The World as Will and Representation

Arthur Schopenhauer

Volume 1

Four Books, with an Appendix
containing the Critique of the Kantian Philosophy

Ob nicht Natur zuletzt sich doch ergründe?
Goethe

['Might not nature finally fathom itself?' – from a poem to Staatsminister von Voigt, 27 September 1816]

Contents of Volume 1

Preface to the first edition

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What I propose to do here is to specify how this book is to be read so as to be understood. – It aims to convey a single thought.[a] But in spite of all my efforts, I could not find a shorter way of conveying the thought than the whole of this book. – I believe it is the idea that people have sought out for such a long time under the heading of philosophy, which is why scholars of history have thought it to be as impossible to discover as the philosophers' stone, although Pliny had already told them: 'how much has been considered impossible before it has been done?' (*Natural History*, 7, 1).[b]

As this one thought is considered from different sides, it reveals itself respectively as what has been called metaphysics, what has been called ethics, and what has been called aesthetics; and it is only natural that it be all of these, if it really is what I claim it to be.

A *system of thoughts* must always have an architectonic coherence,[c] i.e. a coherence in which one part always supports another without the second supporting the first, so the foundation stone will ultimately support all the parts without itself being supported by any of them, and the summit will be supported without itself supporting anything. *A single thought*, on the other hand, however comprehensive it might be, must preserve the most perfect unity. If it is divided up in order to be communicated, the various parts must still be organically coherent, i.e. each part containing the whole just as much as it is contained by the whole, with no part first and no part last, the whole thought rendered more distinct through each part, and even the smallest part incapable of being fully understood without a prior understanding of the whole. – But a book must have a first line and a last, and to this extent will always be very different from an organism,

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[a] *Gedanke*
[b] *Quam multa fieri non posse, priusquam sint facta, judicantur?* (*Hist. nat.* 7, 1 [§ 6])
[c] *Zusammenhang*

however similar they might be in content: as a result, form and matter are in contradiction here.

In circumstances such as this, it is evident that the only way to completely fathom[a] the thought presented here is to *read the book twice*, and in fact with considerable patience the first time, the sort of patience that only comes from a voluntary conviction that the beginning presupposes the end almost as much as the end presupposes the beginning, and similarly that all the earlier parts presuppose the later ones almost as much as the later ones presuppose the earlier. I say 'almost': because this is by no means unconditionally so, and anything that could be done to give priority to what is explained only in the sequel – just as in general whatever could facilitate comprehensibility and clarity – has been honestly and conscientiously done. Indeed, I might have succeeded to some extent if it were not for the reader, who in reading the book thinks not only of what is being said but
IX (which is only natural) of its possible consequences as well. As a result, the many places where the book really *is* in conflict with the opinions of the age (and, presumably, with those of the reader as well) can be joined by just as many more anticipated and imaginary points of conflict, so that what is in fact only a misunderstanding must look like lively disapproval. And although the painstakingly attained clarity of presentation and expression leaves no question about the immediate meaning[b] of what is said, such clarity cannot at the same time elucidate the relation between what is being said and everything else, which further exacerbates the problem. This is why the first reading requires, as I said, a patience that comes from the confidence that a second reading will put many things (if not everything) in a very different light. As to the rest, my serious attempts to render a very difficult topic fully and even easily comprehensible must justify occasional repetition. Even the structure of the whole, which is organic rather than chainlike, sometimes forces me to touch on the same point twice. This very structure, as well as the extremely close connections[c] between all of the parts, has not allowed me to divide the work into chapters and paragraphs, a division I otherwise find very valuable, but has instead required me to leave it in four main parts, four perspectives,[d] as it were, on the one thought. In each of these four Books, the reader must be particularly careful not to lose sight of the principal thought in the associated details that need to be treated along with it, or of the progress of the presentation

[a] *Eindringen*
[b] *Sinn*
[c] *Zusammenhang*
[d] *Gesichtspunkten*

as a whole. – This, like the demands to follow, is absolutely essential for the hostile[a] reader (hostile, that is, to the philosopher, because he is one himself).

The second demand is that the introduction be read before the book itself, even though it is not located inside the book but rather appeared five years earlier under the title: *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Philosophical Essay*. – It is absolutely impossible to truly understand the present work unless the reader is familiar with this introduction and propadeutic, and the contents of that essay are presupposed here as much as if they had been included in the book. Moreover, if the essay had not preceded the present work by several years, it would be incorporated into the First Book instead of standing in front of it as an introduction; there are gaps in the First Book where the material from that essay would have been, and the resulting incompleteness must be made good by constant appeal to that essay. But I have such a strong aversion to copying myself or struggling to find new words for what was said quite adequately the first time, that I preferred this method, despite the fact that I could now present the material in that essay rather better, particularly by cleansing it of many concepts that stem from my (then excessive) entanglement with the Kantian philosophy, concepts such as categories, outer and inner sense, and the like. Yet those concepts are there only because I had never really engaged with them on a very profound level, and thus only as side issues that do not touch on the main subject. This is why the reader who is familiar with the present work will automatically correct those passages in the essay. – But only after the reader has fully recognized (by means of this essay) what the principle of sufficient reason is and means, where it is valid and where it is not, the fact that it is not prior to all things and the whole world does not exist only in consequence of and according to this principle, as something like its correlate; only after the reader has fully recognized that this principle is really nothing more than the form in which an object (which is always conditioned by the subject) of whatever sort it may be, is always cognized, so long as the subject is a cognizing individual – only then is it possible to grasp[b] the method of philosophizing that is attempted here for the first time, and that is utterly distinct from all previous methods.

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The same aversion to repeating myself verbatim or even saying the same thing a second time with different and less suitable words (having already used all the better ones) – this aversion is solely responsible for another gap

[a] *ungeneigten*
[b] *eingehen*

in the First Book of this work, since I have omitted everything written in the first chapter of my essay *On Vision and Colours*, which otherwise would have belonged here, word for word. So a familiarity with this short, earlier writing is also presupposed.

Finally, the third demand made of the reader could even have been left unstated, because it is nothing less than an acquaintance with the most important phenomenon[a] to emerge in philosophy over the past two thousand years, one that lies so close to us: I am talking about the principal works of Kant. I find that the effect of these works on a mind to which they truly speak is, as has already been said elsewhere, comparable to a cataract operation on a blind person: and if we were to continue this comparison,[b] my aim can be described as wanting to put cataract glasses into the hands of those who have successfully had this operation, since the operation is the most necessary condition for the use of those glasses. – However much I take the achievements of the great Kant as my point of departure, a serious study of his works has nonetheless enabled me to discover significant errors, and I have had to separate these errors out and show them to be unsound[c]
XII so that I could then presuppose and apply what is true and excellent in his theories in a pure form, freed from these errors. So as not to interrupt and confuse my own discussion by frequent polemical remarks directed against Kant, I have put these into a special appendix. And my writing presupposes a familiarity with this appendix just as much as it presupposes, as I have said, a familiarity with the Kantian philosophy: so with this in mind, it is advisable to read the appendix first, and all the more so because its content refers directly to the First Book of the present work. On the other hand, given the nature of the material, the appendix inevitably makes occasional reference to the work itself; but all that follows from this is that it needs to be read twice, just like the main part of the work.

Thus, for the purpose of my discussion, I do not presuppose that the reader has a complete knowledge of any philosophy besides that of *Kant*. – But if in addition the reader has spent time in the school of the divine *Plato*, then he will be that much more prepared for and receptive to what I have to say. And if he has even shared in the blessing of the *Vedas*, which have been made accessible to us through the *Upanishads*, and which, to my mind, is the chief advantage that this still-young century enjoys over the previous one (and in fact, I expect the influence of the Sanskrit literature to have as profound an effect on us as the revival of Greek literature had on

[a] *Erscheinung*
[b] *Gleichniß*
[c] *verwerflich*

the 15th century[1]) – so, as I was saying, if the reader has also already received and been receptive to the consecration of the ancient Indian wisdom, then he will be in the very best position to hear what I have to say to him. It will not strike him, as it will strike many others, as foreign or even inimical, since I would like to claim (if it does not sound arrogant) that each of the individual and disconnected remarks that form the *Upanishads* could XIII be derived as a corollary[a] of the thoughts I will be imparting, although conversely my thoughts certainly cannot be found there.

But most readers will have already felt their impatience mounting and will have broken out into a rebuke that has been held back for some time with considerable effort: how dare I put a book before the public under demands and conditions, the first two of which are presumptuous and completely unreasonable, and this at a time when there is such a general abundance of distinctive thoughts that the press makes three thousand such thoughts into common property each year in Germany alone, in the form of estimable, original and completely indispensable works, as well as in countless periodicals, and even the daily papers? Particularly at a time when there is no lack of wholly original and profound philosophers; and in fact there are more of them living simultaneously in Germany alone than during the course of several centuries together? How, the indignant reader might ask, will there ever be an end to it if we have to do so much work for a single book?

Since I have absolutely nothing to say to such reproaches, I can only hope for some gratitude on the part of those readers for having warned them in time so that they do not waste a single hour with a book that it would be useless to read without fulfilling the stated demands and thus must be left entirely alone; this is particularly true since it is a fairly good bet that the book can have nothing to say to them, that it will only ever be a matter 'for few men'[b] and thus must wait calmly and modestly for the few whose XIV uncommon way of thinking will find it palatable. Because even apart from its intricacies and wealth of detail, as well as the exertions that it expects of the reader, what well-informed person of this age, whose knowledge has approached the marvellous point where the paradoxical is the same as the false, could bear to encounter thoughts on almost every page that frankly contradict those that he himself had put down as true and established once and for all? And then, how unpleasantly disappointed people will be when

[a] *Folgesatz*
[b] *paucorum hominum* [Horace, *Satires* I. 9, 44]

they find absolutely no mention of the things that they believe they must look for here in particular, because their way of speculating coincides with that of a still-living great philosopher*,[2] who has written truly touching books and has only the small weakness of considering everything that he has learned and approved of before his fifteenth year as the innate and fundamental thoughts of the human spirit. Who wants to put up with all this? So my advice is simply to put down the book.

But I am afraid that even this will not let me off the hook. The reader who has come as far as the preface only to be rebuffed by it has paid good money for the book, and wants to know how he can be compensated. – My last resort now is to remind him that he knows other things to do with a book besides reading it. It can fill a space in his library as well as any other book, and it will look quite good there with its fresh, clean binding. Or he can leave it in the dressing room or on the tea table of his educated lady friend. Or finally, by far the best option of all and one that I would particularly advise, is for him to write a review of it.

XV And so, after allowing myself this joke (and in this thoroughly ambiguous life there is hardly any page too serious to grant it a place), I offer up this book with profound seriousness and in the firm conviction that sooner or later it will reach those to whom alone it can be addressed. And as to the rest, I am calmly resigned to the fact that it will fully share the fate that truth has met with in every branch of knowledge, and most of all where the knowledge is most important, that of being granted only a short victory celebration between the two long periods of time when it is condemned as paradoxical or disparaged as trivial. The author of the truth usually meets with the first fate as well. – But life is short and the reach of the truth is long and long-lived: let us speak the truth.

(Written in Dresden in August 1818.)[3]

* F. H. Jacobi

Preface to the second edition

XVI

It is not to my contemporaries, it is not to my compatriots – it is to humanity itself that I entrust my now-completed work, in the confidence that humanity will find some value in it, even if this value will only gain recognition belatedly, this being the inevitable fate of all good things. It can only be for humanity, not for the generation that hurries past, caught up in the delusions of the moment, that my mind has unceasingly devoted itself to its work, almost against my will, throughout the course of a long life. Even the lack of interest[a] could not shake my faith in its value during this time; I constantly saw the false, the bad, and finally the absurd and nonsensical* enjoying general admiration and esteem, and reflected that if people who know how to recognize what is genuine and true were not so rare as to be sought in vain for twenty years together, then those who are able to produce it would not be so few that their works afterwards constitute an exception to the transitory nature of earthly things, so that XVII
we would lose the comforting prospect of posterity, which constitutes a necessary source of strength for everyone with a lofty goal. – Nobody who seriously takes on and pursues a problem[b] that does not result in material advantage can count on the sympathy[c] of his contemporaries. But in the meantime he will usually see the semblance of such a problem becoming accepted in the world and having its day: and this is as it should be. The problem itself must be pursued for its own sake or else it will fail, because intent[d] is always dangerous to insight.[e] Indeed, the whole of the history of literature testifies to the fact that everything worthwhile takes

* Hegelian philosophy

[a] *Theilnahme*
[b] *Sache*
[c] *Theilnahme*
[d] *Absicht*
[e] *Einsicht*

a long time to gain currency, particularly if its nature is instructive and not entertaining: and in the meanwhile, falseness glitters and gleams. It is difficult if not impossible to unite the problem with the semblance of the problem. But this is just the curse of this world of misery and need: everything must serve and slave for them; the world is not built to permit any noble or sublime striving – such as a striving towards light and truth – to thrive unchecked or to exist for its own sake. Rather, even if something like this could ever assert itself, and its idea be thus introduced, material interests[a] and personal goals will overpower it immediately and turn it into their own tool or mask. Accordingly, after Kant gave renewed prestige to philosophy, it was not long before this too had to become the instrument of different goals, of state goals from above and personal ones from below; – even if this was not philosophy in the strict sense, it was nonetheless its look-alike and passed for philosophy. This should come as no surprise to us, because the vast majority of people are constitutionally incapable of
XVIII entertaining any goals except material ones, and cannot even imagine any other kind. This is why to strive after truth alone is much too lofty and eccentric an aspiration than can be expected to arouse the sincere interest or real sympathy of all people, many people, or even just a few people. If, nevertheless, you see a remarkable spirit of activity (such as in Germany at the moment), a general bustle, people discussing and writing about matters philosophical, you can confidently assume that the actual first mover,[b] the hidden, driving force behind this activity, notwithstanding solemn looks and assurances, is in fact real and not ideal goals. Specifically, it is personal, official, ecclesiastical, political, and in short material interests that people have in view. Consequently, it is purely partisan interests that set the many pens of these supposed sages[c] so powerfully into motion, and so intent, not insight, is the guiding star for these noise-makers,[d] and truth is really the last thing they have on their minds. The truth does not find partisans: rather, it can make its way through this sort of philosophical mêlée as calmly and inconspicuously as through the winter night of the darkest century that was held captive by the most rigid church doctrines, where the truth was communicated like the esoteric doctrine of a few adepts, or even entrusted to parchment alone. In fact I would say that no age can be less propitious for philosophy than one in which it is shamefully misused

[a] *Interessen*
[b] *primum mobile*
[c] *Weltweisen*
[d] *Tumultuanten*