

## Original Paper

# On the Reflection of Schopenhauer's Ethics in *Fly* by Riichi

Yokomitsu

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### Abstract

*The short story Fly, published in 1923 in the Japanese magazine Bungeishunju, is the Japanese neo-sensationalism writer Riichi Yokomitsu's maiden work. The full text is only more than three thousand five hundred words, but its content is humorous, profound implication, vivid image, it is really a short and pithy life drama. This paper will take the characters in Fly as the research object to discuss the embodiment of Schopenhauer's ethics in the text.*

### Keywords

*Schopenhauer's ethics, Fly, self-interest, evil, sympathy*

## 1. Compassion Ethics

The concept of "compassion ethics" is defined by Scheler, an emotional phenomenologist who had the most influential discussion and analysis on compassion in the early 20th century. Before his criticism of compassion ethics, he defined compassion ethics represented by the theories of Hume, Smith, Rousseau and Schopenhauer as "the ethics that takes compassion as the highest moral value and derivates all actions with moral value". This ethics originated from Hume's discussion of sympathy in the 18th century, developed and advanced by Smith and Rousseau, reached its climax in Schopenhauer's theory of sympathy in the 19th century, and then came to an end.

## 2. Schopenhauer's Ethics

The unique feature of Schopenhauer's ethical system is to accurately summarize the motive of human's communicative behavior. In his opinion, there are three basic forms of motivation in human communication practice: "There are only three basic sources of human behavior, and all possible motives are generated from this or that source. They are: (a) Egoism: the desire for one's own welfare,

and it is infinite. (b) Evil: intended to harm others and may develop into extreme cruelty. (c) Compassion: a desire for the welfare of others, possibly to a degree of nobility and magnanimity. Every human action is attributable to one of these sources, although two of them may work together”.

### 3. Motivation for Human Behavior

Schopenhauer divided the motives of human behavior into three categories: wishing oneself happy, wishing others pain, and wishing others to be happy. Schopenhauer pointed out that any moral motive containing egoistic factor was completely excluded from the category of morality and regarded sympathy of altruistic dimension as the only source of moral motive. Egoism and vice are the driving forces of morality, and only on the basis of compassion is a proper moral action.

This paper will analyze the embodiment of three motivations in the text with examples.

#### 3.1 *Wish Oneself Happy: Egoism*

Egoism is often seen in situations where extreme unethical behavior develops in response to physiological needs such as appetite, lust, and comfort.

Section seventh of the text: When will the carriage start? The sweat of the people gathered at the post station was dried. But when would the carriage go? No one knows. If anyone knows, it's probably the steamed bun swelling up on the stove. Why do you say so? Because, to this neat fanatics groom, eating hot steamed buns that no one has touched, just out of the steamer, is the highest comfort in his long single life every day.

The coachman in the article is a hunchback, fond of chess, a neat single old man. He turned a deaf ear to the pleas of passengers, especially to the eagerness of a peasant woman who wanted to see her son last, and played chess only. Every day, the coachman has to taste the steamed buns for the steamer before he starts his work. The steamed stuffed bun is the only comfort for a man who has been single for years. Living alone, he does not know what affection or love is, because he has never been loved, and he does not know what it is to worry about others, so he is so indifferent to the requests of passengers. Hot, fresh buns were more important to him than the woman's eagerness to see her son one last time. The coachman is a cold, numb figure. Ignoring the thoughts of the passenger in order to satisfy his biological needs. Then, the coachman's seemingly accidental nap changes the fate of a carriage of people, including himself. Perhaps no one imagined that napping could have such serious consequences. I think he's taken naps and been lazy before, but he's never had an accident. But this time, seven very different paths of life converge in the case of the driver's nap. Coachman is one of the manifestations of egoism in the text.

#### 3.2 *Wish Others Pain: Evil*

Evil is everywhere, but it is generally mild. Generally manifested in indifference and antipathy between people. Humans disguise this motivation with politeness and cleverness, so backstabbing and backbiting are common.

Section sixth of the text: The woman got up from her bench in the yard and went over to the squire. "Do you know when the coach starts? My son is dying, and if I don't get to town soon, I won't see him one last time".

"Tut, that's a pity".

"I've been waiting for two hours and I'm still not going. It takes three hours to get to town. I wonder when we'll get there. It'll be noon in town".

"Noon, then". said the squire.

The woman turned to him. "Not at noon. My son will die then, not till noon!"

In the third section, a woman, who wants to go to town to visit her son who is dying, repeatedly asks about the departure time and begs for an early departure. After being ignored by the coachman, she placed her hopes on other passengers, hoping that they would join her in urging coachman to leave. Their indifference made her almost desperate. In *Fly*, the woman mentioned her son's impending death to others four times in total, the first two times when she asked the driver about the departure time, and the second two times when she talked with the squire. For ordinary people, "death" is a special existence, people revere "death". But death here did not stir the feelings of the coachman and the squire, who showed how indifferent they were to the condition of others. Evil was everywhere, and the indifference of the driver and the squire was a sign of it.

### 3.3 *Wish Others to be Happy: Compassion*

Schopenhauer made it very clear that compassion is a universal, primal, intuitive psychological tendency or instinct of human beings, and that compassion can even be used as a synonym for general humanity: "Since it seems that those who do not have compassion are called inhuman, 'humanity' is often used as a synonym for compassion". It is impossible to talk about morality without acknowledging the universal and instinctive human nature of compassion.

True morality is very rare, and there is no true moral man in the world. Schopenhauer quotes Rousseau as saying that men do not sympathize with those with whom they are happy, but with those with whom they are unhappy. That is, our immediate empathy is limited to the pain of others, not to comfort. Compassion, therefore, is essentially empathy for the suffering of others, that is, seeing them as one with oneself.

Section third of the text: The woman looked into the groom's room and called out: "Is there a car?" No one answered. "Is there a carriage?" A teacup is poured on the askew tatami, the thick tea of strong wine kind drips out quietly. The woman wandered uneasily about the yard. Then, standing by the bun shop, she called out again, "Any more carriages?"

"Just left". The woman who owned the bun shop answered.

"Go? The carriage has gone? When did you leave? If only I had come earlier... Is there no car?" While talking, anxious peasant woman already cried out. Without wiping her eyes, she dashed out into the middle of the road and hurried away toward the town.

“There’s another carriage”.

When the woman asked for the third time, “Just left!” The answer was not from the coachman but from the woman who owned the shop. And when the woman was about to run to the town, the lady of the bun shop also said, “There’s another carriage”. The woman did not buy steamed buns in the shop, therefore, there is no relationship and interest between the owner of the shop and the woman. As a person with basic moral quality, the shop’s owner was sympathetic to the woman’s experience and gave an answer to a stranger’s anxious questions. Although it is human nature, but for the listener is a great psychological comfort. Therefore, lady of the bun shop is the embodiment of sympathy in the text.

#### 4. Conclusion

Taking the characters in *Fly* as an example, this paper analyzes the three motivations of human communication in Schopenhauer’s ethics: egoism, evil and compassion. The selfish, greedy, self-interested coachman, the indifferent squire, the lady of the shop who represents sympathy but only appears in two lines, and the egoism or evil of the other characters all make the article more vivid. Yokomitsu’s description of the characters makes the final ending emerge with the philosophy of life, thought-provoking.

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