'value' philosophy and ethics.[65] Above all, however, it is not clear in what way the elementary experience of being life that wants to live, in the midst of life that wants to live, necessitates the position of a universal will to life as an instance of ethical responsibility. Regarding the ethics of reverence for life—at least in the formulation found in Schweitzer's work—there can be found no proof of a logical *necessity*, despite his claims.[66]

Additionally, further questions are to be addressed to Schweitzer's approach. As simple as the fundamental ethical postulate of his ethics might seem, namely that it is good to preserve and promote life, and evil to harm or destroy life, its practical application is difficult. Since one's own life can only continue by 'negating' the lives of others, reverence for life inevitably ends up in ethical conflict.[67] Schweitzer speaks passionately of an absolute ethics which would be above any pragmatic relativism. However, his absolute ethics offers no standards for the solution of the ethical conflict in particular cases. Schweitzer's ethics of reverence for life does not encounter the ethical conflict as a limit situation, rather it institutionalises it as a permanent conflict, which, against Schweitzer's declared intention, by principle allows one to suspend oneself from ethical standards. Werner Picht even questions whether among Schweitzer's "followers and even among his co-workers there is even a single one who has really unreservedly embraced the relentlessness and exclusivity of this ethical thinking."[68]

Strictly speaking, Schweitzer's rigorous fostering of a reverence for life contradicts the very nature of this life, which requires consuming or even simply taking the place of other life. But if negating life is completely unavoidable, since it is necessary for survival, then it certainly cannot be declared evil *in principle*, as is the case in Schweitzer's thought. The morally acting human being, however, must not only acknowledge the necessity of this fact, but, insofar as his actions are to be ethically justified, "whether they want to or not, they are also forced to make decisions which presuppose value judgments".[69] This necessity, however, is in contradiction to Schweitzer's ethical principle, which fundamentally declares all life, human as well as animal and vegetable, to be of equal value. Critics object that both a natural order—

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[65] See also Oskar Kraus, *Albert Schweitzer: Sein Werk und seine Weltanschauung* (Berlin: Pan-Verlag Metzner, 1926), 49.

[66] Cf. also Picht, *Wesen und Bedeutun,* 122, followed by Groos, *Grösse und Grenzen,* 518f.

[67] Cf. Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 338ff, 346ff.

[68] Picht, *Wesen und Bedeutun,* 130.

[69] Picht, *Wesen und Bedeutun,* 531.

according to which living beings are organised at different levels—and moral consciousness point to a special position for humanity, which Schweitzer himself basically accepts in practical life, but which he does not do justice to theoretically within the framework of his ethics, which can be characterised as 'biocentric'. As a principle of an absolute ethics, reverence for life would have to drive humanity to the complete surrender of their own life and thus directly or indirectly to suicide. Acting according to reverence for life as Schweitzer describes it, on the other hand, is only possible if it is understood as a principle not of an absolute ethics but, contrary to Schweitzer's own postulate, a relative one.[70] However, since Schweitzer does not sketch out any further criteria of judgment for such an ethics and thus perpetuates the ethical conflict, ethical behavior becomes "a maneuvering between life affirmation and life negation".[71]

On the other hand, the idea of a universal responsibility leads Schweitzer into a heteronomy that is difficult to bear. "An uncompromising believer is reverence for life!" "Even my own happiness reverence for life does not grant me." "You must pay a price for it."[72] One wonders why this is so. Biographically, this attitude of Schweitzer's can be easily accounted for.[73] But it hardly justifies philosophically the institutionalisation of such a conscience. On the contrary, its consequences are ethically problematic, because "all carefree pleasure, all carefree leisure of man, but with it also an essential part of higher culture, would be called into question by the inexorably consuming service to life".[74]

Today, Schweitzer is often mentioned as the guardian of an ethics which criticises and overcomes the objectification of nature that began with Descartes, as well as anthropocentric thinking and its deadly consequences for humanity and nature. The currently common judgment of Descartes associated with such an evaluation cannot be discussed here. However, it should not be overlooked that Schweitzer—despite his criticism of an anthropocentric

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[70] Cf. Picht, *Wesen und Bedeutun,* 538f.

[71] Picht, *Wesen und Bedeutun,* 117. See also 127.

[72] All three quotations in Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 344.

[73] Cf. Schweitzer, *Life and Thought*, 85: "It struck me as incomprehensible that I should be allowed to lead such a happy life while I saw so many people around me wrestling with care and suffering." (p. 84). "Then one brilliant summer morning at Günsbach, during the Whitsuntide holidays—it was in 1896—there came to me, as I awoke, the thought that I must not accept this happiness as a matter of course, but must give something in return for it.".

[74] Groos, *Grösse und Grenzen,* 535.

narrowing of philosophy and ethics—is himself a staunch advocate of the modern idea of progress. “Reverence for life thus compels us to imagine and will all the progress of which human being and humanity are capable.”[75] Progress is civilisation, but civilisation is dominion, and not only in the sense of—as we would say today—qualitative growth, the dominion over humanity’s disposition, but precisely in the sense of the dominion over nature and its forces. It is to be asked to what extent Schweitzer is in fact initiating a new way of thinking, as it is demanded today in the context of the discussion about the chances of survival of humanity and nature.

In conclusion, looking at Nietzsche and the age of nihilism, the question must be asked, to what extent Schweitzer really takes into account the collapse of German idealism and the questionability of metaphysical thought. Schweitzer believes that, based on a reverence for life, civilisation carries its value so much in itself “that even the certainty of a cessation of humankind in the foreseeable future could not disqualify our effort for culture”[76]. Can we not say that Schweitzer tries to support the principle of reverence for life by means of the very philosophy whose failure, looking back on the 19th century, must already have been acknowledged? But then it is to be questioned whether reverence for life, as Schweitzer defines and interprets it, is really strong enough to overcome nihilism.

To Schweitzer’s credit, it is worth saying that he himself dealt with this question in ever new attempts, as is shown in his posthumously published *Kulturphilosophie III*—‘The Worldview of Reverence for Life’. He himself understands universal life in itself does not provide sufficient grounds for ethics. Just as the earth arose from a cosmic catastrophe, so it will end in one in the distant future. Neither can “the conviction that the purpose of the earth is fulfilled in the life that arises on it” be justified in terms of natural science, nor “can the existence of humankind as the highest life be regarded as certain.” Apart from the fact that humankind could be carried away by epidemics,[77] the age of technology and means of mass destruction entails the danger that humankind will extinguish itself. That is why Schweitzer concludes: “An ethical worldview that can bear the thought that the human being could be something temporary in the world: Only this is truly solid.”[78]

Schweitzer finds a certain comfort in the thought “that as fire does not blaze up in one but

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[75] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 354.

[76] Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 355.

[77] Cf. also Schweitzer, *Wir Epigonen,* 212.

[78] Schweitzer, *Erster und zweiter*, 312.

in many flames, so our being [*Sein*] does not reach its highest point only in the development of living beings on our earth, but also in a variety of developments that takes place in the spatial and temporal infinity."[79] This thought can be understood as a naturalistic variant of a universal and futuristic eschatology in spite of the fact that Schweitzer understands the traditional eschatological ideas of Christianity, conceived as a thoroughgoing eschatology, as obsolete.[80]

In the end, Schweitzer's ethics of reverence for life is based on religion and theology. With that, it draws on premises that nowadays are in no way universally acknowledged (as is demonstrated, for example, from a utilitarian point of view in Peter Singer's critique).[81] Singer does share with Schweitzer the matter of an animal ethics, yet at the cost of the protective rights of the unborn or of the totally disabled newborn—rights regarded as universal by Schweitzer. Even if Singer's objections to the idea of sanctity of life or reverence for life are themselves poorly founded and open to criticism, this does not change anything in the evident problems of justification for Schweitzer's ethics. This is also the case with the late Hans Jonas' approach of an ethics of responsibility—it similarly contains tacit religious or metaphysical premises. And finally, a "cryptic theology"[82] surely underlies the concept of life against which Karl Barth expressed himself when he wrote: "Life is no second God."[83] Yet, in spite of all the unsolved philosophical as well as theological problems, Schweitzer's pioneering work in the areas of ecological ethics and intercultural, or transcultural ethics, remains undisputed.

Perhaps one should generally interpret Schweitzer less as a theoretician of morality than a

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[79] Schweitzer, *Erster und zweiter,* 239; 210.

[80] Cf. Ulrich H.J. Körtner, 'Ethik und Eschatologie: Zur Bedeutung des Eschatologieverständnisses Albert Schweitzers für die Systematische Theologie der Gegenwart', in *Zwischen Denken und Mystik. Albert Schweitzer und die Theologie heute*, ed. Wolfgang Erich Müller (Bodenheim: Philo, 1997), 108-125.

[81] Cf. Peter Singer, *Praktische Ethik,* trans. Jean-Claude Wolf (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1990), esp. 70ff. See also Helga Kuhse, *Die "Heiligkeit des Lebens" in der Medizin: Eine philosophische Kritik* (Erlangen: Fischer, 1994).

[82] Christofer Frey, 'Zum Verständnis des Lebens in der Ethik', in *Frey, Konfliktfelder des Lebens: Theologische Studien zur Bioethik*, ed. Peter Dabrock and Wolfgang Maaser (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 77–100, here 98.

[83] Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik,* 3.4, (Zollikon-Zürich: TVZ, 1951), 388.

psychologist of morality, as Heike Baranzke suggests. In her view, "reverence for life is not a principle of justification of ethics, but a moral-psychological principle of sensitisation for the formation of acceptance of responsibility."[84] Committed life praxis and narrative reasoning cannot be played out with an ethics that puts to the test the principles and norms that guide life praxis. And such a test does not give rise to a "culture of responsibility"in which an ethics of responsibility is embedded.[85]

Charles Taylor, in his *Sources of the Self,* profoundly criticised, with a view to Descartes, a form of reason that he denotes as "disengaged reason".[86] Disengaged reason deliberately breaks with ordinary, corporeal experience. It does violence to ordinary experience by conceiving of the sensual world and its phenomena as something "'disenchanted,' as mere mechanism, as devoid of any spiritual essence or expressive dimension".[87] Disengagement for Taylor is"always correlative of an 'objectification' […] Objectifying a given domain involves depriving it of its normative force for us."[88]

The whole of Schweitzer's thought, throughout which he understood himself as a renewer of Enlightenment rationality, can be understood as a protest against disengaged reason. His ethics aspires precisely to an engaged reason in which knowing passes into experiencing.[89] In that sense it remains unabatedly up to date.

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[84] Heike Baranzke, 'Was bedeutet 'Ehrfurcht' in Albert Schweitzers Verantwortungsethik?', *Synthesis Phliosophica,* 27. 1 (2012), 7–29, here, 25.

[85] Baranzke, 26.

[86] Cf. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 262ff. Following Taylor, see also Johannes Fischer, *Sittlichkeit und Rationalität: Zur Kritik der desengagierten Vernunft,* Forum Systematik 38 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010).

[87] Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 266.

[88] Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 290.

[89] Cf. Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik,* 89.

III

Forging the Broken Sword of Idealism Anew: A Critical Examination of Schweitzer's *Philosophy of Civilization*

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Abstract

In *The Philosophy of Civilization*, Schweitzer offers an ethical approach that he believes would lead to the restoration of civilisation. He argues that "ethics consists … in my experiencing the compulsion to show to all will-to-live the same reverence as I do to my own." Convinced of his approach's correctness, Schweitzer announces, "In no other fire than that of mysticism of reverence for life can the broken sword of idealism be forged anew." In this paper, I critically examine Schweitzer's view by looking closely into his way of reasoning and by searching for constructive ways to develop Schweitzer's unorthodox ethical approach further.

Keywords

Albert Schweitzer, reverence for life, ethics, the crisis of civilisation, progress, Erazim Kohák.

Introduction

At the end of January 1913, G.H. Hardy, Professor of Mathematics at the Trinity College in Cambridge, received an eleven-page letter from an unknown clerk in India. The letter was full of unorthodox theorems and formulas. Although one of the leading mathematicians in the world, Hardy had never seen anything like that; for hours and days, he was glued to the letter trying to figure out whether his correspondent created a dazzling fraud, or whether this work which disregarded the accepted mathematical conventions was of timeless significance. Convincing himself that the latter is the case, he invited the author, Srinivas Ramanujan, who could not complete his education at a mediocre Indian university, to work with him in Cambridge. Most of Ramanujan's novel formulas and theorems seemed intuitively correct to Hardy, but he had one burning and persistent question for the newly discovered Indian genius:

"Can you prove any of that?"[1]

Only a few months after Hardy received Ramanujan's letter, another extraordinary man stunned the academic and artistic world of Europe by leaving for Africa and opening a hospital in the most malaria-infested part of the continent, in today's Gabon. Albert Schweitzer was already well-known as a theologian and an organ player, the author of several well-received books dealing with the history of Christianity and Johann Sebastian Bach. Despite his multiple talents and occupations, he considered himself primarily a philosopher, which led to the publication of his most significant philosophical work, *The Philosophy of Civilization* (in 1923). In its first volume, 'The Decay and Restoration of Civilization' (*Verfall und die Wiederaufbau der Kultur*) Schweitzer offers a damning criticism of the course our civilisation had been taking in the last several centuries. He maintains that "civilization is essentially ethical in character," but that philosophers have abandoned their "watch post" and that they were primarily "responsible for the collapse of civilization." (We shall return to this accusation later.)

His second and even more ambitious volume was called 'Civilization and Ethics' (*Kultur und Ethik*). In it, with a critical eye and a surgical knife, Schweitzer went through the entire history of ethics, downplayed all already-known ethical theories, and offered an ethical approach that he believed would lead to the restoration of civilisation. As he explains, in his untraditional view, "Ethics consists … in my experiencing the compulsion to show to all will-to-live the same reverence as I do to my own. There we have given us that basic principle of the morals which is a necessity of thought. It is good to maintain and encourage life; it is bad to destroy life and to obstruct it."[2] Convinced of the correctness of his approach, Schweitzer announces: "In no other fire than that of mysticism of reverence for life can the broken sword of idealism be forged anew."[3]

As Hardy was stunned by Ramanujan's letter, we can be equally astonished by Schweitzer's

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[1] Cf. Robert Kanigel, *The Man Who Knew Infinity: A Life of the Genius Ramanujan* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1991).

[2] Albert Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1987), 309.

[3] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 81. In German original: "In anderm Feuer als in dem der Mystik der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben kann das zerbrochene Schwert des Idealismus nicht neu geschmiedet werden"; quoted from Albert Schweitzer, *Gesammelte Werke in Fünf Bänden* (Zürich: Buchclub Ex Libris, 1974), Band 2, 111.

novel ethics of reverence for life and his ambitious pronouncements. Schweitzer's work simply does not fit into the standards of academic philosophy, just as his ethical reasoning does not conform to the existing "canons" of ethical thinking. If we take the three standard models of understanding moral actions to be (a) doing what is right (Kant); (b) maximising the world's value (utilitarianism); and (c) being responsive to others (ethics based on sympathy), we can see that Schweitzer's ethics of reverence for life has the elements of all three approaches but it cannot be squared neatly into any one of them. According to Schweitzer, Kant's theory is too formal and detached from the concerns of practical life, utilitarianism turns everything into 'means' and discards the possibility of intrinsic values, while ethics based on sympathy lacks a rationally justified and universally applicable moral principle. Not just Schweitzer's original phrase, *Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben*, but his entire ethical theory, which insists on devotion toward all living creatures whom we have the opportunity and ability to serve, is unlike anything ever presented in the history of philosophy. Without even considering the details of how such an ethical approach can enable us to enter into a spiritual relationship with the entire creation, we are puzzled as to whether we are dealing here with yet another example of wishful utopian thinking or whether Schweitzer may have happened upon something of extraordinary significance.

While I believe that the latter is the case, as with Ramanujan's letters, the "proofs" are missing. Although proofs are of less relevance in philosophy than in mathematics, a demand for rational justification is indispensable for any philosophy that aims at critical acceptance. Yet, despite Schweitzer's passionate decrees, even a brief reflection would convince us that no crisis of civilisation and no history of ethics leads in any directly conceivable way to reverence for life; nor does he present any "basic principle of the morality" which is demonstrated to be "a necessity of thought." The metaphorical proclamation about the reforged sword of idealism may appear both intuitively more appealing and believable, but what evidence could justify Schweitzer's optimistic declarations? Adding to these concerns is the fact that, despite persistent efforts over several decades, he never publishes parts three or four of his *Kulturphilosophie*. Like Ramanujan's mathematical projects, Schweitzer's philosophical edifice has also remained unfinished.

In this paper, I will act as Schweitzer's sympathetic critic, as Hardy did in the case of Ramanujan. I will press Schweitzer hard both through a close examination of his reasoning and by searching for constructive ways to develop further Schweitzer's unorthodox ethical approach.

Mapping the Line of Reasoning

Schweitzer does not outline for us the structure of the reasoning that leads him from the crisis of civilisation to the ethics of reverence for life; we need to reconstruct it ourselves. In the first volume of his work, three ideas seem to preoccupy him the most: the 'decay' of civilisation, the idea of 'progress' (essential for every civilisation), and 'ethics', insofar as he also considers this to belong to the essence of civilisation. (One could add to this list the ideas of *Lebensanschauung* and *Weltanschauung*, as well as that of philosophy, economy, technology, and their respective roles in the decay and restoration of civilisation.) In the second volume, an examination of the history of ethics dominates the discussion, and, together with the arguments made in the first volume, Schweitzer believes this should somehow lead to the idea of *reverence for life*.

To make Schweitzer's line of reasoning as visible as possible, I will mostly focus on the following four ideas: (a) the 'crisis' of civilisation; (b) progress; (c) ethics; and (d) reverence for life.

I use the softer and more general expression term 'crisis', instead of Schweitzer's 'decay,' or even 'suicide' of civilisation. I will avoid the latter expression because a hundred years after the publication of Schweitzer's work, our civilisation still exists—it has not committed suicide yet! Further, not all has been bad in the development of our civilisation—some of its elements may have been healthy and even propitious, despite the overall crises. Put differently, in some respects our civilisation may be regressing, but in others it surely is progressing.[4]

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[4] As Richard Tarnas explains, the idea of progress belongs to the core of modernity—the belief in man's linear historical progress toward ultimate fulfillment. The modern man understood his destiny as essentially teleological, "with humanity seen as moving in a historical development out of the darker past characterised by ignorance, primitivism, poverty, suffering, and oppression, and toward a brighter ideal future characterised by intelligence, sophistication, prosperity, happiness, and freedom." He adds: "Confidence in human progress, akin to the biblical faith in humanity's spiritual evolution and future consummation, was so central to the modern world view that it notably increased with the decline of Christianity. Expectations of mankind's coming fulfillment found vivid expression even as the modern mind reached its most determinedly secular stages in Condorcet, Comte, and Marx. Indeed, the ultimate statement of belief in evolutionary human deification was found in Christianity's most fervent

Schweitzer does not focus on material and technical progress; he does not consider them fundamental. In fact, he suggests that they may even make it more difficult to realise that we are regressing—or at least completely disoriented—with regard to the moral and spiritual progress of our civilisation. By progress, he has in mind primarily a moral and spiritual perfecting of individuals: an inner, individual progress rather than any external and measurable social progress. As he sums it up, "Civilization originates when men become inspired by a strong and clear determination to attain progress, and consecrate themselves, as a result of this determination, to the service of life and of the world. It is only in ethics that we can find the driving force for such action, transcending, as it does, the limits of our own existence."[5]

With regard to the *subject matter* (or content) of ethics, Schweitzer argues that it has to begin with life and focus on its maintenance and flourishing: "life is the most universal and yet the most immediately determined phenomenon."[6] As for its *formal* requirements: "The true basic principle of the ethical must be not only something universally valid, but something absolutely elementary and inward, which, once it has dawned upon a human being, never relinquishes its hold, which as a matter of course runs like a thread through all of one's meditations, which never let itself be thrust aside, and which continually challenges one to try conclusions with reality."[7]

Schweitzer does not oppose civilisation to some primitive state of affairs (as perhaps Rousseau imagined); rather, its opposite is a state of mind in which we are only capable of

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antagonist, Nietzsche, whose Superman would be born out of the death of God and the overcoming of the old limited man." cf. Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 321-22.

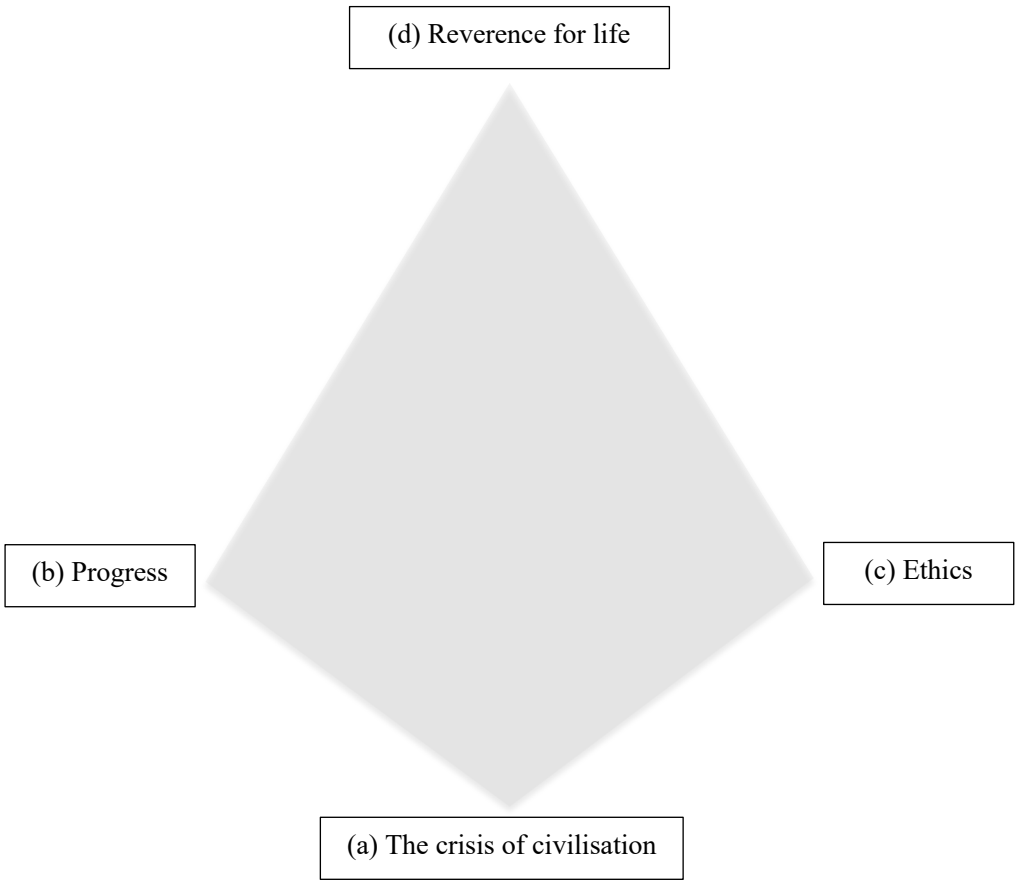
[5] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, xiii. I wonder if Schweitzer should not have used another word instead of *Fortschritt*, which translates as 'progress'. As Oswald Spengler suggests, it may have been better to follow Goethe than Darwin here: "In Goethe evolution is upright, in Darwin it is flat; in Goethe organic, in Darwin mechanical; in Goethe an experience and emblem, in Darwin a matter of cognition and law. To Goethe evolution meant inward fulfillment, to Darwin it meant 'Progress.'" Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I: Form and Actuality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), 370.

[6] Schweitzer's letter to Dr. Oskar Pfister, 19.12.1926, quoted in Albert Schweitzer, *Letters 1905-1965*, ed. Hans Walter Bähr (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 92-93.

[7] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 107.

focusing on ourselves, on our physical comfort and the accumulation of material prosperity. Although he ties the idea of progress closely to the conception of ethics, it is important to note that 'progress' and 'ethics' are distinguishable ideas, in the sense that neither of them implies the other. We can, for instance, understand an ethics that is concerned with maintaining the status quo, rather than aiming at any vaguely defined notion of progress.[8] And conversely, progress is sometimes accomplished by means that are not strictly speaking moral: from Plato's 'noble lies', to compromises, illusions, or deceptions. As in Schweitzer's quote above, we often take progress to refer to 'ends', while ethics is concerned with the 'means' for accomplishing a certain end. In Schweitzer's view, the ethics of reverence for life are the means needed to progress toward a state of affairs in which reverence for *all* life would prevail, not only within an individual human being, but also by become a general human attitude as well.

Schematically speaking, Schweitzer's line of reasoning can be represented by means of the following diagram:



[8] There is no unified way to understand what 'ethics' is, nor how similar or different it is to 'morality'. Schweitzer's uses of these two words are roughly equivalent, as are the respective translations from Greek and Latin.

Let me briefly clarify its main features. There is no straight line that leads from point (a) to point (b), from the crisis of civilisation to reverence for life. Nor are progress and ethics subsumable under the same heading. Instead, Schweitzer needs to show that both (b) and (c) are essential for a healthy restoration of civilisation, and then to show that we can move from either (b) or (c)—or both!—to (d). This diagram also suggests that the paths from (a) to both (b) and (c) are shorter than the paths that lead from them to (d). Even if we can relate the crisis of civilisation to the development of ethics and the idea of progress, a long and thorny path still awaits us if we venture to reach (d) from either (b) or (c)—if we can reach that summit at all.

All of these are important insights, but they require further 'proofs'. Yet the key to Schweitzer's entire reasoning is connected to point (d), reverence for life. How, then, should we understand this phrase?

Reverence for Life and its Interpreters

In *The Philosophy of Civilization*, as well as in his numerous other books, essays, and sermons, Schweitzer often writes as if 'reverence for life' is a simple and one-dimensional phrase. This, however, is far from being the case.

In one of his oft-quoted pronouncements, Schweitzer writes: "Reverence for life, *veneratio vitae*, is the most direct and at the same time the most profound achievement of my will-to-live."[9] Yet, the more closely we look at it, the more complex are the questions we face. When, in his attempt to articulate his view, Schweitzer says that, "just as in reverence for my own will-to-live I struggle from the destinies of life, so I struggle too for freedom from myself,"[10] we wonder what he means by that: how many urges and drives—besides the will-to-live, or even within that will—are in us? And if there is more than one, why favor only one of them, or any of them? When he adds: "We have to carry on the struggle against the evil that is in mankind, not by judging others, but by judging ourselves,"[11] we must wonder: what is that evil that he is talking about? Where does it come from and how does it manifest itself? And how could judging ourselves help us to cope with it?

The complexities regarding our correct interpretation of reverence for life are further multiplied when we look at how some of the sympathetic commentators articulated it.

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[9] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 78.

[10] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 314.

[11] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 315.

According to Werner Picht, for example, Schweitzer was convinced that he had "discovered the relationship of man to the universe, the essence of human nature and the unshakeable foundation of ethics". Schweitzer saw himself as "living and acting in the world, as one who aimed at making men less shallow and morally better by making them think".[12]

Jackson Lee Ice proposes another understanding: "Schweitzer absorbed from Georg Simmel a conviction that the potential 'ought-ness' of the essential self is as real as the actual 'is-ness' of the existing self … the finite will to live already has a built-in-definition of what self-perfection involves, and the whole point of elemental thinking is to clarify the vision of the essential self so that it may become ever more closely approximated in existence."[13]

Quite different interpretations are defended by George Seaver and James Brabazon: they lead us away from the pedagogical and practical use of reverence for life toward its religious and an even broader spiritual impact. According to Seaver, "To be committed to life is different from having reverence for it. To revere is to discover something awesome and holy, something that grasps and holds the person. This is not intellectual commitment, it is not emotional attachment, it is not something once felt that can be denied; it is a final and unconditional religious act. It is not even an act of faith or of blind obedience."[14]

Brabazon presents Schweitzer's ethics by talking about reverence for life as "the doctrine of the bottom line," which in our age is "the religion of selfishness and greed." Brabazon insists that we should realise that "the economy is not the bottom line. It just is not. It is some distance from the bottom line. The economy is actually only the housekeeper." As Schweitzer contends, the bottom line is "ecology, it is life," and we must focus on "the enhancement of life." Brabazon furthermore interprets reverence for life as roughly equivalent to two other phrases: "to be in harmony with the ultimate energy of the universe and to love God."[15]

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[12] Werner Picht, *The Life and Thought of Albert Schweitzer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 118.

[13] Jackson Lee Ice, *Schweitzer: Prophet of Radical Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1971), 118.

[14] George Seaver, *Albert Schweitzer: The Man and His Mind* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947), 110.

[15] James Brabazon, 'Albert Schweitzer at the Beginning of the Millennium', in *Reverence for Life: The Ethics of Albert Schweitzer for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Kurt Bergel (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 20.

Reverence for 'X'

These writers emphasise different aspects of Schweitzer's understanding of reverence for life, if not just demonstrating their own different point of view. Ice accentuates Schweitzer's approach in strictly philosophical terms, with reference to the distinction between 'is' and 'ought'; Seaver emphasises the religious, while Brabazon explores the social and environmental dimension of reverence for life. Picht's account is somewhere in the middle of all of these. How narrowly or broadly then, should we understand reverence for life? Here are several options, some defended by Schweitzer and some challenging his theory and provoking its further development:

1) Reverence for all life (as Schweitzer usually proclaims).
2) Reverence for all human life (and human life only).
3) Reverence for all rational life (in the spirit of Kant's ethics).
4) Reverence for all beings with a soul (or all spiritual beings only).
5) Reverence for all things divine.
6) Reverence for all persons.
7) Reverence for everything that exists (in the sense of everything created).

These are all options worth further investigation—which cannot be done in this short paper. But what then to say about Schweitzer's philosophical and ethical project? That it failed? That it alerted us to the right problem (by offering a correct diagnosis of our crisis), but it did not offer the right solution (or proper medicine)? Or that it perhaps offered the right medicine, but not in the right manner? Or not in the right dose? Or in combination with some other medicine that Schweitzer failed to see, or did not emphasise enough?

Despite the lack of definitive results, like Ramanujan, Schweitzer endowed us with extremely fertile soil for further explorations. I would like to point out two lines of thought which seem very promising to me. One comes from Schweitzer's contemporary Norman Cousins, whose relationship with Schweitzer, *inter alia*, was instrumental in causing him to become engaged in the protest against nuclear testing. Perhaps inspired by the increasing possibility of the extinction of all human life, Cousins nonetheless argues that 'physical' death is not the most important death: it is the death of a certain *quality* of life that is to be mourned. As he puts it: "The tragedy of life is not in the hurt to a man's name or even in the fact of death itself. The tragedy of life is in what dies inside a man while he lives—the death of genuine feeling, the death of inspired response, the death of the awareness that makes it possible to feel

the pain or the glory of another man in oneself." This, according to Cousins' understanding of Schweitzer, is what the crisis of civilisation is mostly about, and this is what Schweitzer was hoping to alleviate through his ethics of reverence for life: "Schweitzer's aim was not to dazzle an age but to awaken it, to make it comprehend that moral splendor is part of the gift of life, and that each man has unlimited strength to feel human oneness and to act upon it. He has proved that although a man may have no jurisdiction over the fact of his existence, he can hold supreme command over the meaning of existence for him. Thus, no man need fear death; he need fear only that he may die without having known his greatest power—the power of his free will to give his life for others."[16]

While avoiding all unnecessary deaths and increasing the *quality* of life are the overarching concerns of Schweitzer's ethics of reverence for life, there is one more that has not received sufficient attention from Schweitzer's followers. This is Schweitzer's lament in *The Philosophy of Civilization* that in our age "it is becoming ever more difficult to be a personality."[17] This topic reaches even deeper into the reasons for Schweitzer's disappointment with contemporary philosophy and clarifies his accusations that philosophy itself is responsible for the crisis of civilisation.

Against the vast majority of modern philosophers in the west, Schweitzer sides with Goethe in his conviction that there is a fundamental continuity between the natural and the moral orders of the universe.[18] The separation of these two orders—of 'being' and of 'the good'—has led in

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[16] Norman Cousins, *Dr. Schweitzer of Lambaréné* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 220-21.

[17] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 88. Cousins was not a philosopher, and he did not develop these ideas. Their more developed form can be found in Nicolai Hartmann's *Ethik* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1926), which, as his own heavily underlined copy of this book testifies, Schweitzer studied carefully.

[18] In his lecture 'Goethe the Philosopher', Schweitzer asks: "How does Goethe introduce the element of ethics into his nature philosophy?" He answers in a way that outlines not only Goethe's but his answer as well: "The great problem in every philosophy of nature is, in fact, to pass from nature to ethics… Goethe admits simply at the very outset that the ethical factor is given by nature. Divinity is revealed in nature by primordial phenomena, which are not only physical but also ethical" (Goethe to Eckermann, February 13, 1829) … Goethe, then, thinks that we know by experience in the deepest and largest sense of this word that God, who is

the past several centuries toward a systematic depersonalisation of both our conception of the world and of the world of our ordinary life itself. As if bewitched by instrumental reason and the pursuit of utilitarian values, we have promoted utility and depersonalised—or treated as objective, value-neutral, and detached—relationships as the only appropriate ways of dealing with human and other lives.

Schweitzer does not advance this line of reasoning very much—especially not in *The Philosophy of Civilization*—but Erazim Kohák does.[19] As Kohák puts it: "We have progressively built up around us an impersonal world, social as well as physical, in which no respect for the integrity of its object need constrain our arbitrary will."[20]

In the spirit of Schweitzer, Kohák argues that the only sustainable moral perspective is the personalist one. For both of them, 'reverence' involves a double attitude: coming from a person (not as a 'moral agent,' and even less as a thing), and directed toward others treated as if they are persons (rather than mere objects). A person is someone who stands in moral relationship

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identical with nature, is, in some mysterious way quite unfathomable by us, not only creative force but also moral will. In no other way could the ethical element show itself in the thought of humanity." Quoted in Albert Schweitzer, *Goethe: Five Studies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), 113-14.

[19] See also the following two books which are sympathetic to Schweitzer and express similar concerns: Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (New York: Continuum, 1999), especially pages 161-63; and Yutang Lin, *From Pagan to Christian* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1959), especially pages 232-35. It should also be mentioned here that Schweitzer recognised how the religions of the east, or more precisely the thinkers of the east, saw a striking connectedness between humans and nature. Since in his book which we are discussing here he is focused more on thinkers of the west, I will not engage in any detailed relation of Schweitzer with the Oriental thought.

[20] Erazim Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 210-11. As Kohák clarifies (195), our primary relations to others—from inanimate entities to human beings—"is first of all a moral relation, governed by a moral law. Only secondarily, within that moral matrix, can we designate nature also in terms of utility or in terms of sheer being." Kohák does not mention Schweitzer in The Embers and the Stars, but in *The Green Halo: A Bird's-Eye View of Ecological Ethics* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), he shows that he is fully aware of Schweitzer's ethical approach and its environmental implications.

to us, a being we encounter as 'Thou'. In Kohák's interpretation: "The re-personalization of our relationship to our animal world means … approaching it with respect, as ordered by a moral law, not only by our convenience. Yes, there will again be compromises, but let them be perceived clearly as compromises. We need to recognise that the suffering we impose on animals is not automatically justified by our convenience." Kohák clarifies it by offering an example: "Again, we may be less affluent for it, much as the feudal lord would have been much less affluent if he recognised the moral claim of his subjects, but we shall be much richer, much more human for it."[21]

It appears, then, that Schweitzer's personalism works on two planes: on the first plane it takes very seriously the relationship between ethics and personality—what is ethical is what emerges from a human being naturally (ethics comes from within; it cannot be imposed); and secondly, as you indicate on the plane personalised relations with living phenomena. The two are obviously related. In the end, reverence for life is a profound and wholehearted way of overcoming a sense of difference between us and the world around, of connecting both with ourselves and the creation that surrounds us.[22]

Conclusion

While announcing that "the broken sword of idealism" could only be forged anew through "the mysticism of reverence for life," Schweitzer may well be claiming too much. Yet whether or not this was so, he clearly does not offer sufficient 'proof' that his ethics of life results from any necessity of thought. Nor does he establish any unified and systematic interpretation of what reverence for life amounts to. Nevertheless, such criticisms—justified as they are—do not amount to a definitive negative judgment on Schweitzer's ethics and his overall idealistic project of the restoration of civilisation. Just as Ramanujan himself could not prove many of

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[21] Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars*, 213. For similar approach see Roger Scruton, *The Face of God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012); and Scruton, *The Soul of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). Even some of the leading philosophers of our time still seem to underestimate the damage done by the depersonalisation of both the human world and of human individuals; see, for instance, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[22] This implication of Schweitzer's personalism was pointed out to me by J.N. Carleton Paget.

the theorems that he so brilliantly conceived, but some of them were demonstrated by others several decades after his death, let us hope that Schweitzer's ethics of reverence for life, understood more as the presentation of a vision of how we might live than as a formal ethical theory, may continue to inspire our contemporaries. Even more importantly, let us hope that we can live in the spirit of reverence for all life. Or to be even more idealistic, in the spirit of reverence for all there is.[23]

[23] I am grateful to J.N. Carleton Paget for his valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

IV

Schweitzer and British Moral Philosophy

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Abstract

This paper discusses the second volume of Albert Schweitzer's *The Philosophy of Civilization* (1923). It focuses especially on Schweitzer's interest in British moral philosophy from Hobbes in the sixteenth century to T.H. Green in the nineteenth. The paper begins by setting the background to Schweitzer's ethics in 'life-affirmation' and 'world-affirmation'. It then moves to Schweitzer's broadly 'Humean' metaethics, and points to some possibly rationalist elements in his account. Schweitzer's position on egoism and altruism is discussed, along with his views on well-being. Finally, Schweitzer's views are compared to those of Shaftesbury, J.S. Mill, and Green.

Keywords

Albert Schweitzer, British moral philosophy, life-affirmation, world-affirmation, rationalism, altruism.

Introduction

The second volume of Albert Schweitzer's *Philosophy of Civilization* (1923) is remarkable for several reasons, including the vast range of philosophical traditions it covers, from ancient Greek, through Chinese and Indian, to later western philosophy. It is difficult to generalise about Schweitzer's interpretative method, so it may be worth homing in on one particular area, and for that I have chosen British moral philosophy in the period running from Hobbes in the 17th century to T.H. Green, at the close of the 19th. My general conclusion is that—perhaps not all that surprisingly, given the rather all-out nature of Schweitzer's critique—is that he is perhaps closer to some of the philosophers he criticises than he appears to have thought.

The background to the critique is as follows. Schweitzer believes that philosophy has failed to provide a basis for civilisation, through its excessively academic focus.[1] What we require is 'world-affirmation' and 'life-affirmation', and an ethical system suited for that activity which

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[1] Albert Schweitzer, *Civilization and Ethics*, third edition, trans C.T. Campion (London: A & C Black, 1949 [1923]), x.

gives our life a meaning, based on such thought about the world and life as finds a meaning in each of them.[2] This has been the aim of Western thought, but it has been led to an 'optimistic-ethical' interpretation of the world, which ignores the possibility of world- and life-*negation*, as found in certain Chinese and Indian traditions, according to which life is an illusion, nothing matters, all is vanity, and so on.[3] The optimistic-ethical interpretation has to be renounced: "if we take the world as it is, it is impossible to attribute to it a meaning in which the aims and objects of mankind and of individual men have a meaning also."[4] World-affirmation and life-affirmation cannot come from *knowledge* of the world, but can come only from the 'will-to-live'—volition—and the most profound achievement of the will-to-live is reverence for life: *I* give value to *my* life.[5] Further, in experiencing the will-to-live in myself, I experience God as mysterious, that is, beyond scientific understanding.[6] In other words, world-affirmation, life-affirmation, and ethics are all 'non-rational'.[7]

Schweitzer's book appeared just a year before Moritz Schlick began the weekly discussions of what came to be known as the 'Vienna Circle', many of whose members would have agreed that ethics is non-rational. So, Schweitzer's metaethics may be more of an expression of the spirit of his times than he realised. Further, it is worth noting the influence of broadly Humean ideas on some of the group, especially of course A.J. Ayer, who expressed his own version of Viennese Humeanism in his *Language, Truth, and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz), published in 1936. Consider, for example, the following passage from Hume's *Treatise*:

> Take any action allow'd to be vicious: Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call *vice*. In which-ever way you take it, you find only-certain passions, motives, volitions, and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your

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[2] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, xi.

[3] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, xii.

[4] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, xiv.

[5] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, xvii.

[6] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, xviii.

[7] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, xix.

> nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind.[8]

The will-to-live is, of course, different from blame, or indeed praise, but the general metaphysics here is the same as Schweitzer's. And this raises the important question of what Schweitzer thought about those rationalist philosophers, such as Clarke, who believed that we can acquire knowledge not only of the world, but of how we should live and act within it. It is worth noting also that, although Hume is pretty clearly not a theist, it is not obvious that he would object to our 'projecting' a god onto the world, if it were generally a beneficial thing to do. (Of course, Hume thought it would not be, but that is a different matter.)

Schweitzer claims:

> The Rationalist world-view is optimistic and ethical. Its optimism consists in that it assumes as ruling in the world a general purpose directed to the achievement of perfection, and that from this purposiveness the efforts of individual men and of mankind in general to secure material and spiritual progress derive meaning and importance, and in addition a guarantee of success.[9]

Schweitzer has a tendency to run together 'is' claims and 'ought' claims. Rationalism is an epistemological view, and there is no reason why a rationalist should not be pessimistic about the future. Further, of course, Schweitzer's own view seems somewhat optimistic, both in so far as he believes that there is a good to be achieved—spiritual progress and meaning—and that he is ready to speak of practical, ethical knowledge: "The knowledge derived from my will-to-live is direct, and takes me back to the mysterious movements of life as it is in itself. The highest knowledge, then, is to know that I must be true to the will-to-live."[10] Could it be that Schweitzer, because of his scientistic metaphysical inclinations, is misinterpreting a possible intuition of a self-evident truth (as in Clarke or, say, Sidgwick) as the expression of his will-to-live? He describes the philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists as "lifeless and semi-

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[8] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1, eds. D.F. Norton and M.F. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007 [1739]), T 3.1.1.26.

[9] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 6.

[10] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 213.

scholastic".[11] But could the difference here be one of content rather than epistemological substance (his objection being that they are 'reverence-for-life-less')? Or, if pushed, would Schweitzer accept that his own claims to knowledge are as lacking in foundation as any other?[12]

In chapter 7, Schweitzer discusses British ethics in the 17th-18th centuries. He tends to focus on the distinction between 'egoism' on the one hand, and 'altruism' on the other:

> There are three ways in which the relations between the egoistic and the altruistic can be made clear. Either one assumes that the egoistic in the thought of the individual is automatically converted into the altruistic by consistent meditation. Or one supposes the altruistic to have its beginning in the thought of society and thence to pass over into the convictions of the individual. Or one retires to the position that egoism and altruism are both among the original endowments of human nature.[13]

Again, however, we find the is/ought distinction blurred at crucial points. Egoism can be understood as purely descriptive, a claim about the psychology of human beings—that they always, consciously or unconsciously, aim only at what they believe will be in their best interests. But such a psychological position must be carefully distinguished from a normative claim about the reasons we have *for* acting (as opposed to the reasons *why* we act in the way we do). Hobbes, Locke, and Bentham, on Schweitzer's view, all hold that altruism arises in the individual through societal influence.[14] But true altruism, that is an ultimate concern for others, is not conceivable for Hobbes or Locke, who are both psychological egoists, and for Bentham it is so rare that it can be largely ignored. Normatively, of course, these authors are quite different. Hobbes is a rational egoist, while Bentham is an act utilitarian. And Locke certainly seems to allow for genuine non-egoistic moral normativity: "All obligation binds conscience and lays a bond on the mind itself, so that not fear of punishment, but *a rational apprehension of what is right*, puts us under an obligation."[15]

Schweitzer also considers the titans of the Scottish Enlightenment, Hume and Smith.

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[11] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 84.

[12] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 14.

[13] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 71-2.

[14] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 75.

[15] John Locke, 'Essays on the Law of Nature', trans. W. Von Leyden, in *Political Essays*, ed. M. Goldie, 1997 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 118.

Rightly, in my view, he characterises Hume as a utilitarian, though I cannot agree that Hume is a utilitarian *within* morality. Morality itself, as an enterprise, is justified through its utility, but once he is working within that enterprise Hume is a deontologist, who believes, for example, that justice should be done even if it decreases the level of overall happiness. Schweitzer might have noted also the somewhat remarkable fact that Hume and Smith are the first major philosophers in the Western tradition to recognise the 'dualism' of practical reason in a form which allows that 'moral' or other-regarding reasons are often in conflict with the agent's own good or well-being such that doing what is right is a genuine sacrifice on the part of the agent.[16]

Schweitzer does recognise the dominance of hedonism in the British moral philosophical tradition, according to which pleasure is the only good for any being and pain the only bad. (There were non-hedonists, including Cumberland, Mandeville, and Reid, but they were clearly a minority.) But he might have spent more time wondering why so many of these great philosophers, and their predecessors, found hedonism so plausible. The answer is the tempting thought that, from the point of view of the subject, the only thing that can matter for them is how well their life is going for them from the hedonic point of view, and the almost equally tempting position that goods often claimed to be valuable in themselves—such as friendship, knowledge, or achievement—are claimed to be so only because of their pleasantness. In general, more consideration by Schweitzer of the importance of *subjectivity* in well-being might have led to his recognising the problems with his reverence-for-life view, according to which, for example, bacteria matter because they are alive, not because they have some subjective point of view from which things can matter positively or negatively. It seems that Schweitzer would be likely to encourage the creation of a world including a being suffering terribly, as long as there were enough bacteria and plants to outweigh the suffering.[17]

Among this group of philosophers, it is perhaps Shaftesbury who meets with Schweitzer's greatest approval: "With Shaftesbury ethics descend from a rocky mountain range into a luxuriant plain."[18] Schweitzer welcomes Shaftesbury's living philosophy of nature, his mysticism, and his (harmless) pantheism, which in combination constitute an "ethics bound up

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[16] See my *Sacrifice Regained: Morality and Self-interest in British Moral Philosophy from Hobbes to Bentham*, 2019 (Oxford: Clarendon Press), chapters 12-13.

[17] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 250.

[18] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 87.

with a philosophy of life that is full of vitality".[19] The word 'vitality' of course brings to mind 'life', and possible reverence for it, and one wonders whether Schweitzer knew of Shaftesbury's *Philosophical Regimen*, where he expresses disgust for the body as "an excrement in seed, already half being, half putrefaction, half corruption".[20] This is a long way from 'reverence for life'.

Schweitzer has little to say about J.S. Mill, but plausibly sees Spencer as more of a biologist than a moralist.[21] He is also on point in some of his criticisms of Sidgwick, who he rightly sees as seeking to combine the 'ethical personality' (that is, broadly speaking, the pursuit by the agent of their own well-being) with utilitarianism, without examining their higher unity.[22] But what Schweitzer means by 'higher unity' here is presumably that there is no conflict between the demands of morality and those of self-interest. Sidgwick rightly saw how implausible this claim is, especially for a potentially very demanding position such as utilitarianism. Consider a case in which you can produce the greatest overall happiness by submitting to many days of agonising torture. It may be that this is what you have most reason to do, but the idea that it is in your interest to be tortured is, to put it mildly, hard to believe. Sidgwick's failure arose through his unwillingness to allow that there could be a plurality of ethical principles, the practical weight of each in various situations to be judged only by the perceptive agent. Like Schweitzer, perhaps, he sought a philosophy which would provide a clear and unambiguous answer to the question of how one should act on any particular occasion. But what Aristotle called '*phronēsis*', or 'practical wisdom', given the human condition, will always be required in addition to any philosophy.

Interestingly, Schweitzer also finds in T.H. Green's ethics "thoughts which are full of vitality".[23] But again he remains unsatisfied with these thoughts: "They leave unsolved, however, indeed they do not even put, the question, how the higher life-affirmation comes to give itself a content which stands in contradiction to the course of nature."[24] This strikes me as a somewhat harsh judgement on Green's discussions of freedom, virtue, and the good in the

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[19] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 88.

[20] The third Earl of Shaftesbury, *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*, ed. B. Rand, 1900 (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1900), 147.

[21] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 156.

[22] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 180.

[23] Schweitzer, *Civilization*, 184.

[24] Ibid.

Prolegomena to Ethics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883). Indeed, Schweitzer's ethical views seem closer to Green's theistic perfectionism than to those of Shaftesbury or any of the other thinkers in the British moral philosophical tradition he discusses.

V

A Hundred Years On: Schweitzer's *Philosophy of Civilization*

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Abstract

After relating how I came to meet Albert Schweitzer and spent six months at his hospital, giving a taste of what it was like to spend time with this exceptional personality, via a few examples, I describe how I came to translate essential parts of volume three into English. I then examine what we know about volumes three and four and look at the reasons why volume three remained incomplete, and volume four was never started, concluding with an appraisal of the implications and significance of the issues surrounding this work for our time, a century later.

Keywords

Albert Schweitzer, Lambaréné, ethics, nature, translation, Goethe, Reverence for Life UK.

Introduction

Let me begin by writing a little about how I came to get to know Dr. Albert Schweitzer…

It was in the autumn of 1962 when, following 18 months stay in Nigeria, I arrived at Schweitzer's hopital in Lambaréné aged twenty-six. I knew about the hospital because I had lived for several months in the house of my American half-uncle by marriage—Fergus Pope—who had been to Lambaréné and who was then studying medicine in London in order to go back there as a qualified doctor. I learnt a great deal from him, but he was a man of action, and I cannot remember ever discussing Schweitzer's philosophical work with him.

Thus, when, in 1962/63, I spent six months under Dr. Schweitzer's roof—so to speak—I had not read anything he had written. I didn't even know he was a philosopher and a theologian. I only knew him as a medical doctor and a very exceptional man of action with a very powerful and endearing personality and character.

By way of three little anecdotes, let me give you a taste of what contact with this man was like for me:

1) At our first meeting at the river's edge—within seconds of my stepping out of the canoe which

had brought me across the river Ogowe—taking my hand and looking straight into my eyes, he asked what my plans were. No 'hello' or 'welcome'—just "what are your plans young man?" Upon answering, that at that moment I had none, he called out: "A-ha! A free man!". And I was transported into eons of what it might mean to be truly free. The experience has been my constant companion ever since.

2) On occasions when I had to ask him something whilst he was writing at his desk, his hand would stop mid-word as he turned to face me standing behind him. After the brief conversation—and they were always brief—he would continue writing instantly as if there had been no interruption. This demonstration of 'living in the moment' is also unforgettable.
3) One day, as he and I were walking to the dining hall at lunchtime, I summoned up courage to ask him to release his catering manager from her three-year contract because I wanted to marry her. He took my arm, asked me a few questions and then commented: "you have good taste young man, I give you that." But I had had the feeling that during our short walk, my whole life had been examined, and I was left with the certainty that I had made a good decision. (Indeed, this year, Vreni and I have celebrated our diamond wedding anniversary.)

It would be wrong, however, to say that I was not interested in philosophy at that time, because I had read quite a bit of ancient Indian philosophy and some Plato, and the books of Goethe's poems were my constant companions. But none of that ever came up between Schweitzer and me.

Now let me jump half a century—to 2010. By then I had been chairman of the charity supporting Schweitzer's work in the UK for fifteen years, and I had read much of Schweitzer's published philosophical work—some of it in the original German, including the unfinished third volume of *The Philosophy of Civilization,* which was published posthumously in the original German,[1] and was not then known to the English speaking world. This last work left me with a strong feeling that important, unfinished business lay hidden in the fact that Schweitzer had not been able to complete the final parts of his major philosophical project.

It had also dawned on me, what a huge significance lay in the fact that for Schweitzer, 'ethics' *had* to be an essential ingredient of any definition of the concept of civilisation, even though I had never found a dictionary which included ethics (or even 'morals') in their definition of that word.

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[1] Albert Schweitzer, *Die Weltanschauung der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben, erster und zweiter Teil* and *Die Weltanschauung der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben, dritter und zweiter Teil,* eds. Claus and Johannes Zürcher (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999 and 2001).

By 2010, I had also realised what a radical thinker Schweitzer was. And, driven by my inkling concerning the significance of that hidden 'unfinished business' I resolved—even though I had no qualifications for the task, except that I am sufficiently bilingual—to attempt to make the essential contents of volume three accessible to the English-speaking world.

Assisted by an extensive correspondence with the collator and joint-editor of all of Schweitzer's posthumously published written legacy (Dr Johann Zürcher in Switzerland), it took me ten years to complete the task. As the work was nearing completion, I was advised that the book would be too large for publishers to accept and that I should split the work into two books—which I did. This, however, didn't help me in finding a publisher. So, I had to self-publish via Amazon.[2]

'*Wir Epigonen*'

Let me deal with volume four first, as it takes us back to the very beginning: as Ulrich Körtner has already detailed above, Schweitzer tells us that in the summer of 1899 he was in Berlin, at a party where someone exclaimed: "Why, we are all of us just nothing but 'Epigoni'!".[3] That sentence struck him like a bolt of lightning, because it put into words exactly what he felt. It made him realise how very out of tune with the spirit of the age he really was, and that he could not share the general euphoria about the so-called achievements of that time. The young professor saw nothing but dark storm clouds gathering on the horizon and was acutely aware of a general decline in idealism amongst his fellow academics. It was since that day that he harboured the plan to write a philosophy of civilisation.

However, other pressing and momentous decisions, like abandoning his academic career, studying medicine and going to Africa (not to mention all his work on J.S. Bach and the preservation of ancient organs), took precedent… that is, until the August 5 1914, when the news reached Lambaréné that Europe was at war. That same evening the Schweitzers were put under house arrest. And the next day, he started work on *The Philosophy of Civilization*.

Schweitzer soon realised that, since the 'dark clouds' had arrived and the storm was raging over Europe, it was no longer enough to simply *warn* of impending doom. Positive statements

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[2] See my *The World View of Reverence for Life,* and *My Path with Albert Schweitzer (Cambridge: NESt Publications, 2020).*

[3] Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought*, trans. C.T. Campion (New York, Henry Holt, 1933 [1931]), 145-146.

had to be made… but what could be said? Then, in September 1915 came the momentous point where, in a moment of inspiration, his search for answers crystalised in the words '*Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben*'—often (but not entirely accurately) translated as 'Reverence for Life'. The parameters of his project vastly expanded, and he began to see in it four distinct volumes. As has also been discussed above, the first two of these volumes were published in 1923.

Both volumes one and two were written in Europe during the early 1920s, because the bundle of manuscript pages which Schweitzer had written in Lambaréné was thought to have been lost when the Schweitzers were moved to an internment camp in France in 1917. This bundle did eventually reappear and its contents were finally published posthumously.[4] Just by looking at some of the chapter headings ('The Idea of Statehood', 'State and Civilised State', 'The Structure and Life of the State', 'The Church and the State', 'The Social State', 'Civilised and Uncivilised States'…), it is clear that Schweitzer had hoped to revisit much of what he had drafted in Lambaréné between 1914 and 1917 for the planned fourth volume of *The Philosophy of Civilization*, which he intended to call *Kulturstaat* ('The Civilised State'). Work on that volume never actually started[5]— but by looking at these chapter headings and imagining just for a moment what Schweitzer could have produced when applying the ethos of 'Reverence for Life' to these subjects, we can get a sense of what has been lost to us owing to the blockage which also caused volume three to remain unfinished. This, then, is all we know about the material for volume four.

The Blockage

Work on volume three began in Lambaréné in spring 1931, a full eight years after the publication of the first two volumes. Then in November 1933 he suddenly put aside what he had written. By January 1934, he had started again from the beginning. This pattern repeated, such that *four* separate versions were found after his death in 1965—all written before 1945. Sections on Indian and Chinese philosophy were hived off into separate works because they grew too large. A book with the title *Indian Thought and its Development* (Boston, Beacon

[4] Albert Schweitzer, *Wir Epigonen. Kultur und Kulturstaat*, eds. Ulrich Körtner and Johann Zürcher (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005). For the background see Körtner in this journal.

[5] In fact, Dr Zürcher sent me all the notes found specifically earmarked for volume four, and these don't amount to more than one and a half pages of A4.

Press, 1954) was published in 1935, and his writings on the history of 'Chinese Thought' were published as part of his ten volume *Nachlass*.[6]

So what was it that prevented the completion of volume three? Many reasons have been put forward, mainly blaming other priorities. He was running a large hospital under extremely challenging conditions; raising all the funding for this himself, through lectures, organ recitals and his published writings; as well as maintaining a huge correspondence with leading politicians, scientists and supporters all over the globe.[7] Throughout this period, many people tried to persuade him to publish volume three, but he always refused.

Each of these reasons might contribute to an explanation for why Schweitzer did not return to this promised third volume again between 1946 and his death in 1965, but none satisfy to explain why he took four separate runs at it before 1945. Something seemed to be preventing Schweitzer from bringing his argument to a satisfactory conclusion. It was whilst I was immersed in the project of translating volume three, that it began to dawn on me that there might be something other than merely 'practical consideration' that explains the four separate attempts Schweitzer made at finishing the work.

The challenge was to come up with a new worldview in which the ethics of 'Reverence for Life'—arrived at as the inevitable result of fundamental thought taken to its natural conclusion—was firmly embedded. In this way, Schweitzer planned to use volume three to lay a firm foundation in thought, upon which he could finally set to work on 'the construction of his cathedral' (to borrow his own analogy), volume four.[8] Where then was the insurmountable stumbling block? As I was pondering this question, two things occurred to me. Firstly, I realised that each time Schweitzer had come to a stop, he was struggling with his chapter on ethics. There he had described what he called "the Realities of Nature" (the fact that nature was 'red in tooth and claw', as the Darwinians had put it), and he was faced with demonstrating

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[6] Albert Schweitzer, *Werke aus dem Nachlass*, eds. Richard Brüllmann et al. (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1989–2006).

[7] This is not to mention his contribution in the early 1950s to the protests against the atomic tests of that period, or his being awarded the Noble Peace Prize, which gave him the opportunity to speak on radio in Oslo about 'the problems of peace' in our world. This was, incidentally, also the first ever broadcast relayed live right around the globe.

[8] Albert Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, trans. C.T. Campion (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. 1987 [1923]), 313.

how ethics came into the picture as the inevitable conclusion of deep thought.[9] And somehow, he couldn't make that work. And then, just as this was beginning to dawn on me, I attended the 2014 prize-giving of the International Albert Schweitzer Prize, awarded by the town of Königsfeld in Germany. The main guest speaker was the then-president of the German *Hilfsverein*, Dr. Einhard Weber, and his topic was 'Schweitzer and Goethe'. You can imagine how my attention was galvanised when I heard Dr. Weber quoting Schweitzer speaking about Goethe's worldview—and I quote:

> If we ask Goethe how ethics arise out of nature, the answer we get from him is very simple. … Goethe was deeply convinced of the process of evolution in nature right up to and including humankind. Humans, for Goethe, are 'a piece of nature' … And as soon as humans rise up to fully embrace true ethics, something new appears in nature, a higher dimension, a new possibility … the spiritual journey of humankind is not something isolated and on its own, but is a movement within the evolution of the whole of nature.[10]

I could hardly believe my ears. How could Schweitzer express this so clearly in a talk about Goethe, and yet not carry it over into his own philosophy of civilisation? Puzzled as I was, I researched this further at home, and found that Schweitzer had given four talks about Goethe:

1) In Frankfurt, on August 28 1928, in response to receiving the Goethe Prize.
2) Again in Frankfurt, March 22 1932, on the centenary of Goethe's death.
3) In Ulm on July 9 1932, also addressing Goethe's centenary.
4) Finally, on July 6 1949 in Aspen, USA, on the bicentenary of Goethe's birth.

In his first Frankfurt address, Schweitzer said the following:

> The big problem for all natural philosophers—for Goethe, as for the Stoics, for Spinoza and for Lao-Tse is this: How to deduce ethical values from Nature? Goethe takes a very simple path here: he pays no attention to all the derivations and proofs his contemporaries tried, but simply accepts

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[9] Mark, *Reverence for Life*, section B 122.

[10] Here and in what follows I have provided my own translations for what Schweitzer has to say on Goethe. This passage is taken from his second Frankfurt address (22.03.1932). For an alternative, complete English translation see Albert Schweitzer, *Goethe: Five Studies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948).

> the ethical ideas which have arisen in humankind as natural manifestations…

Similarly, in Schweitzer's third talk (this time in Ulm), he gives us an inkling of the problem which he himself faced:

> Thought, in order to come to a complete world-view, cannot be satisfied with a knowledge of what is apparent and discernible, but has to seek answers to questions about invisible things like the meaning and purpose of the world; but here Goethe undertakes something reprehensible. In his view, humankind is far too insignificant to be able to give meaning and purpose to the world. Whilst the others (Goethe's contemporaries) insist on the necessity for this, in order to be able to make sense of their ethical behaviour in the world, Goethe has no need for the assignation of meaning and purpose to the world. According to him, we humans have to be ethical out of inner conviction. No thing in the world is purpose for some other purpose—or means to some other end, but the 'things' of the world are purpose unto themselves. … Thus we humans can dispense with the task of having to fathom out the meaning and purpose of the world … The point of life for humans is to develop the 'good' that is in each individual and to resist the 'evil' which obstructs that development …

Schweitzer claims that what Goethe thought about this subject was "reprehensible". Goethe was ducking the issue, and Schweitzer needed more. And it is here that I believe we have found the 'blockage': Schweitzer could not allow himself to be satisfied with Goethe's resignation regarding the question of a 'complete' worldview. He could not let go of the idea that somehow the justification for ethics had to be found within the parameters of biological science as it existed in his time, and it had also to be derived from an *evolutionary* purpose attributed to this whole enterprise. Without that, he held that no foundation in thought could be established for ethics. Unfortunately, Schweitzer could not find such a derivation, and even though he drew attention on several occasions to the minuscule size of Earth on a universal scale, Goethe's own, 'humble' view, would not suffice.

I do not want to insinuate that the way Goethe dealt with this issue was insufficiently rigorous compared to Schweitzer himself. But Schweitzer remained in search of 'firm ground' that could withstand the onslaughts of his time. He felt that this 'foundation' had to be laid on scientifically-substantiated facts, drawn from the observable universe. This is particularly evident in the last of his four attempts at finishing volume three, where he grapples with the

latest in scientific research, mainly focusing on biology.[11] Furthermore, Schweitzer blamed the Enlightenment philosophers for not having laid a sufficiently firm foundation for their ethical ideals, thereby leaving them incapable of withstanding the challenges which were to come during the industrial revolution and the scientific era of modern times, and ushering in the decline of Western civilisation which he sought so intensely to express. Therefore, he saw it as his mission to do better than Goethe at this task.

I have tried to demonstrate that Schweitzer's 'blockage' was not due to his lacking an account of how ethics arise in our universe. This, he had already eloquently expressed on Goethe's behalf: "humankind is nature's instrument for bringing ethics into the evolutionary process of life on Earth". However, Schweitzer could not bring himself to formulate the arguments necessary to transform this recognition into a foundation for ethics that would also have traction and find acceptability amongst the scientific materialism of his time. This, I believe, is the real reason he never managed to complete volume three.

Concluding remarks

What does all this mean for us today? There are those of us who, in order to make sense of things, find it imperative to recognise the limitations of the currently-dominant abstract, materialistic, scientific basis for formulating a worldview. We have to go beyond this restrictive authority. Are we not confronted daily with the stark reality of what this currently prevailing worldview has brought us humans, not to mention the rest of life on this Globe? We know that whilst this view has its place in exploring, describing and manipulating physical matter, it is only part of the story. For us, the firm foundation for a worldview must of necessity be based on the *totality* of our experience of life, including not just the attributes of solid, physical matter, but also the subtle energies and spiritual causes which govern life on earth. And given the immense power now placed in human hands, ethics are essential for these energies and causes to function in a benign way. This is becoming more and more evident by the day, and this worldview is inching ever closer to conquering the last remaining unaffected parts of the earth.

Of course, Schweitzer knew all that, which is why he raised the alarm. Now, nearly eight decades later (he had stopped working on volume three by 1946), whilst the destructive aspects of our materialistic worldview have accelerated, we also have a greater awareness of what

[11] See Mark, *Reverence for Life*, section C 201 onwards.

remains of the worldviews, beliefs and attitudes of indigenous and aboriginal cultures than was ever available in Schweitzer's own lifetime. We are therefore better able to envision an evolutionary continuity in human development, picking up—and revitalising—previously lost or neglected aspects of human attributes and achievements. We are able to regard the intense focus on technological ingenuity that has dominated much of the last two hundred years as a 'necessary interlude'—a *detour*. And we can visualise that this detour may now allow us to rejoin an earlier trajectory for human evolution, retaining those achievements which are helpful, and rejecting those which are not.

In this sense, Schweitzer's is one of a small number of voices from the last century who recognised the urgent need to bring the question of ethics into a central and pivotal position in the human debate about the future. Whilst it was not granted to Schweitzer to complete the philosophical foundation for his ethical 'cathedral', he did give us a fully convincing architectural model through the vivid demonstration of his life. And he has said enough for us to know what he was trying to say: that our task then as in now is "to stand in awe of life"!

It is time for our species to grow up into adulthood and take responsibility for its actions. That means, at this juncture of our development, that the corporate world, which is now the most powerful of human institutions (globally), must discover its *conscience*. The immense technological power now available to humankind, both for good and for destruction, makes it imperative that we come of age and fulfil the task of bringing ethics to fruition in this earthly realm. For ethics is the language of conscience. If we fail in this task, it is now very likely that we will commit accidental suicide, by becoming the collateral damage brought on by our own creation of 'greed-machines'. The 'carrot and stick' method exercised by many of the major religions of past millennia (manipulation of a population, through the concept of an afterlife divided into heaven and hell) has by now been virtually replaced by a 'survival of the fittest' ideology. And that ideology brings us ever closer to a life-threatening abyss.

My final questions are these: can we accept Goethe's view that it is nature's intention (through the agency of humankind) to allow ethics to flower and bear fruit in this earthly garden? And with that, can we accept this as a sufficiently firm foundation on which to build new structures for public life, based on Schweitzer's ethics of 'Reverence for Life'? Let's not be deterred by the seeming enormity of the task. All journeys have to start with a few small steps—even those that may take millennia. Best foot forward!