October 1867 – April 1868: On Schopenhauer[1]

An attempt to explain the world under an assumed factor.
The thing-in-itself[2] receives one of its possible shapes.
The attempt failed.
Schopenhauer did not regard it as an attempt.
His thing-in-itself was deduced by him.

The reason why he did not see his own failure was that he did not want to sense the dark and contradictory elements in the region where individ.[3] ends.

He distrusted his own judgement.

Passages.

The dark drive, brought under an apparatus of representation, manifests itself as world. This drive has not found a place under the *princip. indiv.*

[1] Arthur Schopenhauer, German philosopher (1788–1860), was a major influence on the young Nietzsche.

[2] Immanuel Kant, German philosopher (1724–1804), distinguished sharply between what he called the thing considered 'as it was in itself' (originally Latin: *res per se spectata*; German: '*Ding an sich*) and the thing as a possible object of human experience. The former, Kant argued in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), could not be known in any way by humans, although it could be an object of mere thought, empty speculation, faith, etc. Few of the Idealists who came after Kant could resist the temptation to think of the thing-in-itself as a reality that stood behind the world of appearances.

[3] Schopenhauer believed that the world of our human experience was a world of things 'subject to the *principium individuationis*' (the 'principle of individuation'), that is, that it was a world composed of objects that were distinct from each other by virtue of their location in space and time. However, this individuated world was the mere appearance, the reality of which was a (non-individuated) will. See *WWR* I. § 23.

I

The title page of the World as W[4] and R already reveals what Schopenhauer claims to have achieved for humanity through this work.

His answer to the yearning question of all metaphysicians – expressed in Goethe's 'whether the spirit would not reveal many a secret'[5] – is a bold Yes; and to ensure that the new insight was seen far and wide, like an inscription on a temple, he wrote the redeeming formula for the old and most important riddle of the world across the face of his book as the title *The World as Will and Representation*.

that alleged solution, then:

To grasp comfortably where the resolving and enlightening quality of this formula is to be sought, it is advisable to translate it into a semi-figurative form

The will, which has neither cause[6] nor knowledge, manifests itself, when subjected to an apparatus of representation, as world.

If we subtract from this proposition what Schopenhauer received as the heritage of the great Kant and what in his grand manner he always regarded with the most proper respect, the one word 'will' with its predicates is left behind. It is a solidly coined, wide-ranging word, intended to express an idea which was so significant and which went so far beyond Kant that its discoverer could say that he considered it as 'that which has very long been sought under the name of philosophy, and which is therefore considered by those who are familiar with history to be as impossible to find as the philosophers' stone'.[7]

Here it occurs to us in good time that Kant too regarded a no less questionable discovery, through the unfashionably ornate table of categories [*illegible*], as a great, indeed the greatest and most fruitful deed of his life, albeit with the character. difference that Kant, after complet. 'the most difficult thing that could be undertaken for the purp[ose] of met[aphysics][8] marvelled at himself as a violently erupting force of nature and was ordained to 'appear as the ref[ormer] of phil[osophy]',[9] while

[4] *WWV* is Schopenhauer's main philosophical work.
[5] This quotation from Goethe is the motto of *WWV*, vol. I.
[6] *grundlos*.
[7] *WWV*, Preface to first edition.
[8] Friedrich Albert Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus* (Iserlohn: Baedeker, 1866), p. 260.
[9] Ibid, p. 257.

Schopenhauer always feels grateful [for] his alleged find to the prodigious sagacity and visual force of his intellect

The errors of great men are admirable because they are more fertile than the truths of the lesser ones.

If we now set about analytically examining the proposition put forward above, which is the quintessence of Sch's syst[em], nothing is further from us than wishing to harass Schopenhauer himself through such a criticism, confront him triumphantly with the separate pieces of his proofs, and finally ask with raised brows how on earth a man can arrive at such pretensions with a system that is so full of holes.

II

Indeed it must not be denied that the proposition with which we started as the quintessence of Schopenhauer's system can be successfully attacked from four sides.

1. The first, and most general, attack is directed against Schopenhauer only in so far as he did not go beyond Kant where it was necessary. It has its sights on the concept of a thing-in-itself, which it considers, in Überweg's words, as 'only a hidden category'.[10]

2. However, even if we grant Schopenhauer the right to follow Kant along that dangerous path, what he puts in place of the Kantian X,[11] the will,[12] is created only with the help of a poetic intuition, while his attempted logical proofs can satisfy neither Schopenhauer nor us. Cf. I, p. 125. 131.

Thirdly we are obliged to protest against the predicates attributed by Schopenhauer to his will, which sound far too definite for something absolutely unthinkable and which are gained throughout from their opposition to the world of representation; while between the thing-in-itself and the appearance even the concept of opposition is meaningless.

4. Nevertheless, all these 3 instances could be countered in favour of Schopenhauer with a possibility raised to the power of three:

there may be a thing-in-itself, albeit in no other sense than that in the realm of transcendence anything is *possible* that is ever hatched out in

[10] Friedrich Überweg was a nineteenth-century historian of philosophy; this is cited from Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, p. 267.
[11] See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A104–10, A249–53.
[12] *WWR* I. §§ 19–20.

the mind of a philosopher. This possible thing-in-itself may be the will: a possibility which, having come into being from the combination of two possibilities, is only the negative power of the first possibility, which, in other words, amounts to a strong step towards the other pole, impossibility. We reinforce this concept of a continually decreasing possibility once again if we admit that even those predicates of the will assumed by Schopenhauer may pertain to it, because an opposition between the thing-in-itself and the appearance can be thought even though it is unprovable. Now any kind of moral thinking would declare its opposition to such a knot of possibilities: but even this ethical objection could be countered by saying that the thinker, faced with the mystery of the world, has no other means than guessing, i.e. hoping that a moment of genius will place on his lips the word that provides the key to the writing that lies before everyone's eyes and yet has never been read, which we call the world. But is that word the will? – This is the point at which we must make our fourth attack.

Schopenhauer's supporting tissue becomes tangled in his hands, least of all as a result of a certain tactical ineptitude of its maker, but mainly because the world cannot be fitted into the system as comfortably as Schopenhauer had hoped in the first enthus[iasm] of a finder. In his old age he complained that the most difficult problem of phil. had not been solved by his philosophy either. By this he meant the question of the limits of individ[uation].

3

Henceforth we shall closely examine a certain species of contradictions with which Sch.'s system is riddled; a species of extremely important and hardly avoidable contradictions which, as it were, arm themselves to wage war against their mother while still in her womb, and which perform their first deed by killing their mother when they have scarcely been born. They all refer to the boundaries of individuation and they have their πρῶτον ψ[εῦδος][13] at the point touched on under number 3.

'The will as a thing-in-itself', Schopenh. says, *W as* [*Will and Representation*], vol. I, p. 134, 'is quite different from its appearance and entirely free of all the forms of the same, which it does not enter until

[13] An 'initial error' which infects everything that follows from it with untruth.

4

it appears, and which therefore concern only its nature as an object and are alien to itself. Even the most universal form [of all representations], that of an object for a subject, does not apply to it, much less those forms subordinate to it that have their common expression in the principle of sufficient reason, which, as is commonly known, includes space and time and consequently also the multiplicity which exists and was made possible through them alone. In this last respect, borrowing a term from the true old Scholasticism, I will call time and space the *principium individuationis*.'

In this account, which we encounter in innumerable variations in Schopenh's writings, we are surprised by the dictatorial tone, which predicates of that thing-in-itself which lies altogether outside the sphere of knowledge a number of *negative* properties and which therefore does not accord with the assertion that the most general form of knowledge, being an object for a subject, does not apply to it. Schopen. himself expresses this in *W as W* p. 131 as follows: 'This thing-in-itself, as such, is never an object, because every object is its mere appearance and no longer itself. If it *was nevertheless to be thought of objectively*, it had to *borrow* a *name and concept* from an object, i.e. from something in some way objectively given, and therefore from one of its appearances.' Schopenhauer, then, demands that something that can never be an object be nevertheless thought of objectively: but on that road we can reach only an apparent objectivity, in so far as a totally obscure and incomprehensible x is hung with predicates as if with brightly coloured garments taken from a world that is alien to it, the world of appearances. We are then required to regard the draped garments hung on it, i.e. the predicates, as the thing-in-itself: for that is the meaning of the sentence 'if it was nevertheless to be thought of objectively, it had to borrow a name and concept from an object'. So the concept of the 'thing-in-itself' is secretly eliminated because 'it is meant to be' and we are handed another concept in exchange.

The borrowed name and concept is precisely the will, 'because it is the clearest, most developed appearance of the thing-in-itself, directly illuminated by knowledge'. But that does not concern us here: what is more important for us is that all the predicates of the will too are borrowed from the world of appearances. Admittedly, Sch. makes an attempt here and there to present the meaning of these predicates as totally incomprehensible and transcendent, e.g. *W as W* II, p. 368: 'The unity of that will in which we have recognised the essential nature-in-itself of the world

of appearances is a metaphysical one. Consequently our knowledge of it is transcendent, i.e. it is not based on the functions of our intellect and therefore cannot really be grasped by them.' cf. *W as W.* I. p. 134, 132. However, we can see from Sch.'s entire system, and in particular from the first account of it in vol. I of *W as W*, that he permits himself the human and by no means transcendent use of unity in the will wherever it suits him, and basically has recourse to that transcend[ence] only where the gaps in the system strike him as too palpable. For this 'unity' therefore, the same holds as for the 'will': both are predicates of the thing-in-itself, taken from the world of appearances, under which the real heart of the matter, the transcendental, evaporates. What is true of the three predicates of unity, eternity (i.e. timelessness), liberty (i.e. lacking any reason)[14] is the same as what is true of the thing-in-itself: they are tied inseparably to our organisation one and all, so that it is extremely doubtful that they have any meaning at all outside the sphere of human knowledge. But that they should pertain to the thing-in-itself, because their opposites rule the world of appearances, is something that neither K[ant] nor Sch. will be able to prove to us, or even just make more likely, the latter above all because his thing-in-itself, the will, cannot make ends meet with those three predicates and is continually having to raise a loan from the world of appearances, i.e. transfer the concept of multiplicity, temporality and causality to itself.

On the other hand he is entirely right in saying, I p. 118, that 'it will never be possible to reach the nature of things from without: however much we may investigate, we gain nothing but images and names'.

4

The will appears: how could it appear? Or to ask differently: where does the apparatus of representation in which the will appears come from? Schopenhauer answers, with an expression peculiar to him, by describing the intellect as the *μηχανή*[15] of the will, II. 315: 'But this enhancement of brain development is brought about by the constantly increasing and ever more complicated need of the corresponding appearances of the will.' 'Thus the knowing and conscious self is basically tertiary, since it

[14] *Grundlosigkeit.*
[15] instrument; see *WWR* I. § 27.

presupposes the organism, and the organism presupposes the will.' II. 314 Schopenhauer thus imagines a step-by-step sequence of phenomena of the will with continually increasing existential needs: in order to satisfy these, nature uses a corresponding step-by-step sequence of aids, among which the intellect, from scarcely conscious sensations to extreme clarity, has its own place. This view places a world of appearances in front of the world of appearances, if we want to cling to Schopenhauer's *termini* concerning the thing-in-itself. Before the appearance of the intellect we already see the *principium indiv.*, the law of causality, in full effectiveness. The will seizes life post-haste, seeking to manifest itself in every way; it begins modestly at the lowest levels and as it were works its way up from the bottom. In this region of Schopenhauer's system everything is already dissolved into words and images: of the initial definition of the thing-in-itself everything – almost even the memory of it – has been lost. And where this memory steps in once in a while it serves only to bring the complete contradiction out into the full light of day. *Par.* II. 150: 'The geological events that preceded all life on earth did not exist in any consciousness at all: neither in their own because they had none, nor in the consciousness of another because there was no such consciousness. Therefore … they did not exist at all; or what else does their having existed mean? Basically, it is merely *hypothetical*, that is, *if* a consciousness had existed in those primeval times, such events would have appeared in it. That is where the *regressus* of appearances leads us and therefore it lay in the nature of the thing-in-itself to manifest itself in such events.' They are, as Sch. says on the same page, only 'translations into the language of our intuiting intellect'.

But how, we ask after these sober explanations, was it ever possible for the intellect to come into being? Surely, the existence of the last step before the appearance of the intellect is as hypothetical as that of every earlier step, i.e. this step did not exist because no consciousness existed. And now, at the next step, the intellect is supposed to have appeared, i.e. the flower of knowledge is supposed to have burst forth suddenly and abruptly from a non-existent world. This is supposed to have happened in a sphere of timelessness and spacelessness, without the intervention of causality. But what comes from such a world stripped of worldly qualities must – according to Schopenhauer's principles – itself be the thing-in-itself. Now either the intellect remains eternally joined together with the thing-in-itself as a new predicate or there can be no intellect at all because an intellect could never have come into being.

But an intellect exists: consequently it could not be a tool of the world of appearance, as Schopenhauer would have it, but it would be the thing-in-itself, i.e. the will.

Schopenhauer's thing-in-itself would therefore be at one and the same time *princip. indiv.* and the ground of necessitation: in other words, the existing world. Sch. tried to find the x of an equation: and the result of his calculation is that it equals x, i.e. that he has not found it.

5. Ideas.
6. Character.
7. Teleology and contrast.
8.

It must be noted how carefully Schopenh. avoids the question of the origin of intellect: as soon as we reach the region of this question, hoping that it will now come, he hides as it were behind the clouds, although it is quite obvious that the intellect in Sch.'s sense presupposes a world caught up in the *pr[incipio] in[dividuationis]* and the laws of causality. On one occasion, as far as I can see, this admission is at the tip of his tongue; but he gulps it down in such a strange way that we must examine it more closely. *W. as W.* II 310. 'If we now go back in the objective comprehension of the intellect as far as we possibly can, we shall find that the necessity of, or the demand for, *knowledge as such* arises from the multiplicity and the *separate* existence of beings, that is, from individuation. For if we imagined that there was only *one single* being, it would have no need of knowledge: because nothing would exist that was different from it and whose existence it would therefore have to absorb indirectly through knowledge, i.e. image and concept. It would itself already be all in all, and therefore there would remain nothing for it to know, i.e. nothing alien that could be understood as an object. However, given the multiplicity of beings, every individual is in a state of isolation from all the others, and this is what gives rise to the necess. of knowledge. The nervous system, by means of which the individual animal first becomes conscious of itself, is bounded by a skin; but in the brain, raised to intellect, it crosses this boundary with the help of causality as its cognitive mode, and thus it develops intuition as a consciousness of *other* things, as an image of beings in space and time, changing in accordance with causality.'

Notebook 1, autumn 1869

1[1]

Whoever talks or hears about Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides[1] today immediately thinks of them as *littérateurs*, because he first got to know them, either in the original or in translation, from *books*: but this is roughly as if somebody who is talking about *Tannhäuser*[2] means and understands nothing more than the libretto. I want to talk therefore about those men *not* as librettists but as composers of operas. I know that with the word 'opera' I am handing you a caricature, even though only a few of you will initially admit that. But I shall be satisfied if by the end you have been convinced that our operas are mere caricatures in comparison to the ancient musical drama.

The origin itself is characteristic. The opera came into being without any foundation in the senses, in accordance with an abstract theory and the conscious intention to achieve the effects of the ancient drama by these means. It is therefore an artificial homunculus, indeed the malicious goblin of our musical development. Here we have a warning example of the damage the direct aping of antiquity can do. By such unnatural experiments the roots of an unconscious art growing out of the life of the people are cut off or at least badly mutilated. We are shown examples of this by the emergence of French tragedy, which, from the outset, is a

[1] Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides: These are the three fifth-century (BC) Athenian tragedians some of whose works have survived. Aeschylus, probably born in the 520s BC, was the oldest of the three. Euripides was the youngest, probably born in the early 480s BC, and who died in 406; Sophocles outlived Euripides by about a year.

[2] *Tannhäuser oder der Sängerkrieg auf dem Warteburg*, opera by Richard Wagner, first performed in Dresden in 1845.

learned product, designed to contain the quintessence of the tragic, in an entirely pure form, as an abstract concept. In Germany too, since the Reformation, the natural root of drama, the Shrovetide play, has been undermined: attempts at creating something new, up to and including the classical period, have been made in a purely learned manner. At the same time this proves that even in a misguided and unnaturally developed genre such as the drama of Schiller and Goethe[3] an irrepressible genius like the German can find a way; and the same process can be seen in the history of the opera. If the force slumbering in the depths is truly all-powerful it will overcome even such alien admixtures: in the most gruelling, often even convulsive struggle, nature will be victorious, albeit very late in the day. If one is to describe briefly the massive armour under which all the modern arts break down so often and advance so slowly and erratically, it is erudition, conscious knowledge and excessive study. Among the Greeks the beginnings of drama go back to the unfathomable expressions of folk impulses: in the orgiastic celebrations of Dionysus[4] people were driven outside themselves – ἔκστασις[5] – to such an extent that they acted and felt like transformed and bewitched beings. Nor are such conditions entirely remote from the life of the German people, except that they never experienced such a flowering: at least I see the St John's or St Vitus' dancers, who used to wander singing and dancing from town to town in enormous and constantly increasing masses, as nothing other than such an ecstatic Dionysian movement, even though in medicine today the phenomenon is regarded as an epidemic of the Middle Ages. The ancient musical drama blossomed out of such an epidemic;

[3] As Artistic Director of the Court Theatre in the small Ducal Residence town of Weimar in Central Germany from 1791 to 1817, Johann Wolfgang (von) Goethe (1749–1832) was responsible for producing a number of his own plays and plays by his friend Schiller (1759–1805), who also lived in Weimar from 1787 to his death. Nietzsche had three basic criticisms of the kind of drama they wrote during the period of their co-residence in Weimar. First of all, their theatre was consciously an aristocratic *court* theatre, and Nietzsche – at any rate during this early period – followed Wagner in insisting that the best theatre could never depart too far from its roots in a genuine popular culture. Second, as in most of its modern forms, the 'classicism' Goethe and Schiller espoused during their Weimar period had to do more with admiration of an idealised 'antiquity' rather than with any correct apprehension of ancient realities. Sometimes Nietzsche cites this creative idealisation as a strength of the Weimar project (see below, p. 206, 5[167]), but sometimes as a weakness. Third, Goethe, at any rate, despite his many gifts, had one notorious blind spot: he was utterly unmusical with completely philistine taste. This, in Nietzsche's eyes, made him unfit to attain any deeper understanding of drama, which is *essentially* musical.

[4] Greek god of natural vitality and intoxication. See BT §§ 1–2.

[5] The state of being 'outside oneself'.