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SCHOPENHAUER-
JAHRBUCH

SCHOPENHAUER
YEARBOOK

FÜR DAS JAHR
2023

**Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch
Schopenhauer Yearbook**

SCHOPENHAUER-JAHRBUCH

SCHOPENHAUER YEARBOOK

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2023

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Vorwort

Der vorliegende 104. Band für das Jahr 2023 ist mit einiger Verspätung erst im Februar des Folgejahres fertig geworden. Das liegt vor allem daran, dass Beiträge aus dem 9. Essay-Wettbewerb der Schopenhauer-Gesellschaft noch mit in den Band aufgenommen werden sollten. Die Preisverleihung fand im Rahmen der Mitgliederversammlung am 4. November 2023 an der Universität Mainz statt. Da die publikationswürdigen Einreichungen noch überarbeitet und redigiert werden mussten, zog sich die Herausgabe des Bandes über den Jahreswechsel hin. Der mit 1500 Euro dotierte Preis wurde Prof. Dr. Jakob Norberg von der Duke University in Durham/USA für den innovativen Aufsatz über Schopenhauer und die Sklaverei zugesprochen, der an erster Stelle von drei aus den Einsendungen ausgewählten Beiträgen zum Wettbewerb abgedruckt ist.

Die Verzögerung des Erscheinens hat es auch ermöglicht, Beiträge zum 9. Internationalen Doktorandenkolloquium der Schopenhauer-Forschungsstelle zu berücksichtigen, das in Verbindung mit der Mitgliederversammlung am 2. November stattfand. Die Beiträge von Moritz René Pretzsch und Anne Virginia Meindl konnten noch rechtzeitig begutachtet und ausgearbeitet werden. Mit dem Kolloquium und der Mitgliederversammlung war auch noch die kleine Tagung „Schopenhauer und die Romantik“ verbunden. Die dort gehaltenen Vorträge sollen zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt publiziert werden. Der Beitrag über die Rezeption von Schopenhauers Musikphilosophie in der Schopenhauer-Schule ist aus der Tagung „Schopenhauer tra arte e letteratura“ der Italienischen Sektion der Schopenhauer-Gesellschaft im November 2022 hervorgegangen.

Am 15. Januar 2024 ist der bedeutende Nietzscheforscher und Übersetzer der Werke Schopenhauers Sossio Giametta im Alter von 95 Jahren gestorben; ein Nachruf wird im 105. Band des Jahrbuchs folgen.

Matthias Kößler
Geschäftsführender Herausgeber

Abhandlungen

9. Essay-Wettbewerb der Schopenhauer-Gesellschaft: Recht und Gerechtigkeit

Schopenhauer on the Injustice of Slavery

Jakob Norberg, Durham, NC

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Aufsatz rekonstruiert Schopenhauers Verständnis der Sklaverei – wie er sie definiert, warum sie ein Unrecht ist und unter welchen Bedingungen sie entsteht. Der Aufsatz erläutert, wie Schopenhauer Sklaverei sowohl als moralisches als auch als politisches Phänomen auffasst – er behandelt sie als eine Form der Ungerechtigkeit (die Unterwerfung eines Individuums durch ein anderes), aber auch als eine besondere Form der Herrschaft, die er als Despotismus bezeichnet. Schopenhauers leidenschaftlicher Widerstand gegen die Sklaverei führt ihn jedoch nicht dazu, einen politischen Egalitarismus zu befürworten. Das Vorhandensein von Millionen Sklaven in einer modernen Republik, nämlich den Vereinigten Staaten vor 1861, veranlasste Schopenhauer zu der Vermutung, dass Republikanismus und Despotismus eher miteinander verflochten als gegensätzliche Tendenzen seien. Nach Schopenhauers Ansicht schien die nordamerikanische Republik stark der individuellen Freiheit verpflichtet zu sein, zeichnete sich aber durch systematische Unterjochung und Unterdrückung aus. Letztendlich ist Schopenhauer der Ansicht, dass sich sein moralischer Widerstand gegen die Sklaverei und seine skeptische Ablehnung des Republikanismus gegenseitig unterstützen.

Schlüsselwörter: Sklaverei, Vereinigte Staaten, Republikanismus, Despotismus, Unterdrückung.

Abstract

This essay reconstructs Schopenhauer's understanding of slavery – how he defines it, why he considers it unjust, and under which conditions he thinks it is likely to arise. The essay explains how Schopenhauer views slavery both as a moral and political phenomenon – he treats it as a form of injustice (the subjugation of one individual by another) but also as a particular form of rule, which he calls despotism. However, Schopenhauer's passionate opposition to slavery does not lead him to embrace political egalitarianism. The existence of millions of slaves in a modern republic, the United States before 1861, instead prompted

Schopenhauer to speculate that republicanism and despotism might be intertwined rather than opposing tendencies. In Schopenhauer's view, the North American republic seemed strongly committed to individual freedom but was characterized by systematic subjugation and oppression. Ultimately, Schopenhauer came to believe that his moral opposition to slavery and his skeptical rejection of republicanism were mutually supportive.

Key words: slavery, the United States, republicanism, despotism, oppression.

Throughout his work, Schopenhauer emerges as a passionate opponent of slavery. In the chapter on pantheism in *Parerga und Paralipomena*, he points to the horror of enslavement in the Americas, where millions of Black slaves endure “60 Millionen Peitschenhiebe auf bloßen Leibe” every day.¹ In the essay on the nothingness and suffering of life in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, he invokes “Negersklaverei” as undeniable evidence of how terribly “der Mensch mit dem Menschen verfährt.”² In a list of inhuman cruelties perpetrated in the name of Christianity in *Über die Grundlage der Moral*, he includes the victimization of the “zu endloser Zuchthausarbeit verdamnten Negersklaven.”³ Across his different texts, then, Schopenhauer presents slavery as proof of the moral indifference and physical brutality with which human beings treat each other. For him, the subjugation and permanent domination of millions of people, often for the purpose of producing goods such as coffee and sugar, stands out as a horrific injustice – the “sklavenhaltenden Staaten” of North America are, he declares, a “Schandfleck” on all of humanity.⁴

This paper will conduct a closer study of an understudied topic in Schopenhauer's philosophy, namely his discussion of slavery.⁵ The aim of the paper is to better understand his conception of enslavement as subjugation and oppression

1 Schopenhauer, Arthur: *Werke in zehn Bänden* (Zürcher Ausgabe), vol. 9 (Zürich: Diogenes 1977), 112. All references to Schopenhauer in this paper are to this edition. The Zürcher Ausgabe follows the third edition of *Sämtliche Werke* edited by Arthur Hübscher (Mannheim 1972).

2 Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 4, 676.

3 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, 274.

4 *Ibid.*, vol. 9, 231. Note that Schopenhauer is aware of the distinction between ancient slavery and modern plantation-based enslavement of Africans in North America. In the dialogue on religion in *Parerga und Paralipomena*, one of the interlocutors, the critical Philateles, attacks modern American slavery geared toward large-scale production of goods such as sugar and compares the plight of Black slaves to the servants of ancient masters. See Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 10, 387.

5 A few scholars do mention Schopenhauer's views on slavery, but it has not been the focus on any study. For instance, a 2019 article by Jared Sexton deals with Schopenhauer's “encounter with organized captivity” but places him in a longer tradition of both ancient, modern, and contemporary pessimistic thinkers who address slavery and Black enslavement. See Sexton, “Affirmation in the Dark.” In: *The Comparatist* 43 (2019): 90–111; 95.

– how he defines it, why it is wrong, where and when he thinks it is likely to arise, and how it should be countered and punished. It thus treats Schopenhauer as a thinker who is extensively and earnestly concerned with unjust domination. The investigation of his treatment of slavery involves many different parts of the work. For instance, Schopenhauer provides definitions of slavery in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, and discusses specific cases of enslavement in other works, particularly in *Parerga und Paralipomena*. The topic also cuts across different areas of his philosophy: Schopenhauer defines slavery as a fundamental kind of wrong, but also as a form of despotic regime, and slave-like servitude appears as a key metaphor for the relationship of the intellect to the will. In other words, slavery emerges as a complex issue related to morality, jurisprudence, politics, and selfhood.

Ultimately, the consideration of slavery shifts the standard view of Schopenhauer. Concerned with the harm that individuals cause each other, Schopenhauer often focuses on the negative effects of the never-ending “Widerstreit der Individuen”⁶ or the Hobbesian war of all against all – the “*bellum omnium contra omnes*.”⁷ In his treatment of politics and the state, he presents mutual attacks by ferocious egoists and the threat of violent anarchy as the fundamental problem of society. Consequently, scholars have often considered Schopenhauer a theorist in the Hobbesian tradition.⁸ With the focus on slavery and slave-like servitude, however, Schopenhauer emerges as a philosopher preoccupied not only with the threat of disorder and anarchic conflict but also with the injustice of subjugation. Indeed, the examination of modern North American slavery will demonstrate that, for Schopenhauer, political anarchy and systemic oppression can be entwined. From his vantage point in the mid-nineteenth century, the United States was a more volatile and violent country than European monarchies, but it also featured large-scale slavery plantations with millions of Black slaves. In Schopenhauer’s work, then, anarchic conflict and despotic domination emerge as associated pathologies.

The paper has four parts. First, it reconstructs Schopenhauer’s conception of slavery in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. It shows that he defines slavery as a fundamental wrong to be morally condemned and prohibited by a properly formed state, but also as an exercise of power under the name of despotism. The

6 Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 2, 427.

7 *Ibid.*, 415

8 Konstantin Broese notes that Schopenhauer continues a tradition of political theory shaped by Hobbes and Machiavelli, although he provides this political tradition with a new metaphysical foundation. See Broese, “Staat und Politik in Schopenhauers Denken – grundlegende Aspekte,” in: *Politik und Gesellschaft im Umkreis Arthur Schopenhauers*, ed. Matthias Kößler (Würzburg 2008), 13–18. On the general tendency of commentators to treat Schopenhauer as a “Hobbesian political thinker,” see Robin Winkler, “Schopenhauer’s Critique of Moralistic Theories of the State,” in: *History of Political Thought* 34.2 (2013), 296–323; 304.

second and longest part explores his intriguing analysis of Black enslavement in North America in *Parerga und Paralipomena* and teases out its theoretical implications for his judgement of different kinds of rule. Since enslavement appears in a decidedly republican country, the United States, the phenomenon of slavery undermines a simplistic characterization of different kinds of regimes and subtly changes the definitions presented in his earlier work – republics, Schopenhauer indicates in these later writings, can be both more anarchic *and* more despotic than monarchies. The short third section then discusses Schopenhauer’s view of the abolition of slavery and the proper punishment for holding people in coerced servitude. Even though he does not develop a full-fledged account of abolition, he clearly thinks enslavement should be severely punished. The paper ends with a brief consideration of slavery as a metaphor for the internal constitution of human beings who are both driven by will and equipped with rationality. Specifically, Schopenhauer pictures the attachment of the intellect to the will as a form of bondage, and its detachment from the will as a form of liberation. For him, enslavement is a form of despotic oppression found in particular regions and countries, but also, in a metaphorical sense, the shared condition of human beings.

All in all, this paper presents Schopenhauer as consistently and thoughtfully concerned with the injustice of coerced servitude, especially in the form of modern Black enslavement in the United States. Reflections on slavery are important to Schopenhauer’s philosophy of morality and selfhood, and they provide the occasion for a complex discussion of forms of government, such as despotism and republicanism. Schopenhauer’s works, then, contain an illuminating but previously neglected philosophical engagement with a form of unjust mass domination in his era.

Slavery as a Wrong and as a Form of Rule

The reconstruction of Schopenhauer’s treatment of slavery must begin with the basic definitions of enslavement as an injustice found in his main work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. These definitions appear at key points in chapter 62 of the first edition of his magnum opus, the chapter that deals with the topic of “zeitliche Gerechtigkeit.”⁹

Slavery appears twice in this pivotal chapter, in different contexts. On the first occasion, Schopenhauer provides a fundamental definition of slavery as a specific kind of “Unrecht.”¹⁰ He begins by defining all wrongs as the consequence of the will’s self-affirmation in circumstances in which the will, conditioned by the *principium individuationis*, appears in numerous coexisting individuals. The active will always affirms itself, but when the will affirms itself in

9 Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 2, 436.

10 *Ibid.*, 418.

one egoistic individual, it typically conflicts with the self-affirmation of the will in another individual. The self-affirmation of one individualized will can result in the outright negation of another individualized will. This negation takes many forms: one embodied individual destroys or harms the body of another individual, or makes that body serve its own ends. Schopenhauer calls these different forms of negation wrongs.

Following the general definition of wrong, Schopenhauer provides a ranked list of specific wrongs. The most horrific wrong is cannibalism because it involves one individual killing and devouring another individual, thus providing a gruesome graphic illustration of one individual body negating another. Murder is the second worst wrong, and intentional mutilation the third worst. After these three forms of negations or assaults by one body on another, Schopenhauer introduces slavery. Enslavement is wrong, he claims, because one self-affirming individual subjugates the body of another and forces it to work for him or her, using its “Kräfte” for his or her own purposes.¹¹ After wrongful subjugation and slavery comes property theft, through which one individual expropriates the results of another individual’s labor. Yet Schopenhauer adds that theft is closely related to enslavement, since the stealing individual effectively takes the product of another body’s work. Through enslavement, one individual controls and benefits from the productive labor of another individual; through theft, one individual takes the fruits of the productive labor of another individual.

Schopenhauer’s list of wrongs provides examples of how the will, when it is fragmented by the *principium individuationis*, comes into conflict with itself. In cannibalism, murder, mutilation, enslavement, and property theft, individual manifestations of the will negate other such manifestations. Yet the ranked forms of wrong are slightly different in character, and not just in terms of the intensity of negation. Cannibalism, murder, injury, and theft are isolated, punctual events: a cannibal does not eat the same body twice, and a murderer does not kill the same person multiple times. In contrast, enslavement is, at least in most cases, a more enduring relationship between two individuals. The forced submission of one person to another typically makes one a master and the other a slave for a longer period; enslavement institutes a lasting relationship of injustice between people.

Schopenhauer indicates the more enduring, institutional character of subjugation in the second passage in chapter 62 in which he mentions slavery. This time, the overall topic is the purpose and formation of a state. The construction of a state is, to begin with, a collective human response to the problem of individuals committing wrongs against each other. Egoistic individuals routinely violate each other’s spheres of action because they seek to affirm their will and strengthen

11 Ibid., 417.

and extend their lives even though it entails negating the will of others and violating and weakening their lives. The overall result of such violations is, however, an unbearable war of all against all. Thanks to the shared capacity for reason, however, humans devise a means to mitigate the conflict among individuals. Specifically, all individuals come to see that the gain they might make by harming other individuals will, over time, be outweighed by the wrong they likely will experience at the hands of those others. Guided by a rational cost-benefit analysis, they are willing to renounce the advantages of unrestrained self-affirmation by binding themselves to prohibitions on wrongs that will protect them from the incursions of other individuals. This collective self-binding takes the shape of a political contract or a “*Staatsvertrag*” among consenting parties.¹² As the name indicates, the contract creates a state, that is, an independent entity with the authority and capacity to create and enforce laws. Through the state contract, then, all individuals effectively give up their unrestricted power of action and allow themselves to be supervised and sanctioned by an entity able to prohibit and punish wrongs. In this way, the state puts an end to the violent condition in which self-affirming individuals harm each other.

It is in the context of state formation that Schopenhauer writes of slavery a second time in the chapter on temporal justice. This time, however, he does not primarily speak of slavery as a type of wrong but as a defective form of collective or social arrangement. Before the construction of a proper state based on a collective agreement, Schopenhauer first writes, people can exist in different conditions. There is either anarchy or despotism. He defines anarchy as a group of “Wilden” who are independent of each other.¹³ They are evidently not so dispersed and self-reliant to not make up a community at all, but no centralized power compels them all to respect a shared set of laws. In contrast to anarchy, Schopenhauer defines despotism as a group of “Sklaven” living under the arbitrary rule of a stronger party, “der Stärkere.”¹⁴ In this case, there is a hierarchy, but one to which the collective has not consented; the mightiest party has simply subjugated others, forcing them into a state of servitude. Schopenhauer here stays quite close to a well-established association of despotism and enslavement: in ancient Greek usage, a despot was a master who ruled in a household over people who were slaves or servants.¹⁵

With the characterization of anarchy and despotism in place, Schopenhauer adds that even properly formed states can “tendieren” toward one of the two

12 Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 2, 428. Schopenhauer’s emphasis.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 For a brief discussion of the Greek usage, see Roger Boesche, “Fearing Monarchs and Merchants: Montesquieu’s Two Theories of Despotism,” in: *The Western Political Quarterly* 43.4 (1990): 741–761; 741.

mentioned pre-state conditions.¹⁶ Specifically, republics (featuring the rule of many) tend toward anarchy and monarchies (featuring the rule of one) tend toward despotism. Schopenhauer does not claim that republics are identical with anarchies. He only indicates that republics are, relatively speaking, close to the condition of savages not bound by a common law, and that the monarchies are, relatively speaking, close to the condition of one despot or master ruling over enslaved individuals. In line with the Aristotelian distinction between sound and corrupted forms of government,¹⁷ perhaps we can say that Schopenhauer considers anarchy the corrupt version of republican government and despotism the corrupt form of monarchy. One should also add that Schopenhauer ultimately endorses monarchy as the superior kind of state government. A hereditary monarchy ensures, he contends, the most robust form of state. If the transgenerational wellbeing of one dynastic family is inseparably associated with the wellbeing of the country, that one family will promote the strength of both. Schopenhauer seems to imply here that a sovereign may lay waste to a country, but that a hereditary monarch whose children will one day inherit the country will seek to manage the country well for posterity.

In *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Schopenhauer approaches slavery in two slightly different ways. In the beginning of chapter 62, he introduces it as a type of ranked wrong, a form of “Unrecht,” which is not as horrific as cannibalism or murder but worse than property theft. More toward the middle of the chapter, he then associates slavery with a condition of collective life that possesses some order but does not meet the requirements of a contractually based state. In this second context, slavery appears under the heading of despotism – when one person rules tyrannically or arbitrarily over others, they have the status of slaves. In both cases, slavery stands in a relationship to the idea of a consensually constructed state. Schopenhauer understands the state as a collective response to the constant threat of human individuals perpetrating wrongs against each other. For him, a state can prevent homicides, assaults, and property crimes and in this way benefit all its subjects. Presumably, a properly formed state can also prohibit cases of slavery within its territories; the state can ban enslavement and punish slave owners. Given Schopenhauer’s notion that despotism, and thus a master’s rule over slaves, often precedes the state contract in time, the proper construction of a contractually based state must also eliminate slavery as part of its emergence. In other words, a state can prosecute cases of enslavement within its bounds, but a proper state’s process of formation should

¹⁶ Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 2, 428.

¹⁷ For a recent discussion of Aristotle’s theory of “constitutional degradation” and its legacy, see James Hankins, *Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, MA 2019), 73.

by itself also put an end to slavery. A just political order rules out the practice of slavery.

Judging by *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Schopenhauer considers enslavement as both a moral and a political phenomenon: it is a type of wrong but also a defective form of hierarchical social arrangement. Slavery belongs both as a component in a list of crimes (homicide, mutilation, injury, theft) and as a component in a constellation of political concepts (anarchy and despotism, republics and monarchies).

Slavery in the United States: Despotism in a Constitutional Republic

Schopenhauer returns to the topic of slavery in *Parerga und Paralipomena*, especially in chapter 9, which is devoted to jurisprudence and politics. In contrast to the discussion of fundamental concepts of right, justice, and statehood in his major work, however, the discussion in *Parerga und Paralipomena* is more oriented toward a particular case of slavery, namely slavery in the United States. These more specific comments on contemporary slavery introduce interesting complications in his account. Most importantly, Schopenhauer's view of slavery as a form of rule undergoes adjustments once it is brought into contact with North American slavery; the institutionalized injustice of enslavement is, he still holds, a form of despotism, and yet it is clearly practiced in a modern constitutional republic – this is the key paradox that Schopenhauer must confront. Why and how are republicanism and despotism so closely associated in one country?

At first, Schopenhauer looks more closely at slavery as a (deeply unjust) form of production in *Parerga und Paralipomena*: enslaved people typically produce goods for others. In section 125 of the chapter on jurisprudence and politics, he compares slavery and other forms of hard, coerced labor, for instance by tenants who work on land owned by landowners. In one passage, he even claims that “Armuth und Sklaverei” are merely two forms, or even two different names, for one and the same thing.¹⁸ The single essence underlying both indigence and enslavement is, according to Schopenhauer, forced labor.¹⁹ Slaves are obviously

18 Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 9, 266.

19 In his 1980 study of Schopenhauer and the so-called social question, Ludger Lütkehaus provides many helpful insights into Schopenhauer's views and formulations concerning poverty. He notes that Schopenhauer tends to bundle disparate forms of labor and subordination (slavery, serfdom, wage labor etc.) rather than make sharp distinctions between different forms of social organization (such as feudalism, capitalism etc.) and that he prefers to use old terms, such as “Armuth”, over more modern terms, such as “pauperism.” Even when Schopenhauer seems to use a modern vocabulary, such as “proletariat,” he is referring to the lower classes in the ancient Roman sense, not the mass of industrial workers. See Lütkehaus, *Schopenhauer: Metaphysischer Pessimismus und 'soziale Frage'* (Bonn 1980), 19–20. However, Lütkehaus also points out that the comparison between wage laborers and slaves were commonplace in the 1830s and 1840s, for

coerced into working for others, but the fact that some work for others, he also argues, is ultimately what leads to immiseration. Since every individual only possesses the meager capacity to make a living for him- or herself, the fact that some people live in luxury must necessarily mean that others are condemned to live in poverty. According to this argument, people are poor primarily because they consistently perform hard, time-consuming labor for others. To be sure, Schopenhauer does not deny that free laborers can at least move away from the land whereas slaves are owned by and bound to a master. Yet he insists that most hard labor is a result of some degree of coercion: enslaved people and proletarians are related groups insofar as they both are involuntarily burdened with maintaining the lives of others.

In the context of a wider discussion of labor and the organization of society, Schopenhauer repeatedly returns to examples of enslavement drawn from an American context. Immediately following his general reflections on poverty and forced labor in section 125, for instance, he notes that the production of goods such as sugar and coffee depends on the labor of “jener Millionen Negersklaven, die ihrem Vaterlande gewaltsam entrissen werden, um mit ihrem Schweiß und ihrer Marter jene Gegenstände des Genusses hervorzubringen.”²⁰ And in section 127, he circles back to American slavery in a panoramic characterization of the brutality of social life in the United States. Here, Schopenhauer provides a long list of wrongs perpetrated in the country: there are, he writes, frequent assassinations, bloody duels, and disruptions of the public order. Yet the most horrific injustices perpetrated in the United States are related to the treatment of Black people. Specifically, Schopenhauer speaks of lynching and the unjust oppression of free Black people but above everything else the “himmelsschreiende Negersklaverei, verbunden mit äußerster Grausamkeit gegen die Sklaven.”²¹ Schopenhauer’s critique of antebellum America is so relentless that American readers reacted: in the 1915 volume of the *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch*, a New York-based admirer meekly hoped that Schopenhauer, were he alive in the early twentieth century, would be “inclined to alter” his views should he “sail for America.”²²

Interestingly, Schopenhauer’s unsparing look at the case of North American slavery effectively involves a reconsideration of his earlier conception of slavery’s political character. The core of his conception of slavery does not change between *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* and *Parerga und Paralipomena*. Schopenhauer is consistently a vehement opponent of slavery who views it as a terri-

instance in the work of Ernst Willkomm (1810–1886) who published a five-volume novel with the title *Weisse Sklaven oder die Leiden des Volkes* in 1845.

20 Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 9, 267.

21 *Ibid.*, 275.

22 B. A. Ladd, “Schopenhauer and America,” in: *Viertes Jahrbuch der Schopenhauer-Gesellschaft* (1915): 90–96; 90.

ble wrong, an “Unrecht,” that a properly formed state, resting on the consent of all, must eliminate. Yet with the examination of slavery in the United States as the most prominent example of large-scale subjugation, the political context shifts. In his magnum opus, Schopenhauer ties slavery to despotism: the master over a group of slaves is a despot, and despotism is the appropriate term for a condition in which a mighty ruler treats his subjects as slaves. In *Parerga und Paralipomena*, however, Schopenhauer clearly considers the United States a republic. Throughout section 127, he contrasts monarchies with the United States, and he explicitly refers to its system of government, which he calls a pure constitution or a “reine[n] Rechtsverfassung,” as a republic.²³ This leads to a paradox: slavery is a form of arbitrary rule based on superior strength rather than consent, but it is a prominent feature of a modern republic, namely the United States. In Schopenhauer’s work, then, the United States emerges both as an example of despotism and as an example of republicanism.

In *Die Welt as Wille und Vorstellung*, Schopenhauer claims that republics tend toward anarchy and monarchies tend toward despotism. When looking at the United States, however, this neat opposition seems to break down: the American republic features both forms of corruption. On the one hand, it exhibits the volatility of a condition in which people do not respect the common law; there are numerous cases of assassinations, duels, and mobs, all of which are symptoms of the weakness of a central, law-enforcing state. On the other hand, it displays the brutality of a slaveholding country, with one group of people subjugated and forced into labor for the benefit of others. In Schopenhauer’s account, the United States appears to be both more anarchic *and* more despotic than other countries, especially monarchies.

Schopenhauer himself does not seem at all surprised by the combination of republicanism and enslavement. On the contrary, he presents further examples of how republics have historically relied more on slaves than monarchies. In a later passage in section 127 that argues forcefully for monarchy and against republics, he notes that small ancient republics such as Athens relied heavily on the labor of slaves: “5/6, vielleicht gar 7/8 der Bevölkerung,” Schopenhauer writes, consisted of slaves.²⁴ He continues by stating that the United States of America has “3 Millionen Sklaven” in a country of 16 million.²⁵ In other words, slavery is a common component of republics, both ancient and modern; the despotic treatment of human beings is endemic to republican states.

What explains this constant relation between republicanism and slavery, or this combination of anarchic and despotic tendencies? In *Parerga und Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer clearly uses the presence of slavery as an argument against

23 Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 9, 275.

24 *Ibid.*, 278.

25 *Ibid.*

republics and for monarchies, but he does not quite provide a clear and direct explanation of the frequent combination of enslavement and republicanism. Such an explanation can, however, be gleaned from his general overview of monarchy and republicanism as contrasting forms of government.

Schopenhauer defines monarchy as the rule of one person who stands as the sole and supreme “Lenker und Regierer” over all others.²⁶ In monarchies, many millions, even hundreds of millions, follow one man or, in the case of a queen, one woman. A republic is then defined in contrast to the monarchical rule of one – it involves the rule of many. Republics, one can infer, tend toward anarchy because the leadership is plural; many human beings participate in the exercise of power, and they are likely to be in conflict with one another. Sovereignty is shared – and hence often fractured. Yet Schopenhauer’s repeated observations of slavery in republics indicate that the attempt to remove and replace the single monarch with a plurality of politically active agents also correlates with a proliferation of small despots – with the existence, in other words, of a class of slaveholders.

In monarchies, one person rules over all whereas in republics, many people rule together. Yet many of these independent republicans who share political power simultaneously act as despots *in their households*, ruling over a group of slaves who work for them and enable them to pursue other activities. In the United States of America with its “pure” republican constitution, the proud and defiant departure from one monarchical hierarchy was evidently linked to the multiplication of masters, petty rulers whose ability to engage in republican politics was based on their personal domination of groups of Black people on plantations. Schopenhauer would presumably have been unsurprised to learn that for “thirty-two of the United States’ first thirty-six years of existence, slave-owners from Virginia occupied the post of president.”²⁷

Schopenhauer’s mid-nineteenth century comments on the connection between republicanism and slavery in *Parerga und Paralipomena* are not unique. For decades, observers had remarked that modern supporters of republicanism often accepted enslavement. In 1781, for instance, the Welsh churchman and writer Josiah Tucker (1713–1799) noted that the “most eminent republican writers” tolerated slavery while “pleading so warmly for Liberty for themselves.”²⁸ Already in 1775, the author and lexicographer Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) summed up the matter in a simple, sharp question: “how is it that we hear the

26 Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 9, 276.

27 Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, translated by Gregory Elliott (London 2011), 12.

28 Josiah Tucker cited in Danielle Charette, “David Hume and the Politics of Slavery,” in: *Political Studies* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217231157516>.

loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?”²⁹ Given these prior observations, Schopenhauer does not say something entirely original when he points out that the American proponents of a purely republican constitution personally rely on slavery.

Yet Schopenhauer’s account of the North American combination of republican anarchy and despotism is nonetheless of interest because it does not align with his era’s dominant political polarity, at least not in antebellum America. Schopenhauer is both against slavery *and* against republicanism; he considers slavery a profound moral wrong and republics inferior systems of governments to hereditary monarchies. This anti-slavery, anti-republican position sets Schopenhauer apart from contemporaries who debated the issue before and during the American Civil War, for they were all supporters of republicanism but differed sharply in their evaluation of slavery. For an American anti-slavery politician such as Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865), the “monstrous injustice” of slavery was incompatible with true republicanism and undermined its purpose and strength. “I hate it [slavery],” Lincoln declared in his 1854 speech at Peoria, Illinois, “because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world – enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites.”³⁰ For a pro-slavery figure such as the Virginia planter and lawyer George Fitzhugh (1806–1881), however, a large population of free white men required the presence of Black slaves to carry out menial labor. Writing in the same year as Lincoln, in 1854, he claimed that our “citizens [in the South], like those in Rome and Athens, are a privileged class.”³¹ For the South Carolina senator John C. Calhoun (1782–1850), “civilized society” required one portion of the community – white men – to live on “the labor of the other” and hence slavery was not a contradiction of republican freedom (for white men) but indeed its foundation and condition of possibility.³² In sum, Lincoln saw how the American republic was hollowed out by the injustice of slavery, whereas for the Southern writers, enslaved laborers enabled republicanism by supporting the liberty and independence of white men, freeing them up for political participation.

Looking at the American debate on slavery and republicanism, we can see that Schopenhauer sides with Lincoln in vehemently rejecting the monstrosity of slavery, but analytically speaking, he shares the idea of the Southern writers because he understands enslavement as an integral and enabling part of republicanism; the political rule of the many in the republic relies on the presence of coerced labor. Again, Schopenhauer rejects both slavery *and* republicanism – the

29 Samuel Johnson, *Taxation no Tyranny; An Answer to the Resolutions and Address of the American Congress* (London 1775), 89.

30 Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (New Brunswick 1953), 255.

31 George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond 1854), 93.

32 Calhoun quoted in Robert Elder, *Calhoun: American Heretic* (New York 2021), 338.

former involves an unjust, despotic form of power and the latter tends toward anarchy. And Schopenhauer's observation is that these two social pathologies exist together: from his perspective, early nineteenth-century North America is an anarchic country of many despots.

Subjugating the Despots: Schopenhauer on the Abolition of Slavery

Since Schopenhauer sees slavery as a scandalous injustice, we can assume that he supports the abolition of slavery. At the very least, he is quite familiar with British abolitionist literature. In *Parerga und Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer cites the 1841 report by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society – a philanthropic organization formed in 1839³³ – entitled *Slavery and the Internal Slave Trade in the United States of North America*.³⁴ In *Über die Grundlage der Moral*, he mentions the work of one of the anti-slavery society's founding members, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton's (1786–1845), a book entitled *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy*.³⁵ Given his self-reported reading, we can infer with some confidence that Schopenhauer was on the side of the abolitionists. Yet his brief direct comments on the need to combat slavery are almost as interesting for what they omit as for what they say: Schopenhauer clearly wants to eliminate slavery, but not by way of a slave-led rebellion against slaveholders or a campaign of vengeance.

Before considering Schopenhauer's thoughts on the abolition of slavery, we must briefly look at three aspects of his discussion of justice: his skepticism about the likelihood of restoration of justice in the world of representation, his distaste for revenge as a path to justice, and his conception of eternal rather than temporal justice.

First, Schopenhauer thinks that the world of representation with its millions of separate individuals – that is, the world as conditioned by the *principium individuationis* – will almost always seem tragically unjust. For those who perceive all human beings as differentiated agents and judge some people as evil perpetrators and others as helpless victims, it will seem like those who commit atrocities are rarely adequately punished. The “Unterdrückten” Schopenhauer writes, usually lead bitter lives, without a “Rächer” or vindicator in sight.³⁶ Second, Schopenhauer does not favor the emergence of an avenger because he condemns

33 James Heartfield, *The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1838–1956: A History* (London 2016).

34 British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *Slavery and the internal slave trade in the United States of North America, being replies to questions transmitted by the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-slavery Society for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade throughout the world* (London 1841). For Schopenhauer's citation, see Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 9, 231.

35 Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London 1840). For Schopenhauer's citation, see *Werke*, vol. 6, 274.

36 Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 2, 440.

vengeance as means to restore justice. The punishment of wrongs must, he argues, be related to the future; the purpose of a punishment should be to deter individuals from committing similar wrongs in the time ahead. Vengeance, by contrast, merely duplicates an existing wrong and is therefore unjustifiable; people commit revenge not to forestall further injustices, but to comfort themselves in their suffering by inflicting similar suffering on others. Third, both the dread at the sight of innocent victims and the desire for revenge misunderstands the metaphysical unity of the will. In the phenomenal world conditioned by individuation, the tormentor and tormented may seem distinct and opposed, but not so in the world of the unitary will. Whenever someone wrongs or dominates another human being, it is, Schopenhauer writes, ultimately only the will that tears itself apart: “Der Quäler und der Gequälte sind eins.”³⁷ In that respect, everything that happens is already just, because it is always only the metaphysical will that suffers from its own exertions.

In *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Schopenhauer thus claims that temporal justice is rare, not adequately satisfied by revenge, and perhaps ultimately irrelevant; from a metaphysical standpoint, justice has already been served. These thoughts should, one could assume, dampen our expectations to find full-fledged abolitionism in Schopenhauer’s works. He clearly deems slavery a wrong on an enormous scale, but he just as clearly puts strictures on the establishment of a just order in the world of individual human beings. Demands for temporal justice often remain unsatisfied, must never be motivated by a desire for vengeance, and should ultimately be abandoned altogether in a proper metaphysical vision of the world.

It might come as a surprise, then, that Schopenhauer’s words on the proper response to slavery are uncompromising and forceful, albeit brief. In the section in *Parerga und Paralipomena* in which he summarizes the contents of *Slavery and the Internal Slave Trade in the United States of North America*, he adds that one could find inspiration in this dry, objective report for a veritable “Kreuzzug” with the aim of achieving the “Unterjochung und Züchtigung der sklavenhaltenden Staaten Nordamerika’s.”³⁸ Schopenhauer thus supports something like a vigorous campaign of punishment with the purpose of establishing hegemony over the states to the South. The “Schandfleck” of modern slavery must be forcefully and systematically removed.³⁹

This severe but very brief comment is as interesting for what it omits as for what it states. Schopenhauer does not say anything about the role of the Black slaves themselves in the challenge to slavery and does not spell out how and with

37 Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 2, 441.

38 Schopenhauer, *Werke*, vol. 9, 231.

39 Ibid.