

# THE ESSENTIAL SCHOPENHAUER

Key Selections  
from *The World as  
Will and Representation*  
and Other Writings

HARPERPERENNIAL  MODERNTHOUGHT

Edited by Wolfgang Schirmacher

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**THE ESSENTIAL  
SCHOPENHAUER**

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Key Selections from  
*The World as Will and Representation*  
and Other Writings

Arthur Schopenhauer

*Edited and with a Foreword by*  
WOLFGANG SCHIRMACHER

 HarperCollins e-books

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## Living Disaster: Schopenhauer for the Twenty-first Century

*Life is not worth living!* This is the thought most associated with the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who was virtually unacknowledged when he died one hundred fifty years ago. Increasingly, however, we understand that behind the mask of a pessimist Schopenhauer was a Zen master and arguably the greatest mystic of the nineteenth century. Schopenhauer roused more than two thousand years of Western philosophy from its delusion about who we really are, by declaring that materiality—the life of the body, rather than the mind—was the driving force of existence.

Schopenhauer has become synonymous with a thoroughly pessimistic worldview. In defiance of tradition, as may be exemplified by Leibniz, he proclaimed we live “in the world of all possible worlds.” Wherever a human being dares to admit the truth about our existence, privately or publicly, we find it is Schopenhauer’s brutal honesty that guides such insight. The German composer Richard Wagner, acquainted with Schopenhauer, famously exclaimed, “Finally, I can tell the truth about life!” Schopenhauer is not a philosophical writer whose texts are part of any “Great Books” curriculum, not even at elite universities, since his only interest is in truth itself, no sugarcoating, no political correctness, no respect for precedent. *Do not read Schopenhauer!* the authorities advise, but the opposite happens. In Germany Schopenhauer is still the most widely read philosopher, and worldwide it is not only the rebels, nonconformists, contrarians, and outsiders who turn to him but also professionals who have no illusions about the fragility of the human condition and who refuse consolation. Physicians, lawyers, writers, artists. Musicians in particular have been drawn to Schopenhauer, who claimed that in music alone are we attuned to the authentic condition of life, without any interference from language.

Very few people are capable of being brutally honest about what it means to be human. Schopenhauer’s brother-in-spirit, Spinoza, did not play the game of false consolation and phony rationalization, but rather reminded us death is not to be feared; we have only to fear that we have not lived. Among the brave who accept Schopenhauer’s truth are first and foremost the comedians, the true American philosophers, from *The Simpsons* to George Carlin and Jon Stewart. Woody Allen held up Schopenhauer as a hero, even mentioning the philosopher in his work; influential writers, Jorge Luis Borges among them, learned German in order to read the philosopher in the original. The French thinker Georges Bataille admired the capacity for “laughing in the face of death” as a kind of poetry of living.

But Schopenhauer’s most constant readers are found not only among such eminent personalities. His most intuitive reader emerges in everyone who goes through adolescence, a time when all those who had held our trust and admiration now come under suspicion and we begin questioning. At this stage, we are the most human we can be. Friedrich Nietzsche, educated by Schopenhauer, called humans the “non-determined species,” and Martin Heidegger pointed to Enowning (*Ereignis*) as the existential “openness” that makes us unique.

By discovering our authentic self in the turmoil of adolescence, we must leave behind without regrets, what we are *supposed to be*. Such an “intellectual honesty” (Nietzsche) can lead to suicide, an act which demonstrates that I have the ability to take my own life, that I belong to no one, and that I share with others only the condition “that we have nothing in common,” as Jean-Luc Nancy insists. That teenagers and young adults sometimes take their own lives without an apparent “good reason” is an integral part of true freedom—the freedom to make mistakes, as America’s courageous philosopher Avital Ronell noted. But Schopenhauer also made the most convincing argument *against* suicide. Taking one’s own life merely confirms the unbearable condition of life; through it, we capitulate to what we so despise.

In Schopenhauer’s ethics, the only worthy task of philosophy is embodied in an incessant struggle until the last breath, with the full knowledge that we can never win the “heroic life project.” It was Theodor W. Adorno who not only insisted that “thinking means thinking against yourself” but also stated unrepentantly that “a philosopher never escapes puberty.” Many Schopenhauer editions picture on their covers the portrait of a miserable old white-haired man, but this is not the person who wrote *The World as Will and Representation*, his magnum opus. The young man on the back cover of *The Essential Schopenhauer* is the true author and will always be the philosopher for the young, for creative people—of any age—and a constant threat to manipulation and socialization. There would be no Sigmund Freud, no Jacques Lacan, without Schopenhauer, who boldly pointed to the “sexual organs as the true center of the world.” Schopenhauer learned early on that the rationality of Homo sapiens is just a poorly spun veil covering the cruelty of the “will-to-live.” Schopenhauer spent his entire life, until his death at seventy-two, explaining and augmenting what he understood as a young philosopher.

When he wrote *The World as Will and Representation* he lived in Dresden, a most remarkable Baroque city before its destruction by Anglo-American bombers in February 1945. In Dresden, Schopenhauer enjoyed a charmed life, not unlike any other young man of means in his late twenties. (It is with good reason that the title of the best book on Schopenhauer written by Rüdiger Safranski, is *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy*.) After Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the leading philosopher of the time, succumbed to a cholera epidemic, Schopenhauer ended his brief period as assistant professor at Berlin University, having insulted the authorities by insisting on teaching only “my entire system.” A financial crash forced him to live a frugal life using what remained of the inheritance from his father, a wealthy merchant; but at the end of his life Schopenhauer had more money in the bank than at the beginning. A reclusive life of twenty-seven years in the German metropolis Frankfurt am Main allowed him the opportunity to write without being concerned about public reaction. After his death he became known as “the Buddha of Frankfurt,” a fitting description as he had discovered—on the basis of not very reliable but still usable ancient Eastern texts—that he had many insights in common with Buddha, and he also introduced Buddhism into the Western philosophical debate. Given that Christianity, the Schopenhauer family faith, also describes earth as a “vale of tears” and paradise as a mere promise “after death,” Schopenhauer’s own thought that life is suffering was not presented as revelation. But as Aristotle observed, a philosopher’s power lies not in discovering the new, as do scientists, or offering the unexpected, as artists do. Philosophers take the trivial, turn again to supposed self-evident certainties, thereby revealing their merely dormant validity. The point is that li-

is suffering, yet we all live as if it were not. The basic truths are always simple and hidden out in the open, unrecognizable as answered questions, shut cases, settled disputes.

The philosopher is the most dangerous member of society, at least according to Nietzsche because he stirs up what has been put to rest in order to ensure a functioning society. And the philosopher sometimes even recklessly poses questions in a language everyone can understand without the help of self-important experts. Schopenhauer was one of the great German writers, and this comes through even in the English translations. The titles of his books and the excerpts included in this reader are an indication of the hold questions concerning the human condition still have over us: What are the principles of sufficient reason in a world where faulty reason is called smart? What is the basis of morality where ethics become a problem of social engineering or are left to religion? What constitutes the freedom of the will in the age of neurophilosophy? How can the sublime task of the artist and the inner nature of art still be of significance when art has turned into investment? Can we still glean inspiration from unconventional human lifestyles such as those of mystics, saints, and ascetics for the decisive "question to come": "What does it mean to be a human being?" (Immanuel Kant)

Or: Why live at all? The blissful ignorance of childhood ends all too soon and human beings are faced with the never-ending suffering called "life." It begins with the initial disenchantment that your charmed existence, "being one with the universe," Lacan's "ideal ego," appears to have been a fairy tale. You are, rather, an utterly powerless child, at the mercy of parents, siblings, peers, and virtually any adult. You find yourself suddenly aware of being separated from everything you had taken for granted, from warmth to food, and forced to negotiate for what you enjoyed before without paying for it. Life is a business that does not cover the costs, Schopenhauer remarks. Even the most effective method of making one's nonnegotiable wishes known, screaming as a baby, soon loses its power. Once babies all, we wielded the power of the weak (Levinas). In the majority of cases, our screams brought about the "unconditional surrender" to our command. The baby's need was met, the caregiver's need for quiet appeased. But the weak and the strong are one. The other extreme lies in the inability to respond; the baby, the source of the noise, is ignored, even killed. Toddlers may still throw tantrums, but they lack the baby's perseverance, which made all the difference. Parents as well as teachers in nursery schools have many cunning ways to manipulate you; with language you learn to behave "appropriately" and are guided into the process of civilization. To make a human being out of you, as advocated by educators of all kinds, means in effect directing you to your "place in the world" with the insincere promise that through "hard work and study" the future holds for you the chance to make it beyond that station. Western parents will claim you can achieve anything you want if you just set your mind to it; but this does not change your being "thrown into the world," literally and in terms of your fate, as Schopenhauer put it. We are thrown into social circumstances, with a set of genes that decidedly influence appearance, intelligence, and future health, without our consent or the slightest choice. The "David Copperfield kind of crap," J. D. Salinger, in a kindred spirit of Schopenhauer, called it in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Often enough the children of the world are born into circumstances they would not wish on their worst enemies, and it is not overstatement to call children the slaves of our time, treated without regard to their humanity by parents and educators alike. Certainly, there are laws protecting children from

the most obvious exploitations, such as child pornography, corporal punishment, and child labor, but it still takes the compassionate adult who will stand as accuser and prod the justice system to at least take notice. Children are bound to discover by their teens that they belong to a species that is, quite possibly, the most murderous and predatory in the world. We do not kill out of necessity but out of arrogance, presuming ourselves the “master and owner of nature” (as did Descartes, whom Schopenhauer identified as a “father of modernity”).

“The truth dare not appear naked before the people,” Schopenhauer pointed out in an effort to explain how religions retain their influence even after the age of Enlightenment. “Dare to think for yourself!” Kant challenged his fearful fellow wo/man, but even today many prefer the truth clothed tightly in ritual, traditions, and tall tales. Our innate trust in life with which we are born is a survival technique we share with our companion species. This “ideal ego” experience of our all-too-brief life before and after birth possesses its own potent rationalization and is the reason why we crave a first principle, a *prima philosophia*. Not a (personal) God of some form, we call such order Nature and attribute, with the help of science, to its laws, which Albert Einstein suggested might all be “false.” With Darwin’s system of evolution, the “will in nature” (Schopenhauer) provided a name for universal suffering but in the same breath took the sting out of it. Science lies just slightly less than religions which prefer “consolation”; they presume to call “higher truth” to the plain truth of the suffering they help to deny. And compared with pseudoreligions such as political movements or lifestyle trends promoted by advertising, science at least has on its side “facts which can be falsified” (Karl Popper) and religion’s compassionate wisdom.

Why call it a “lie” when people try to find the good side of events, the light at the end of the tunnel, the opportunity in a crisis? What would be the purpose of mourning the end of innocence and indulging in self-pity after the event of language, Lacan’s “mirror stage,” at which we realize we are separate from the world around us? The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes famously characterized our relationships to our fellow man as “wolf-to-wolf” and offered to relinquish to authorities most of our freedom if they promised to protect us from our neighbors. The police everywhere claim “to serve and protect,” but this does not change Schopenhauer’s accurate and horrific description: “Every living being is the grave of other living beings.” The constitutional right to pursue happiness—as long as you observe the laws of the land—does not change the fact that our pursuit hurts others who had the same prize of mind but came either too early or too late or were born on the wrong continent. Schopenhauer called happiness just a moment between misfortunes and our belief that we are somehow protected from the suffering we see around us the greatest of all lies: Victim and victimizer are one and the same. A hundred years after Schopenhauer, the French philosopher and Nobel Prize winner Albert Camus acknowledged that “he who lives will become guilty” and affirmed that the issue of suicide is a key philosophical question. His answer was the “human in revolt,” who like Sisyphus never gives up, even if the negative outcome is not in doubt. Is life worth living? Only if you make it worth living, Camus as well as Schopenhauer concluded. Schopenhauer did not lay down the Zen master’s bamboo stick, since he did not believe the people deserved the “truth in the truth” yet, the “turning of the will-to-live.” There is a fullness of nothingness, as we learn from Zen; and Schopenhauer hinted at the mystical “it gives” (Heidegger), compassion and love of humanity as a non-teachable way of ethical living.

Schopenhauer claimed one exception to the rule of rational thinking he called “introspection.” The insight into what is in me, accessible to me alone, and protected by the sovereignty of being-there (Heidegger’s *Dasein*) is the authentic path of the will itself in me. Nietzsche’s response to the suffering which is life was the “will to power,” often misunderstood as political agenda. But it is instead the aesthetic power, the creation of a humane world, the truth of fiction, the “contra-factual” ethics twentieth-century philosophers from Ludwig Wittgenstein to Jürgen Habermas advocated. Human beings cannot live without lies, declared Nietzsche, Schopenhauer’s outstanding student, but these lies are neither intentional falsehoods nor white lies to protect feelings. There are lies which tell the truth, as Virginia Cutrufelli demonstrated for the true poets such as Friedrich Hölderlin and Paul Celan. Plato, poet turned philosopher, called in *The Republic* for the expulsion of the poet from society because he feared insights which are neither philosophical in nature nor sophistic opinions for power brokering. The Übertruth of poetry originates in the singular “introspection” which Schopenhauer received as reward for his bravery.

His entire work is a philosophical elaboration of this introspection, his one thought he sensed was the truth: Life is suffering. Spinoza calls “intuition” an insight that comes with the feeling of certainty. Nietzsche speaks of it as a “truth beyond good and evil” and an “eternal recurrence of the same.” But it is not “exactly the same,” every “repetition” of love and hate, striving and missing, of life lived is nearly imperceptibly different, as the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze reminds us.

Fearless and fierce, Schopenhauer found in himself the force called will that, blind and merciless, utterly indifferent to any ethical consideration, approaches life as rapaciously as a serial killer. This will to survive, often formulated in the language of competitive sports, understood as “survival of the fittest” (Darwin), though it is doubtful that any fairness is involved: Even the fittest murderer needs helpful coincidences and lucky breaks. Schopenhauer was unrelenting in his insistence that every human individual be aware of this inescapable and arbitrary suffering which is set off by the very existence of the will and refrain from using the imaginative power of our mind to envision it otherwise. No Hollywood ending to the horror movie of violence and betrayal. But Schopenhauer’s introspection held a hidden call to action which he carefully protected by the cardinal rule of the mystic. Literally, “mystic” means “speak not of silence,” because introducing the mystical insight into the everyday chatter of the culture industry will transform into idle talk what is potent only as “usage” (Heidegger), the essential act with decisive understanding. The sages of humankind—from the Zen masters to the Arab poets, the Christian saints, and Western philosophers such as Spinoza—abided by the obvious truth of silence: Do not listen to what the saints are saying, follow their examples. Even Karl Marx, arguably the most political and influential philosopher of all time, echoed this intuition in his famous Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: “Philosophers have hitherto interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it!” It is this life change which can begin only in singularity that Schopenhauer was blessed (or cursed) with and at which he dared only hint. In the end, “the will turns” in all human beings, and “nothing” is the mode of living authentically.

Schopenhauer was not alone in the hermeneutical limitation leading him to conclude that each individual lives within a context shaped by circumstances we, since Hegel, have called “historical conditions” and, following Hegel’s critic Kierkegaard, “existential.” And how



biased philosophers can be demonstrated by Schopenhauer's notorious essay on women included in this reader. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer's philosophy of disaster is a genuine and well-thought-out manifestation of the extreme change concomitant with modern technology. The "war against nature" has ended with human beings becoming fully responsible for the human condition itself. It is not Homo sapiens who had to redesign the world to be human but rather Homo generator, who realizes in ubiquitous life techniques—from media to biotechnology—how to live fulfillingly under any circumstances. Schopenhauer understood the singularity of the event of humanity, the being-with in each of us. There is no world outside, only, by definition, a misleading representation; the will in me opens its eyes and senses fully its actualization. Addressing the book of Genesis with its story of how God looked upon His creation on the seventh day and saw that it was good, Schopenhauer became conscious of how offensive to all sufferers of this flawed creation it must be, and how insurmountable a problem for any "justification of the existence of God" (*théodicée*). Each of us, whether in puberty or life crisis, can be nothing but "disgusted" by the painful misery that life is for all feeling beings. This is precisely the reaction of the will when finally in the "love of humanity" truth reveals itself to the will. The blind will begins to see itself, slowly and with great effort, and it may take centuries before its sight is fully developed and accepts its limit. The deaf will begins to listen to the resonating of our "living with things" and of the beautiful music of "multitude" (Deleuze). The aimless will which only perpetuated itself discovers the aim in itself, a thriving that stays in Being without negating others, as Spinoza envisioned the *conatus*. The indifference of the will fades away into the ethics of compassion which—according to Schopenhauer—cannot be resisted when it suddenly overcomes us.

With respect to the span of an individual lifetime, the multiple turnings of the will, with its overall easing of suffering, will always be too slow to be noticed properly; so there will still be good reason to continue to fight against injustice and exploitation and for the worthwhile cause. It is through our technologies—bio-as well as digital technologies—that living changes itself. Each new generation is born into a different set of life techniques which can be trusted only when they appear impermanent and barely visible. The toddlers of today will accept as self-evident what for many people born in the middle of the last century would be close to an abomination. Schopenhauer made the desperate suggestion that human beings stop having sex because procreation only prolongs suffering. But he honestly admitted he would not be able to follow it himself. With chemical birth control Homo generator put this debate to rest, and sex is perceived increasingly as what it is in and of itself for us: the most rewarding bodily activity of being-with. Raising children also has an excellent chance of becoming a choice for the many people who are good at it and enjoy mentoring an offspring. But the "biological clock" will finally stop and the "timing" of each Homo generator take precedent. Even for death, the most effective threat to each individual, a turn is underway: A life fully lived through the bad, through the good days, greets death as its genuine life ending. Currently, though most authorities remain paternalistic and deny us the choice of our own death, one can observe a quiet rebellion in the medical profession: It becomes acceptable if the necessary relief from pain has merely the side effect of speeding up your death. It will not be too long before the "right to die my way" will be an accepted life choice.

Living philosophy is Schopenhauer's mandate for the twenty-first century. His one thought that life is suffering, granted him "the turn of the body"—it is not the mind but the "reason of

the body” (Nietzsche) which feels the pain and compassion with all fellow suffering beings. Sexuality is the chief activity, often shamefully hidden, and governed by the “unconscious” (Freud) as well as chemistry. And what we call life is a killing game in which human beings are the rule supreme. Schopenhauer refused to contemplate the other side; his cup was full with suffering, and he considered any talk of a “silver lining” detestable optimism. Our ethical disgust “commands” compassion, as the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas phrased it. It is in such “compassion” which has not pity but self-awareness at its core that we find the “trace” (Derrida) of an “art of living” which needs no preconditions. Schopenhauer learned from the two philosophers he most admired, Plato and Kant, to pay careful attention to epistemology: What can we know? What is real? Reality is not a given fact but rather a “thing-in-itself” that appears for us solely as representation. There is no rational way to find out *how* reality is without our thinking coming into play, but it is equally true that our concepts would be empty without the materials which are not us. Against Kant’s careful argued dictum that we cannot know the “thing-in-itself,” Schopenhauer was adamant about there being one exception and offered himself as proof of the actuality of “introspection” into the authentic condition of life that is suffering. No argumentation from outside, no matter how professional and well-meaning, can refute such an insight, felt with all senses and absolute certainty. It takes individuals in crisis, bravely facing how things stand, to back up Schopenhauer. Guided by his basic insight, Schopenhauer explained why there is a “metaphysical need” for meaning when death strikes, at any time, with no regard for circumstances. Life is not fair, and so human beings console themselves with tales of “eternal life” where wrongs will be set right. And the scientific revolutions, which Schopenhauer observed in their early phase with keen interest, provided the ultimate consolation: the inherent promise to delay aging, overcome illness, and, one day, even cheat death itself. But science is just an interpretation of the will in nature, cunningly made up by a corruptible mind eager to ease our ethical disgust. Life is a losing proposition but at least its science has beautifully crafted laws, and future events can be predicted to a certain degree.

Schopenhauer’s affinity with German Romanticism is manifest in the exception he allowed for art. Different from Plato, for whom “ideas” were by definition not visible, Schopenhauer considered art “materialized idea”: You are more or less aware that it presents the condition of life in detail. For Schopenhauer, art is not representation, pointing to something else; it is what it is, an invitation to stillness, and a meditative break where the will is quiet. We watch people die in a film and are moved, but we do not feel threatened. Still, words can interrupt this calm and connect us to the world as representation of the will, drawing us back into the misery of life. This is the reason why Schopenhauer considered music the genuine art and the sound of being. In the playing of and listening to music all our senses, including the sense of the mind, are attuned to the bad and good fortune of living, without music itself becoming the focus of attention. Art is the world mirror and its gift of “lucid stillness” (T. S. Eliot) is ephemeral but—as the Romantics emphatically stated—a way from aesthetics to ethics. After Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, the founder of existential philosophy, contended that the aesthetical leap into ethics is inevitable. Schopenhauer maintained that the customary ought-to ethics with its norms and rules is unable to deliver what it promises. Instead of imploring people Sunday after Sunday to be good or threatening them with sanctions or hellfire, we should ask what human beings are capable of. Responsibility, the

key concept of many ethics, anticipates an authority which must be believed before it can be effective. But this kind of basic credibility is precisely what was already lost when Aristotle wrote the first *Ethics*—and he knew it: According to Aristotle, it is a sad day for humanity when one feels the need to formulate the way in which every individual should be living intuitively, without having to think about it. Schopenhauer understood responsibility appropriately as our “ability to respond” to existential situations which need our ethical attention. For example, egoism need not be an ethical problem because properly understood nothing is wrong with wanting something good for yourself. The ethical question arises when malice takes over, deeply rooted in feelings of insecurity, vanity, and hate. Schopenhauer did not believe one can change human beings born with a certain character, a genetic set what we would call it today. But he refused to accept the innate character as justification for wrongdoings since no one can be certain about it—on his deathbed the most miserly person could turn benevolent. It is the nucleus of Schopenhauer’s ethics that it is involuntary, a event that overwhelms, a compassion that cannot be denied. It can occur at any time and no defense is possible—it just happens. *Tat tvam asi*—this art thou: The sudden revelation of humanity is the founding act of love and the source of ethical behavior. This love of humanity has many layers and shades and is as private as it is public—it is known to all and confused by many. It reveals and conceals the human condition, a “pendulum between suffering and boredom” (Schopenhauer), the very process in which ethics, mystics, and medicine coincide. Learning from Schopenhauer, one must be able to respond to disaster, bravely living the turning of the will, and taking pleasure in how unnecessary suffering diminishes. Unrepentant realism will always be called for and we will never be free of unavoidable suffering.

The texts of this reader present the essential Schopenhauer for our century. Beginning with ontology, addressing the most basic condition of being and, at the same time, insisting on the rationality of the difference between will and representation, Schopenhauer proceeds to his philosophy of art. As the “materialized idea” (*anschauliche Idee*), art shows us how life is without engaging us in its suffering. The event of art, for creator and audience alike, is the exceptional state of calmness. But this state is momentous, and we human beings are engaged anew in living the disaster and feeling compassion with fellow sufferers, animals not excluded. Schopenhauer’s wisdom can guide us on how to live ethically under such harsh conditions. The love for humanity entails our moral refusal of living according to the “will-to-live.” Schopenhauer underscores that this is not a mere metaphysical question but rather that it shapes daily life.

This reader contains a few changes with regard to the original translated texts for the sake of consistency and fluent reading. It is composed of both British and American translations but American spelling has been adhered to throughout. Though some arcane references and quotes were omitted, many footnotes have been incorporated into the text proper. On occasion, however, a seemingly outdated phrase or usage has been retained for its evocative of the language and context, the time in which Schopenhauer lived and wrote.

Wolfgang Schirmacher  
New York and Dresden  
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## Schopenhauer Timeline

- February 22, 1788** Born in Danzig, a free seaport city and member of the Hanseatic League (after 1945: Gdansk, Poland). His father, Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer, was a successful merchant who married a much younger Johanna Trosiener. Both were from wealthy German families.
- March 1793** Family moved to the Hanseatic city of Hamburg after Danzig was annexed by Prussia.
- 1797** Birth of sister Adele; Arthur was sent for two years to live with his father's friend in Le Havre, where he learned French. He later recalled it as the happiest time of his life.
- 1799** In Hamburg he attended a private school for future merchants and bankers.
- 1803** "Devil's bet" with his father: either two years of travel wherever he wished, after which he would become a merchant like his father, or else prepare for university. Arthur decided to travel through the Netherlands, England, France, and Switzerland and wrote a travel diary (*Reistagebücher*).
- April 20, 1805** Death (possible suicide) of his father. Arthur continued to respect the wishes of his father and started a business apprenticeship in Hamburg.
- 1806** Johanna Schopenhauer moved the family to Weimar, becoming a well-known writer of novels and the host of an intellectual salon. Johann-Wolfgang von Goethe was a frequent visitor, as was Christoph Martin Wieland. Arthur, who had stayed behind in Hamburg, became estranged from his mother.
- 1807** Left the apprenticeship and finished high school (*Gymnasium*).
- 1809** Entered the University in Göttingen to study medicine but in 1810 switched to philosophy. Studied with Gottlob Ernst Schulze, who encouraged his reading of Plato and Kant. After reaching adulthood, Schopenhauer inherited a third of what remained of his father's estate and became financially independent.
- Attended lectures by the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, a theologian and philosopher, at the university in Berlin.

- 1811** He also took courses in physics, astronomy, zoology, physiology, psychology, history, literature, and poetry.
- Due to the Napoleonic war, Schopenhauer left Berlin and moved to Rudolstadt, a small town near the university city of Jena. Schopenhauer wrote *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, submitted it as a dissertation to Jena, and was awarded a doctorate in philosophy in absentia. From 1815 to 1816 he exchanged letters with Goethe on his *Theory of Colours*, which Schopenhauer revised with a version of his own: *On Vision and Colors*.
- 1813**
- 1814–1818** Lived in Dresden, the capital of Saxony, and wrote his chief work, *The World as Will and Representation*, published 1819.
- The young philosopher, having finished his masterpiece, left Germany for Italy, the destination of choice for the writers of that time. Goethe had given Schopenhauer a letter to pass on to Lord Byron, full of praise for the English poet, who was in Italy at that time, but Schopenhauer disliked “peacock” Byron’s appearance and the letter was never delivered.
- 1818**
- Forced to interrupt his Italian voyage because the family fortune was in peril. In the wake of a bank failure, the Schopenhauers’ banker threatened them with bankruptcy if his clients did not agree to only a fraction of their deposit. Schopenhauer’s mother and sister accepted this condition, but Schopenhauer refused and demanded full payment with the statement: “That I am a philosopher does not mean I am a fool.”
- 1819**
- Successful habilitation lecture (a requirement for becoming a professor in Germany) at Berlin University; Hegel was the chair of the Habilitation Committee and curious to meet the young man who had worked with Goethe.
- 1820** During the summer period, Schopenhauer’s first and only seminar, on “My Entire System,” scheduled exactly and intentionally at the same hour the popular Hegel held his own seminar.
- 1821** Began love affair with Caroline Richter from the National Theater, which would last many years.
- 1822–1823** Second sojourn in Italy

- 1824** The writer Jean Paul praised *The World as Will and Representation* as “bold and insightful.”
- 1825–1831** Residence in Berlin, during which Schopenhauer met with Alexander von Humboldt and Adelbert von Chamisso. His university lectures were announced but never reached sufficient enrollment.
- 1831** Fleeing the cholera epidemic, Schopenhauer left Berlin and lived in several places, including Frankfurt am Main.
- 1833** Settled in Frankfurt, where he resided until his death, with a poodle as his only companion. (When he was mad at the dog, he called it “Mensch.”)
- 1836** *On the Will in Nature*
- 1840** *On the Basis of Morality*
- 1841** *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*
- 1844** *The World as Will and Representation* (second edition, two volumes)
- 1852** First comprehensive review of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, *Iconoclasm in German Philosophy*, was published in England and widely noticed in Germany.
- 1851** *Parerga and Paralipomena*
- 1854** Composer Richard Wagner presented Schopenhauer with a signed copy of the libretto of *The Ring of the Nibelungs*.
- 1857** Invited to lecture at the universities of Bonn and Breslau. The poet and dramatist Friedrich Hebbel visited Schopenhauer.
- 1859** *The World as Will and Representation* (third edition, two volumes)
- September 21, 1860** After contracting pneumonia, Schopenhauer died a peaceful death. His grave can be found at the Central Cemetery in Frankfurt am Main.
- 1873** *Collected Works*, edited by Julius Frauenstädt, was published.

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# One

## On the Suffering of the World

If suffering is not the first and immediate object of our life, then our existence is the most inexpedient and inappropriate thing in the world. For it is absurd to assume that the infinite pain, which everywhere abounds in the world and springs from the want and misery essential to life, could be purposeless and purely accidental. Our susceptibility to pain is well-nigh infinite; but that to pleasure has narrow limits. It is true that each separate piece of misfortune seems to be an exception, but misfortune in general is the rule.

Just as a brook forms no eddy so long as it meets with no obstructions, so human nature, as well as animal, is such that we do not really notice and perceive all that goes on in accordance with our will. If we were to notice it, then the reason for this would inevitably be that it did not go according to our will, but must have met with some obstacle. On the other hand, everything that obstructs, crosses, or opposes our will, and thus everything unpleasant and painful, is felt by us immediately, at once, and very plainly. Just as we *do not feel* the health of our whole body, but only the small spot where the shoe pinches, so we do not think of all our affairs that are going on perfectly well, but only of some insignificant trifle that annoys us. On this rests the negative nature of well-being and happiness, as opposed to the positive nature of pain, a point that I have often stressed.

Accordingly, I know of no greater absurdity than that of most metaphysical systems which declare evil to be something negative; whereas it is precisely that which is positive and makes itself felt. On the other hand, that which is good, in other words, all happiness and satisfaction, is negative, that is, the mere elimination of a desire and the ending of a pain. In agreement with this is the fact that, as a rule, we find pleasures far below, but pains far beyond, our expectation. Whoever wants summarily to test the assertion that the pleasure of the world outweighs the pain, or at any rate that the two balance each other, should compare the feelings of an animal that is devouring another with those of that other.

The most effective consolation in any misfortune or suffering is to look at others who are even more unfortunate than we; and this everyone can do. But what then is the result for the whole of humanity? We are like lambs playing in the field, while the butcher eyes them and selects first one and then another; for in our good days we do not know what calamity fate has in store for us, sickness, persecution, impoverishment, mutilation, loss of sight, madness, death, and so on. History shows us the life of nations and can find nothing to relate except wars and insurrections; the years of peace appear here and there only as short pauses, as intervals between the acts. And in the same way, the life of the individual is a perpetual struggle, not merely metaphorically with want and boredom but actually with others. Everywhere he finds an opponent, lives in constant conflict, and dies weapon in hand.

Not a little is contributed to the torment of our existence by the fact that *time* is always

pressing on us, never lets us draw breath, and is behind every one of us like a taskmaster with a whip. Only those who have been handed over to boredom are not pressed and plagued by time. However, just as our body would inevitably burst if the pressure of the atmosphere were removed from it, so if the pressure of want, hardship, disappointment, and the frustration of effort were removed from the lives of men, their arrogance would rise, though not to bursting-point, yet to manifestations of the most unbridled folly and even madness. At all times, everyone indeed needs a certain amount of care, anxiety, pain, or trouble, just as a ship requires ballast in order to proceed on a straight and steady course.

*Work, worry, toil, and trouble* are certainly the lot of almost all throughout their lives. But if all desires were fulfilled as soon as they arose, how then would people occupy their lives and spend their time? Suppose the human race were removed to Utopia where everything grew automatically and pigeons flew about ready-roasted; where everyone at once found his sweetheart and had no difficulty in keeping her; then people would die of boredom or harm themselves; or else they would fight, throttle, and murder one another and so cause themselves more suffering than is now laid upon them by nature. Thus for such a race, no other scene, no other existence, is suitable.

On account of the negative nature of well-being and pleasure as distinct from the positive nature of pain, a fact to which I just now drew the reader's attention, the happiness of any given life is to be measured not by its joys and pleasures, but by the absence of sorrow and suffering, of that which is positive. But then the lot of animals appears to be more bearable than that of man. We will consider the two somewhat more closely.

However varied the forms in which man's happiness and unhappiness appear and impel him to pursuit or escape, the material basis of all this is nevertheless physical pleasure or pain. This basis is very restricted, namely health, nourishment, protection from wet and cold, and sexual satisfaction, or else the want of these things. Consequently, in real physical pleasure man has no more than the animal, except insofar as his more highly developed nervous system enhances the susceptibility to every pleasure but also to every pain as well. But how very much stronger are the emotions stirred in him than those aroused in the animal! How incomparably more deeply and powerfully are his feelings excited, and ultimately only to arrive at the same result, namely health, nourishment, clothing, and so on.

This arises primarily from the fact that, with him, everything is powerfully enhanced by his thinking of the absent and the future, whereby anxiety, fear, and hope really come into existence for the first time. But then these press much more heavily on him than can the present reality of pleasures or pains, to which the animal is confined. Thus the animal lacks reflection, that condenser of pleasures and pains which, therefore, cannot be accumulated, and happens in the case of man by means of his memory and foresight. On the contrary, with the animal, the suffering of the present moment always remains, even when this again recurs innumerable times, merely the suffering of the present moment as on the first occasion, and cannot be accumulated. Hence the enviable tranquility and placidity of animals. On the other hand, by means of reflection and everything connected therewith, there is developed in man from those same elements of pleasure and pain which he has in common with the animal, an enhancement of susceptibility to happiness and unhappiness which is capable of leading to momentary, and sometimes even fatal, ecstasy or else to the depths of despair and suicide.



More closely considered, things seem to take the following course. In order to heighten his pleasure, man deliberately increases his needs, which were originally only a little more difficult to satisfy than those of the animal; hence luxury, delicacies, tobacco, opium, alcoholic liquors, pomp, display, and all that goes with this. Then in addition, in consequence of reflection, there is open to man alone a source of pleasure, and of pain as well, a source that gives him an excessive amount of trouble, in fact almost more than is given by all the others. I refer to ambition and the feeling of honor and shame, in plain words, what he thinks of other people's opinion of him. Now in a thousand different and often strange forms this becomes the goal of almost all his efforts that go beyond physical pleasure or pain. It is true that he certainly has over the animal the advantage of really intellectual pleasures which admit of many degrees from the most ingenuous trifling or conversation up to the highest achievements of the mind. But as a counterweight to this on the side of suffering, boredom appears in man, which is unknown to the animal, at any rate in the natural state, but which slightly attacks the most intelligent only if they are domesticated, whereas with man it becomes a real scourge. We see it in that host of miserable wretches who have always been concerned over filling their purses but never their heads, and for whom their very wealth now becomes a punishment by delivering them into the hands of tormenting boredom. To escape from this, they now rush about in all directions and travel here, there, and everywhere. No sooner do they arrive at a place than they anxiously inquire about its amusements and clubs, just as does a poor man about its sources of assistance; for, of course, want and boredom are the two poles of human life. Finally, I have to mention that, in the case of man, there is associated with sexual satisfaction an obstinate selection, peculiar to him alone, which rises sometimes to a more or less passionate love. [ ... ] In this way, it becomes for him a source of much suffering and little pleasure.

Meanwhile, it is remarkable how, through the addition of thought, which the animal lacks, so lofty and vast a structure of human happiness and unhappiness is raised on the same narrow basis of joys and sorrows, which the animal also has. With reference to this, human feelings are exposed to such violent emotions, passions, and shocks that their stamp can be read in the permanent lines on his face; and yet in the end and in reality, it is only a question of the same things, which even the animal obtains, and indeed with incomparably less expenditure of emotion and distress. But through all this, the measure of pain increases in man much more than that of pleasure and is now in a special way very greatly enhanced by the fact that death is actually *known* to him. On the other hand, the animal runs away from death merely instinctively, without really knowing it and thus without ever actually coming face-to-face with it, as does man, who always has before him this prospect. And so, although only a few animals die a natural death, most of them get only just enough time to propagate their species and then, if not earlier, become the prey of some other animal. On the other hand, man alone in his species has managed to make the so-called natural death the rule, which there are, however, important exceptions. Yet in spite of all this, the animals still have the advantage, for the reason I have given. Moreover, man reaches his really natural term of life just as rarely as do the animals, because his unnatural way of living, his struggles and passions, and the degeneration of the race resulting therefrom rarely enable him to succeed in this.

Animals are much more satisfied than we by mere existence; the plant is wholly satisfied

man according to the degree of his dullness. Consequently, the animal's life contains less suffering, but also less pleasure, than man's. This is due primarily to the fact that it remains free from *care and anxiety* together with their torment, on the one hand, but is also without real *hope*, on the other. And so it does not participate in that anticipation of a joyful future through ideas together with the delightful phantasmagoria, that source of most of our joys and pleasures, which accompanies those ideas and is given in addition by the imagination; consequently in this sense it is without hope. It is both these because its consciousness is restricted to what is intuitively perceived and so to the present moment. Thus only reference to objects that already exist at this moment in intuitive perception does the animal have an extremely short fear and hope; whereas man's consciousness has an intellectual horizon that embraces the whole of life and even goes beyond this. But in consequence of this, animals, when compared with us, seem to be really wise in *one* respect, namely in the calm and undisturbed enjoyment of the present moment. The animal is the embodiment of the present; the obvious peace of mind which it thus shares frequently puts us to shame with our often restless and dissatisfied state that comes from thoughts and cares. And even those pleasures of hope and anticipation we have just been discussing are not to be had for nothing. Thus what a man enjoys in advance, through hoping and expecting a satisfaction, afterwards detracts from the actual enjoyment of this, since the thing itself then satisfies him by so much the less. The animal, on the other hand, remains free from such pleasure in advance as well as from that deduction of pleasure, and therefore enjoys the real and present thing itself whole and undiminished. In the same way, evils press on the animal merely with their own actual weight, whereas for us they are often increased tenfold by fear and foresight. [ ... ] It is just this complete absorption in the present moment, peculiar to animals, which contributes so much to the pleasure we derive from our domestic pets. They are the present moment personified and, to a certain extent, make us feel the value of every unburdened and unclouded hour, whereas with our thoughts we usually pass it over and leave it unheeded. But the above-mentioned capacity of animals to be more satisfied than we by mere existence is abused by egotistic and heartless man, and is often exploited to such an extent that he allows them absolutely nothing but bare existence. For example, the bird that is organized to roam through half the world is confined to a cubic foot of space where it slowly pines for death and cries; and the highly intelligent dog, man's truest and most faithful friend, put on a chain by him! Never do I see such a dog without feelings of the deepest sympathy for him and of profound indignation against his master. I think with satisfaction of a case, reported some years ago in *The Times*, where a lord kept a large dog on a chain. One day as he was walking through the yard, he took it into his head to go and pat the dog, whereupon the animal tore his arm open from top to bottom, and quite right too! What he meant by this was: You are not my master, but my devil, who makes a hell of my brief existence! May this happen to all who chain up dogs.

If the result of the foregoing remarks is that the enhanced power of knowledge renders the life of man more woebegone than that of the animal, we can reduce this to a universal law and thereby obtain a much wider view. In itself, knowledge is always painless. Pain concerns the *will* alone and consists in checking, hindering, or thwarting this; yet an additional requirement is that this checking be accompanied by knowledge. Thus just as light illuminates space only when objects exist to reflect it; just as a tone requires resonance and sound

generally becomes audible at a distance only through waves of the vibrating air that break on hard bodies so that its effect is strikingly feeble on isolated mountain tops and a song in the open produces little effect; so also in the same way must the checking of the *will*, in order to be felt as pain, be accompanied by *knowledge* which in itself, however, is a stranger to a pain.

Thus *physical* pain is already conditioned by nerves and their connection with the brain; and so an injury to a limb is not felt if its nerves leading to the brain are severed, or when the brain itself loses its powers through chloroform. For the very same reason, we consider that as soon as consciousness is extinguished when a person is dying, all subsequent convulsions are painless. It follows as a matter of course that *mental* pain is conditioned by knowledge and that it increases with the degree of knowledge can easily be seen. [ ... ] We can therefore, figuratively express the whole relationship by saying that the will is the string, in thwarting or checking the vibration thereof, knowledge the sounding board, and pain the tone.

Now according to this, only that which is inorganic and also the plant are incapable of feeling pain, however often the will may be checked in both. On the other hand, even an animal, even an infusorian, feels pain because knowledge, however imperfect, is the true characteristic of animal existence. As knowledge rises on the animal scale, so too does susceptibility to pain. It is, therefore, still extremely small in the case of the lowest animals; thus, for example, insects still go on eating when the back part of the body is nearly torn off and hangs by a mere thread of gut. But even in the highest animals, because of an absence of concepts and thought, pain is nothing like that which is suffered by man. Even the susceptibility to pain could reach its highest point only when, by virtue of our faculty of reason and its reflectiveness, there exists also the possibility of denying the will. For without that possibility, such susceptibility would have been purposeless cruelty.

In early youth we sit before the impending course of our life like children at the theatre before the curtain is raised, who sit there in happy and excited expectation of the things that are to come. It is a blessing that we do not know what will actually come. For to the man who knows, the children may at times appear to be like innocent delinquents who are condemned not to death, it is true, but to life, and have not yet grasped the purport of the sentence. Nevertheless everyone wants to reach old age and thus to a state of life whereof it may be said: "It is bad today and every day it will get worse, until the worst of all happens."

If we picture to ourselves roughly as far as we can the sum total of misery, pain, and suffering of every kind on which the sun shines in its course, we shall admit that it would have been much better if it had been just as impossible for the sun to produce the phenomenon of life on earth as on the moon, and the surface of the earth, like that of the moon, had still been in a crystalline state.

We can also regard our life as a uselessly disturbing episode in the blissful repose of nothingness. At all events even the man who has fared tolerably well becomes more clearly aware, the longer he lives, that life on the whole is *a disappointment, nay a cheat*, in other words, bears the character of a great mystification or even a fraud. When two men who were friends in their youth meet again after the separation of a lifetime, the feeling uppermost in their minds when they see each other, in that it recalls old times, is one of comple

*disappointment with the whole of life.* In former years under the rosy sunrise of their youth, life seemed to them so fair in prospect; it made so many promises and has kept so few. Surely the definitely uppermost is this feeling when they meet that they do not even deem it necessary to express it in words, but both tacitly assume it and proceed to talk on that basis.

Whoever lives *two or three generations* feels like the spectator who, during the fair, sees the performances of all kinds of jugglers and, if he remains seated in the booth, sees the same repeated two or three times. As the tricks were meant only for one performance, they no longer make any impression after the illusion and novelty have vanished.

We should be driven crazy if we contemplated the lavish and excessive arrangements, the countless flaming fixed stars in infinite space which have nothing to do but illuminate world and such being the scene of misery and desolation and, in the luckiest case, yielding nothing but boredom—at any rate to judge from the specimen with which we are familiar. No one is to be greatly *envied*, but many thousands are to be greatly *pitied*. Life is a task to be worked out; in this sense *defunctus* is a fine expression. Let us for a moment imagine that the act of procreation were not a necessity or accompanied by intense pleasure, but a matter of pure rational deliberation; could then the human race really continue to exist? Would not everyone rather feel so much sympathy for the coming generation that he would prefer to spare it the burden of existence, or at any rate would not like to assume in cold blood the responsibility of imposing on it such a burden? The world is just a *hell* and in it human beings are the tortured souls on the one hand, and the devils on the other.

I suppose I shall have to be told again that my philosophy is cheerless and comfortless simply because I tell the truth, whereas people want to hear that the Lord has made all things very well. Go to your churches and leave us philosophers in peace! At any rate, do not demand that they should cut their doctrines according to your pattern! This is done by knaves and philosophasters from whom you can order whatever doctrines you like. Brahma produced the world through a kind of original sin, but himself remains in it to atone for this until he has redeemed himself from it. This is quite a good idea! In Buddhism the world comes into being in consequence of an inexplicable disturbance (after a long period of calm) in the crystal clearness of the blessed and penitentially obtained state of Nirvana and hence through a kind of fatality which, however, is to be understood ultimately in a moral sense; although the matter has its exact analogue and corresponding picture in physics, in the inexplicable arising of a primordial nebula, whence a sun is formed. Accordingly, in consequence of moral lapses, it also gradually becomes physically worse and worse until it assumes its present sorry state. An excellent idea! To the Greeks the world and the gods were the work of an unfathomable necessity; this is fairly reasonable insofar as it satisfies us for the time being. ... ] But that a God Jehovah creates this world of misery and affliction [ ... ] and then applauds himself [ ... ], this is something intolerable. [ ... ] If Leibniz's demonstration were correct, that of all *possible* worlds this is nevertheless always the best, we should still not have a *Théodicée*, a defense of God's creation. For the Creator has created indeed not merely the world, but also the possibility itself; accordingly, he should have arranged this with a view to its admitting of a better world.

But generally, such a view of the world as the successful work of an all-wise, all-benevolent, and moreover almighty Being is too flagrantly contradicted by the misery and

wretchedness that fill the world on the one hand, and by the obvious imperfection and even burlesque distortion of the most perfect of its phenomena on the other; I refer to the human phenomenon. Here is to be found a dissonance that can never be resolved. On the other hand these very instances will agree with, and serve as a proof of, our argument if we look upon the world as the work of our own guilt and consequently as something that it were better never to have been. Whereas on the first assumption human beings become a bitter indictment against the Creator and provide material for sarcasm, they appear on the second as a denunciation of our own true nature and will, which is calculated to humble us. For they lead us to the view that we, as the offspring of dissolute fathers, have come into the world already burdened with guilt and that only because we have to be continually working off the debt does our existence prove to be so wretched and have death as its finale. Nothing is more certain than that, speaking generally, it is the great *sin of the world* which produces the many and great *sufferings of the world*; and here I refer not to the physically empirical connection but to the metaphysical. According to this view, it is only the story of the Fall of Man that reconciles me to the Old Testament. In fact, in my eyes, it is the only metaphysical truth that appears in the book, although it is clothed in allegory. For to nothing does our existence bear so close a resemblance as to the consequence of a false step and guilty lust. I cannot refrain from recommending to the thoughtful reader a popular, but exceedingly profound dissertation on this subject by Matthias Claudius which brings to light the essential pessimistic spirit of Christianity and appears in the fourth part of the *Wandsbecker Bote* with the title "Cursed be the ground for thy sake."

To have always in hand a sure compass for guiding us in life and enabling us always to view this in the right light without ever going astray, nothing is more suitable than to accustom ourselves to regard this world as a place of penance and hence a penal colony, so to speak. [ ... ] This view of the world also finds its theoretical and objective justification not merely in my philosophy, but in the wisdom of all ages, in Brahmanism, Buddhism, Empedocles, and Pythagoras. Cicero also mentions that it was taught by ancient sages and in the initiation into the Mysteries "That, on account of definite mistakes made in a previous life, we are born to pay the penalty." Nothing can be more conducive to patience in life and to a placid endurance of men and evils than a Buddhist reminder of this kind: "This *Samsara*, the world of lust and craving and thus of birth, disease, old age, and death; it is a world that ought not to be. And this is here the population of *Samsara*. Therefore what better things can you expect?" I would like to prescribe that everyone repeat this four times a day, fully conscious of what he is saying.

But even in genuine Christianity which is properly understood, our existence is regarded as the consequence of a guilt, a false step. If we have acquired that habit, we shall adjust our expectations from life to suit the occasion and accordingly no longer regard as unexpected and abnormal its troubles, vexations, sufferings, worries, and misery, great and small. On the contrary, we shall find such things to be quite in order, well knowing that here everyone is punished for his existence and indeed each in his own way. For one of the evils of a penitentiary is also the society we meet there. What this is like will be known by anyone who is worthy of a better society without my telling him. A fine nature, as well as a genius, may sometimes feel in this world like a noble state-prisoner in the galleys among common criminals; and they, like him, will therefore attempt to isolate themselves. General

speaking, however, the above-mentioned way of looking at things will enable us to regard without surprise and certainly without indignation the so-called imperfections, that is, the wretched and contemptible nature of most men both morally and intellectually, which accordingly stamped on their faces. For we shall always remember where we are and consequently look on everyone primarily as a being who exists only as a result of his sinfulness and whose life is the atonement for the guilt of his birth. It is just this that Christianity calls the sinful nature of man. It is, therefore, the basis of the beings whom we meet in this world as our fellows. Moreover, in consequence of the constitution of the world they are almost all, more or less, in a state of suffering and dissatisfaction which is not calculated to make them more sympathetic and amiable. Finally, there is the fact that, in almost all cases, their intellect is barely sufficient for the service of their will.

The correct standard for *judging any man* is to remember that he is really a being who should not exist at all, but who is atoning for his existence through many different forms of suffering and through death. What can we expect from such a being? We atone for our birth first by living and secondly by dying. This is also allegorized by *original sin*. [ ... ] Accordingly, we have to regulate our claims on the society of this world. Whoever keeps firmly to this point of view might call the social impulse a pernicious tendency. In fact, the conviction that the world, and thus also man, is something that really ought not to be calculated to fill us with forbearance towards one another; for what can we expect from beings in such a predicament? In fact, from this point of view, it might occur to us that the really proper address between one man and another should be, instead of *Sir, Monsieur*, and so on, *Leidensgefährte, socii malorum, compagnon de misères, my fellow sufferer*. However strange this may sound, it accords with the facts, puts the other man in the most correct light, and reminds us of that most necessary thing, tolerance, patience, forbearance, and love of one's neighbor, which everyone needs and each of us, therefore, owes to another.

The characteristic of the things of this world and especially of the world of men is not exactly *imperfection*, as has often been said, but rather *distortion*, in everything, in what is moral, intellectual, or physical. The excuse, sometimes made for many a vice, namely "that is natural to man," is by no means adequate, but the proper rejoinder should be: "just because it is bad, it is *natural*; and just because it is *natural* it is bad." To understand this aright, we must have grasped the meaning of the doctrine of original sin. When judging a human individual, we should always keep to the point of view that the basis of such is something that ought not to be at all, something sinful, perverse, and absurd, that which has been understood as original sin, that on account of which he is doomed to die. This fundamental bad nature is indeed characterized by the fact that no one can bear to be closely scrutinized. What can we expect from such a being? If, therefore, we start from this fact, we shall judge him more indulgently; we shall not be surprised when the devils lurking in him bestir themselves and peep out, and we shall be better able to appreciate any good point that has nevertheless been found in him, whether this be a consequence of his intellect or of anything else. In the second place, we should also be mindful of his position and remember that life is essentially a condition of want, distress, and often misery, where everyone has to fight and struggle for his existence and therefore cannot always put on a pleasant face. If, on the contrary, man were that which all optimistic religions and philosophies would like to make him, namely the work or even the incarnation of a God, in fact a being that in every sense

ought to be and to be as he is, what a totally different effect would inevitably be produced by the first sight, the closer acquaintance, and the continued intercourse with every human being from that which is now produced!

*Pardon's the word to all.* [ ... ] We should treat with indulgence every human folly, failing and vice, bearing in mind that what we have before us are simply our own follies, failings and vices. For they are just the failings of mankind to which we also belong; accordingly, we have in ourselves all its failings, and so those at which we are just now indignant, merely because they do not appear in us at this particular moment. Thus they are not on the surface but lie deep down within us and will come up and show themselves on the first occasion, just as we see them in others; although one failing is conspicuous in one man and another in another, and the sum total of all bad qualities is undoubtedly very much greater in one man than in another. For the difference in individualities is incalculably great.

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## Two

### On the Affirmation of the Will-to-Live

If the will-to-live exhibited itself merely as an impulse to self-preservation, that would be only an affirmation of the individual phenomenon for the span of time of its natural duration. The cares and troubles of such a life would not be great, and consequently existence would prove easy and cheerful. Since, on the contrary, the will wills life absolutely and for all time, it exhibits itself at the same time as sexual impulse, which has an endless series of generations in view. This impulse does away with that unconcern, cheerfulness, and innocence that would accompany a merely individual existence, since it brings into consciousness unrest, uneasiness, and melancholy, and into the course of life misfortune, cares, and misery. On the other hand, if it is voluntarily suppressed, as we see in rare exceptions, then this is the turning of the will, which changes its course. It is then absorbed in, and does not go beyond, the individual; but this can happen only through his doing painful violence to himself. If this has taken place, that unconcern and cheerfulness of the merely individual existence are restored to consciousness, and indeed raised to a higher power. On the other hand, tied up with the satisfaction of that strongest of all impulses and desires is the origin of a new existence, and hence the carrying out of life afresh with all its burdens, cares, wants, and pains, in *another* individual, it is true; yet if the two, who are different in the phenomenon, were such absolutely and in themselves, where then would eternal justice be found? Life presents itself as a problem, a task to be worked out, and is general therefore as a constant struggle against want and affliction. Accordingly everyone tries to get through with it and come off as well as he can; he disposes of life as he does of compulsory service that he is in duty bound to carry out. But who has contracted this debt? His begetter, in the enjoyment of sensual pleasure. Therefore, because the one has enjoyed this pleasure, the other must live, suffer, and die. However, we know and look back to the fact that the difference of the homogeneous is conditioned by space and time, which I have called in this sense the *principium individuationis*; otherwise eternal justice would be irretrievably lost. Paternal love, by virtue of which the father is ready to do, to suffer, and to take a risk more for his child than for himself, and at the same time recognizes this as his obligation, is due to the very fact that the begetter recognizes himself once more in the begotten.

The life of a man, with its endless care, want, and suffering, is to be regarded as the explanation and paraphrase of the act of procreation, of the decided affirmation of the will-to-live. Further, it is also due to this that he owes nature the debt of death, and thinks of this debt with uneasiness. Is not this evidence of the fact that our existence involves guilt? But we certainly always exist on periodical payment of the toll, birth and death, and we enjoy successively all the sorrows and joys of life, so that none can escape us. This is just the fruit of the affirmation of the will-to-live. Thus the fear of death, which holds us firmly to life



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