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For the griefs of love, he may be the finest among philosophers:



*The Life, 1788–1860*

1788 Arthur Schopenhauer is born in Danzig. In later years, he looks back on the event with regret: 'We can regard our life as a uselessly disturbing episode in the blissful repose of nothingness.' 'Human existence must be a kind of error,' he specifies, 'it may be said of it, "It is bad today and every day it will get worse, until the worst of all happens."' Schopenhauer's father Heinrich, a wealthy merchant, and his mother Johanna, a dizzy socialite twenty years her husband's junior, take little interest in their son, who grows into one of the greatest pessimists in the history of philosophy: 'Even as a child of six, my parents, returning from a walk one evening, found me in deep despair.'



Heinrich Schopenhauer



Johanna Schopenhauer

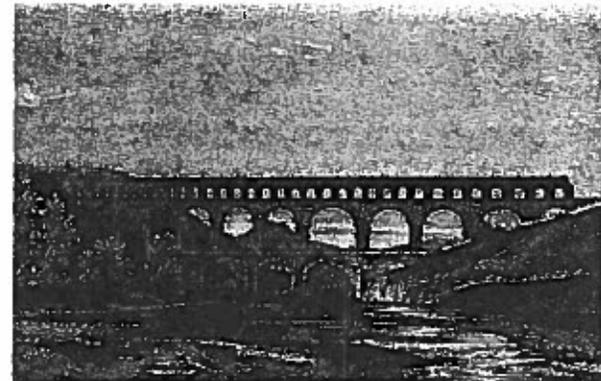
1803-5 After the apparent suicide of his father (discovered floating in a canal beside the family warehouse), the seventeen-year-old Schopenhauer is left with a fortune that ensures he will never have to work. The thought affords no comfort. He later recalls: 'In my seventeenth year, without any learned school education, I was gripped by the *misery of life* as Buddha was in his youth when he saw sickness, old age, pain and death. The truth . . . was that this world could not have been the work of an all-loving Being, but rather that of a devil, who had brought creatures into existence in order to delight in the sight of their sufferings; to this the data pointed, and the belief that it is so won the upper hand.'

Schopenhauer is sent to London to learn English at a boarding-school, Eagle House in Wimbledon. After receiving a letter from him, his friend Lorenz Meyer replies, 'I am sorry that your stay in England has induced you to hate the entire *nation*.' Despite the hatred, he acquires an almost perfect command of the language, and is often mistaken for an Englishman in conversation.



Eagle House School, Wimbledon

Schopenhauer travels through France, he visits the city of Nîmes, to which, 1,800 or so years before, Roman engineers had piped water across the majestic Pont du Gard to ensure that citizens would always have enough water to bathe in. Schopenhauer is unimpressed by what he sees of the Roman remains: 'These traces soon lead one's thoughts to the thousands of long-decomposed humans.'



Schopenhauer's mother complains of her son's passion for 'pondering on human misery'.

1809–1811 Schopenhauer studies at the university of Göttingen and decides to become a philosopher: 'Life is a sorry business, I have resolved to spend it reflecting upon it.'

On an excursion to the countryside, a male friend suggests they should attempt to meet women. Schopenhauer quashes the plan, arguing that 'life is so short, questionable and evanescent that it is not worth the trouble of major effort.'



Schopenhauer as a young man

1813 He visits his mother in Weimar. Johanna Schopenhauer has befriended the town's most famous resident, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who visits her regularly (and likes talking with Sophie, Johanna's housemaid, and Adele, Arthur's younger sister). After an initial meeting, Schopenhauer describes Goethe as 'serene, sociable, obliging, friendly: praised by his name for ever and ever!' Goethe reports, 'Young Schopenhauer appeared to me to be a strange and interesting young man.' Arthur's feelings for the writer are never wholly reciprocated. When the philosopher leaves Weimar, Goethe composes a couplet for him:

*Willst du dich des Lebens freuen,  
So musst der Welt du Werth verleihen.  
If you wish to draw pleasure out of life,  
You must attach value to the world.*

Schopenhauer is unimpressed, and in his notebook beside Goethe's tip, appends a quotation from Chamfort: '*Il vaut mieux laisser les hommes pour ce qu'ils sont, que les prendre pour ce qu'ils ne sont pas.*' (Better to accept men for what they are, than to take them to be what they are not.)

1814–15 Schopenhauer moves to Dresden and writes a thesis (*On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*). He has few friends and enters into conversations with reduced expectations: 'Sometimes I speak to men and women just as a little girl speaks to her doll. She knows, of course, that the doll does not understand her, but she creates for herself the joy of communication through a pleasant and conscious self-deception.' He becomes a regular in an Italian tavern, which serves his favourite meats – Venetian salami, truffled sausage and Parma ham.

1818 He finishes *The World as Will and Representation*, which he knows to be a masterpiece. It explains his lack of friends: 'A man of genius can hardly be sociable, for what dialogues could indeed be so intelligent and entertaining as his own monologues?'

1818–19 To celebrate the completion of his book, Schopenhauer travels to Italy. He delights in art, nature and the climate, though his mood remains fragile: 'We should always be mindful of the fact that no man is ever very far from the state in which he would readily want to seize a sword or poison in order to bring his existence to an end; and those who are far from believing this could easily be convinced of the opposite by an accident, an illness, a violent change of fortune – or of the weather.' He visits Florence, Rome, Naples and Venice and meets a number of attractive women at receptions: 'I was very fond of them – if only they would have had me.' Rejection helps to inspire a view that: 'Only the male intellect, clouded by the sexual impulse, could call the undersized, narrow-shouldered, broad-hipped, and short-legged sex the fair sex.'

1819 *The World as Will and Representation* is published. It sells 230 copies. 'Every life history is a history of suffering'; 'If only I could get rid of the illusion of regarding the generation of vipers and toads as my equals, it would be a great help to me.'

1820 Schopenhauer attempts to gain a university post in philosophy in Berlin. He offers lectures on 'The whole of philosophy, i.e. the theory of the essence of the world and of the human mind.' Five students attend. In a nearby building, his rival, Hegel, can be heard lecturing to an audience of 300. Schopenhauer assesses Hegel's philosophy: '[I]ts fundamental ideas are the absurdest fancy, a world turned upside down, a philosophical buffoonery . . . its contents being the hollowest and most senseless display of words ever lapped up by blockheads, and its presentation . . . being the most repulsive and nonsensical gibberish, recalling the rantings of a bedlamite.' The beginnings of disenchantment with academia: 'That one can be serious about philosophy has as a rule not occurred to anyone, least of all to a lecturer on philosophy, just as no one as a rule believes less in Christianity than does the Pope.'

1821 Schopenhauer falls in love with Caroline Medon, a nineteen-year-old singer. The relationship lasts intermittently for ten years, but Schopenhauer has no wish to formalize the arrangement: 'To marry means to do everything possible to become an object of disgust to each other.' He nevertheless has fond thoughts of polygamy: 'Of the many advantages of polygamy, one is that the husband would not come into such close contact with his in-laws, the fear of which at present prevents innumerable marriages. Ten mothers-in-law instead of one!'

1822 Travels to Italy for a second time (Milan, Florence, Venice). Before setting out, he asks his friend Friedrich Osann to look out for 'any mention of me in books, journals, literary periodicals and such like.' Osann does not find the task time-consuming.

1825 Having failed as an academic, Schopenhauer attempts to become a translator. But his offers to turn Kant into English and *Tristram Shandy* into German are rejected by publishers. He confides in a letter a melancholy wish to have 'a position in bourgeois

society', though will never attain one. 'If a God has made this world, then I would not like to be the God; its misery and distress would break my heart.' Fortunately, he can rely on a comfortable sense of his own worth in darker moments: 'How often must I learn . . . that in the affairs of everyday life . . . my spirit and mind are what a telescope is in an opera-house or a cannon at a hare-hunt?'

1828 Turns forty. 'After his fortieth year,' he consoles himself, 'any man of merit . . . will hardly be free from a certain touch of misanthropy.'

1831 Now forty-three, living in Berlin, Schopenhauer thinks once again of getting married. He turns his attentions to Flora Weiss, a beautiful, spirited girl who has just turned seventeen. During a boating party, in an attempt to charm her, he smiles and offers her a bunch of white grapes. Flora later confides in her diary: 'I didn't want them. I felt revolted because old Schopenhauer had touched them, and so I let them slide, quite gently, into the water behind me.' Schopenhauer leaves Berlin in a hurry: 'Life has no genuine intrinsic worth, but is kept in motion merely by want and illusion.'

1833 He settles in a modest apartment in Frankfurt am Main, a town of some 50,000 inhabitants. He describes the city, the banking centre of continental Europe, as 'a small, stiff, internally crude, municipally puffed-up, peasant-proud nation of Abderites, whom I do not like to approach'.

His closest relationships are now with a succession of poodles, who he feels have a gentleness and humility humans lack: 'The sight of any animal immediately gives me pleasure and gladdens my heart.' He lavishes affection on these poodles, addressing them as 'Sir', and takes a keen interest in animal welfare: 'The highly intelligent dog, man's truest and most faithful friend, is 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 Lord X 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.'

The philosopher adopts a rigid daily routine. He writes for three hours in the morning, plays the flute (Rossini) for an hour, then dresses in white tie for lunch in the Englischer Hof on the Rossmarkt. He has an enormous appetite, and tucks a large white napkin into his collar. He refuses to acknowledge other diners when eating, but occasionally enters into conversation over coffee. One of them describes him as 'comically disgruntled, but in fact harmless and good-naturedly gruff'.



Another reports that Schopenhauer frequently boasts of the excellent condition of his teeth as evidence that he is superior to other people, or as he puts it, superior to the 'common biped'.

After lunch, Schopenhauer retires to the library of his club, the nearby Casino Society, where he reads *The Times* – the newspaper which he feels will best inform him of the miseries of the world. In mid-afternoon, he takes a two-hour walk with his dog along

the banks of the Main, muttering under his breath. In the evening, he visits the opera or the theatre, where he is often enraged by the noise of late-comers, shufflers and coughers – and writes to the authorities urging strict measures against them. Though he has read and much admires Seneca, he does not agree with the Roman philosopher's verdict on noise: 'I have for a long time been of the opinion that the quantity of noise anyone can comfortably endure is in inverse proportion to his mental powers . . . The man who habitually slams doors instead of shutting them with the hand . . . is not merely ill-mannered, but also coarse and narrow-minded . . . We shall be quite civilized only when . . . it is no longer anyone's right to cut through the consciousness of every thinking being . . . by means of whistling, howling, bellowing, hammering, whip-cracking . . . and so on.'

1840 He acquires a new white poodle and names her Atma, after the world-soul of the Brahmins. He is attracted to Eastern religions in general and Brahmanism in particular (he reads a few pages of the Upanishads every night). He describes Brahmins as, 'the noblest and oldest of people', and threatens to sack his cleaning lady, Margaretha Schnepf, when she disregards orders not to dust the Buddha in his study.

He spends increasing amounts of time alone. His mother worries about him: "Two months in your room without seeing a single person, that is not good, my son, and saddens me, a man cannot and should not isolate himself in that manner.' He takes to sleeping for extended periods during the day: 'If life and existence were an enjoyable state, then everyone would reluctantly approach the unconscious state of sleep and would gladly rise from it again. But the very opposite is the case, for everyone very willingly goes to sleep and unwillingly gets up again.' He justifies his appetite for sleep by comparing himself to two of his favourite thinkers: 'Human beings require more sleep the more developed . . . and the more active their brain is. Montaigne relates of himself that he had always been a heavy sleeper; that he had spent a large part of his life in sleeping; and that at an advanced age he still slept from eight

to nine hours at a stretch. It is also reported of Descartes that he slept a great deal.'

1843 Schopenhauer moves to a new house in Frankfurt, number 17 Schöne Aussicht, near the river Main in the centre of town (English translation: Pretty view). He is to live in the street for the rest of his life, though in 1859, he moves to number 16 after a quarrel with his landlord over his dog.



1844 He publishes a second edition and a further volume of *The World as Will and Representation*. He remarks in the preface: 'Not to my contemporaries or my compatriots, but to mankind I consign my now complete work, confident that it will not be without value to humanity, even if this value should be recognized only tardily, as is the inevitable fate of the good in whatever form.' The work sells under 300 copies: 'Our greatest pleasure consists in being admired; but the admirers, even if there is every cause, are not very keen to express their admiration. And so the happiest man

is he who has managed sincerely to admire himself, no matter how.'

1850 Atma dies. He buys a brown poodle called Butz, who becomes his favourite poodle. When a regimental band passes his house, Schopenhauer is known to stand up in the middle of conversations and put a seat by the window from which Butz can look out. The creature is referred to by the children of the neighbourhood as 'young Schopenhauer'.

1851 He publishes a selection of essays and aphorisms, *Parerga and Paralipomena*. Much to the author's surprise, the book becomes a bestseller.

1853 His fame spreads across Europe ('the comedy of fame', as he puts it). Lectures on his philosophy are offered at the universities of Bonn, Breslau and Jena. He receives fan mail. A woman from Silesia sends him a long, suggestive poem. A man from Bohemia writes to tell him he places a wreath on his portrait every day. 'After one has spent a long life in insignificance and disregard, they come at the end with drums and trumpets and think that is something' is the response, but there is also satisfaction: 'Would anyone with a great mind ever have been able to attain his goal and create a permanent and perennial work, if he had taken as his guiding star the bobbing will-o'-the-wisp of public opinion, that is to say the opinion of small minds?' Philosophically minded Frankfurters buy poodles in homage.

1859 As fame brings more attention from women, his views on them soften. From having thought them 'suited to being the nurses and teachers of our earliest childhood precisely because they themselves are childish, silly and short-sighted, in a word, big-children, their whole lives long', he now judges that they are capable of selflessness and insight. An attractive sculptress and an admirer of his philosophy, Elizabeth Ney (a descendant of Napoleon's Maréchal), comes to Frankfurt in October and stays in his apartment for a month making a bust of him.

'She works all day at my place. When I get back from luncheon

we have coffee together, we sit together on the sofa and I feel as if I were married.'



1860 Increasing ill-health suggests the end is near: 'I can bear the thought that in a short time worms will eat away my body; but the idea of philosophy professors nibbling at my philosophy makes me shudder.' At the end of September, after a walk by the banks of the Main, he returns home, complains of breathlessness and dies, still convinced that 'human existence must be a kind of error.'

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Such was the life of a philosopher who may offer the heart unparalleled assistance.

*A contemporary love story*  
WITH SCHOPENHAUERIAN NOTES

*A* man is attempting to work on a train between Edinburgh and London. It is early in the afternoon on a warm spring day.



*Papers and a diary are on the table before him, and a book is open on the armrest. But the man has been unable to hold a coherent thought since Newcastle, when a woman entered the carriage and seated herself across the aisle. After looking impassively out of the window for a few moments, she turned her attention to a pile of magazines. She has been reading Vogue since Darlington. She reminds the man of a portrait by Christen Købke of Mrs Høegh-Guldberg (though he cannot recall either of these names), which he saw, and felt strangely moved and saddened by, in a museum in Denmark a few years before.*



But unlike Mrs Høegh-Guldberg, she has short brown hair and wears jeans, a pair of trainers and a canary-yellow V-neck sweater over a T-shirt. He notices an incongruously large digital sports-watch on her pale, freckle-dotted wrist. He imagines running his hand through her chestnut hair, caressing the back of her neck, sliding his hand inside the sleeve of her pullover, watching her fall asleep beside him, her lips slightly agape. He imagines living with her in a house in south London, in a cherry-tree-lined street. He speculates that she may be a cellist or a graphic designer, or a doctor specializing in genetic research. His mind turns over strategies for conversation. He considers asking her for the time, for a pencil, for directions to the bathroom, for reflections on the weather, for a look at one of her magazines. He longs for a train crash, in which their carriage would be thrown into one of the vast barley-fields through which they are passing. In the chaos, he would guide her safely outside, and repair with her to a nearby tent set up by the ambulance service, where they would be offered lukewarm tea and stare into each other's eyes. Years later, they would attract interest by revealing that they had met in the tragic Edinburgh Express collision. But because the train seems disinclined to derail, and though he knows it to be *louche* and absurd, the man cannot help clearing his throat and leaning over to ask the angel if she might have a spare ballpoint. It feels like jumping off the side of a very high bridge.

1. Philosophers have not traditionally been impressed: the tribulations of love have appeared too childish to warrant investigation, the subject better left to poets and hysterics. It is not for philosophers to speculate on hand-holding and scented letters. Schopenhauer was puzzled by the indifference:

We should be surprised that a matter that generally plays such an important part in the life of man has hitherto been almost entirely disregarded by philosophers, and lies before us as raw and untreated material.

The neglect seemed the result of a pompous denial of a side of life which violated man's rational self-image. Schopenhauer insisted on the awkward reality:

Love . . . interrupts at every hour the most serious occupations, and sometimes perplexes for a while even the greatest minds. It does not hesitate . . . to interfere with the negotiations of statesmen and the investigations of the learned. It knows how to slip its love-notes and ringlets even into ministerial portfolios and philosophical manuscripts . . . It sometimes demands the sacrifice of . . . health, sometimes of wealth, position and happiness.

2. Like the Gascon essayist born 255 years before him, Schopenhauer was concerned with what made man – supposedly the most rational of all creatures – less than reasonable. There was a set of Montaigne's works in the library of the apartment at Schöne Aussicht. Schopenhauer had read how reason could be dethroned by a fart, a big lunch or an ingrowing toenail, and concurred with Montaigne's view that our minds were subservient to our bodies, despite our arrogant faith in the contrary.
3. But Schopenhauer went further. Rather than alighting on loose examples of the dethronement of reason, he gave a name to a force within us which he felt invariably had precedence over reason, a force powerful enough to distort all of reason's plans and judgements, and which he termed the will-to-life (*Wille zum*

*Leben*) – defined as an inherent drive within human beings to stay alive and reproduce. The will-to-life led even committed depressives to fight for survival when they were threatened by a shipwreck or grave illness. It ensured that the most cerebral, career-minded individuals would be seduced by the sight of gurgling infants, or if they remained unmoved, that they were likely to conceive a child anyway, and love it fiercely on arrival. And it was the will-to-life that drove people to lose their reason over comely passengers encountered across the aisles of long-distance trains.

4. Schopenhauer might have resented the disruption of love (it isn't easy to proffer grapes to schoolgirls); but he refused to conceive of it as either disproportionate or accidental. It was entirely commensurate with love's function:

Why all this noise and fuss? Why all the urgency, uproar, anguish and exertion? . . . Why should such a trifle play so important a role . . . ? It is no trifle that is here in question; on the contrary, the importance of the matter is perfectly in keeping with the earnestness and ardour of the effort. The ultimate aim of all love-affairs . . . is actually more important than all other aims in man's life; and therefore it is quite worthy of the profound seriousness with which everyone pursues it.

And what is the aim? Neither communion nor sexual release, understanding nor entertainment. The romantic dominates life because:

What is decided by it is nothing less than the composition of the next generation . . . the existence and special constitution of the human race in times to come.

It is because love directs us with such force towards the second of the will-to-life's two great commands that Schopenhauer judged it the most inevitable and understandable of our obsessions.



5. The fact that the continuation of the species is seldom in our minds when we ask for a phone number is no objection to the theory. We are, suggested Schopenhauer, split into conscious and unconscious selves, the unconscious governed by the will-to-life, the conscious subservient to it and unable to learn of all its plans. Rather than a sovereign entity, the conscious mind is a partially sighted servant of a dominant, child-obsessed will-to-life:

[The intellect] does not penetrate into the secret workshop of the will's decisions. It is, of course, a confidant of the will, yet a confidant that does not get to know everything.

The intellect understands only so much as is necessary to promote reproduction – which may mean understanding very little:

[It] remains . . . much excluded from the real resolutions and secret decisions of its own will.

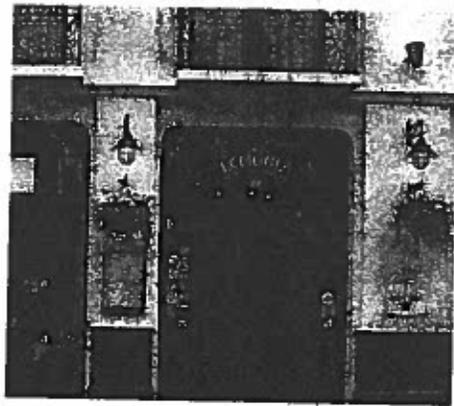
An exclusion which explains how we may consciously feel nothing more than an intense desire to see someone again, while unconsciously being driven by a force aiming at the reproduction of the next generation.

Why should such deception even be necessary? Because, for Schopenhauer, we would not reliably assent to reproduce unless we first had lost our minds.

6. The analysis surely violates a rational self-image, but at least it counters suggestions that romantic love is an avoidable departure from more serious tasks, that it is forgivable for youngsters with too much time on their hands to swoon by moonlight and

sob beneath bedclothes, but that it is unnecessary and demented for their seniors to neglect their work *because they have glimpsed a face on a train*. By conceiving of love as biologically inevitable, key to the continuation of the species, Schopenhauer's theory of the will invites us to adopt a more forgiving stance towards the eccentric behaviour to which love so often makes us subject.

**T**he man and woman are seated at a window-table in a Greek restaurant in north London. A bowl of olives lies between them, but neither can think of a way to remove the stones with requisite dignity and so they are left untouched.



*She had not been carrying a ballpoint on her, but had offered him a pencil. After a pause, she said how much she hated long train-journeys, a superfluous remark which had given him the slender encouragement he needed. She was not a cellist, nor a graphic designer, rather a lawyer specializing in corporate finance in a city firm. She was originally from Newcastle, but had been living in London for the past eight years. By the time the train pulled into Euston, he had obtained a phone number and an assent to a suggestion of dinner.*

*A waiter arrives to take their order. She asks for a salad and the swordfish. She has come directly from work, and is wearing a light-grey suit and the same watch as before.*



*They begin to talk. She explains that at weekends, her favourite activity is rock-climbing. She started at school, and has since been on expeditions to France, Spain and Canada. She describes the thrill of hanging hundreds of feet above a valley floor, and camping in the high mountains, where in the morning, icicles have formed inside the tent. Her dinner companion feels dizzy on the second floor of apartment buildings. Her other passion is dancing, she loves the energy and sense of freedom. When she can, she stays up all night. He favours proximity to a bed by eleven thirty. They talk of work. She has been involved in a patent case. A kettle designer from Frankfurt has alleged copyright infringement against a British company. The company is liable under section 60,1,a of the Patents Act of 1977.*

*He does not follow the lengthy account of a forthcoming case, but is convinced of her high intelligence and their superlative compatibility.*

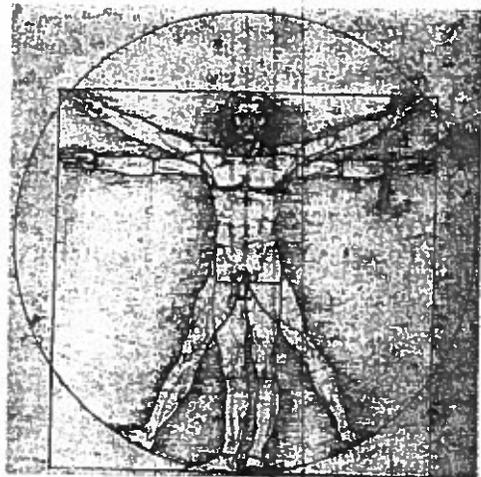
1. One of the most profound mysteries of love is 'Why him?', and 'Why her?' Why, of all the possible candidates, did our desire settle so strongly on this creature, why did we come to treasure them above all others when their dinner conversation was not always the most enlightening, nor their habits the most suitable? And why, despite good intentions, were we unable to develop a sexual interest in certain others, who were perhaps objectively as attractive and might have been more convenient to live with?
2. The choosiness did not surprise Schopenhauer. We are not free to fall in love with everyone because we cannot produce healthy children with everyone. Our will-to-life drives us towards people who will raise our chances of producing beautiful and intelligent offspring, and repulses us away from those who lower these same chances. Love is nothing but the conscious manifestation of the will-to-life's discovery of an ideal co-parent:

The moment when [two people] begin to love each other – to fancy each other, as the very apposite English expression has it – is actually to be regarded as the very first formation of a new individual.

In initial meetings, beneath the quotidian patter, the unconscious of both parties will assess whether a healthy child could one day result from intercourse:

There is something quite peculiar to be found in the deep, unconscious seriousness with which two young people of the opposite sex regard each other when they meet for the first time, the searching and penetrating glance they cast at each other, the careful inspection all the features and parts of their respective persons have to undergo. This scrutiny and examination is the meditation of the genius of the species concerning the individual possible through these two.

3. And what is the will-to-life seeking through such examination? Evidence of healthy children. The will-to-life must ensure that the next generation will be psychologically and physiologically fit enough to survive in a hazardous world, and so it seeks that children be well-proportioned in limb (neither too short nor too tall, too fat nor too thin), and stable of mind (neither too timid nor too reckless, neither too cold nor too emotional, etc.).



Since our parents made errors in their courtships, we are unlikely to be ideally balanced ourselves. We have typically come out too tall, too masculine, too feminine; our noses are large, our chins small. If such imbalances were allowed to persist, or were aggravated, the human race would, within a short time, founder in oddity. The will-to-life must therefore push us towards people who can, on account of their imperfections, cancel out our own (a large nose combined with a button nose promises a perfect nose), and hence help us restore physical and psychological balance in the next generation:

Everyone endeavours to eliminate through the other individual his own weaknesses, defects, and deviations from the type, lest they be perpetuated or even grow into complete abnormalities in the child which will be produced.

The theory of neutralization gave Schopenhauer confidence in predicting pathways of attraction. Short women will fall in love with tall men, but rarely tall men with tall women (their unconscious fearing the production of giants). Feminine men who don't like sport will often be drawn to boyish women who have short hair (and wear sturdy watches):

The neutralization of the two individualities . . . requires that the particular degree of *his* manliness shall correspond exactly to the particular degree of *her* womanliness, so that the one-sidedness of each exactly cancels that of the other.

4. Unfortunately, the theory of attraction led Schopenhauer to a conclusion so bleak, it may be best if readers about to be married left the next few paragraphs unread in order not to have to rethink their plans; namely, that a person who is highly suitable for our child is almost never (though we cannot realize it at the time because we have been blindfolded by the will-to-life) very suitable for us.

'That convenience and passionate love should go hand in hand is the rarest stroke of good fortune,' observed Schopenhauer. The lover who saves our child from having an enormous

chin or an effeminate temperament is seldom the person who will make us happy over a lifetime. The pursuit of personal happiness and the production of healthy children are two radically contrasting projects, which love maliciously confuses us into thinking of as one for a requisite number of years. We should not be surprised by marriages between people who would never have been friends:

Love ... casts itself on persons who, apart from the sexual relation, would be hateful, contemptible, and even abhorrent to the lover. But the will of the species is so much more powerful than that of the individual, that the lover shuts his eyes to all the qualities repugnant to him, overlooks everything, misjudges everything, and binds himself for ever to the object of his passion. He is thus completely infatuated by that delusion, which vanishes as soon as the will of the species is satisfied, and leaves behind a detested partner for life. Only from this is it possible to explain why we often see very rational, and even eminent, men tied to termagants and matrimonial fiends, and cannot conceive how they could have made such a choice ... A man in love may even clearly recognize and bitterly feel in his bride the intolerable faults of temperament and character which promise him a life of misery, and yet not be frightened away ... for ultimately he seeks not his interest, but that of a third person who has yet to come into existence, although he is involved in the delusion that what he seeks is his own interest.

The will-to-life's ability to further its own ends rather than our happiness may, Schopenhauer's theory implies, be sensed with particular clarity in the lassitude and tristesse that frequently befall couples immediately after love-making:

Has it not been observed how *illico post coitum cachinnus auditur Diaboli?* (Directly after copulation the devil's laughter is heard.)

So one day, a boyish woman and a girlish man will approach the altar with motives neither they, nor anyone (save a smattering of Schopenhauerians at the reception), will have fathomed.

Only later, when the will's demands are assuaged and a robust boy is kicking a ball around a suburban garden, will the ruse be discovered. The couple will part or pass dinners in hostile silence. Schopenhauer offered us a choice –

It seems as if, in making a marriage, either the individual or the interest of the species must come off badly – though he left us in little doubt as to the superior capacity of the species to guarantee its interests:

The coming generation is provided for at the expense of the present.

The man pays for dinner and asks, with studied casualness, if it might be an idea to repair to his flat for a drink. She smiles and stares at the floor. Under the table, she is folding a paper napkin into ever smaller squares. 'That would be lovely, it really would,' she says, 'but I have to get up very early to catch a flight to Frankfurt for this meeting. Five thirty or, like, even earlier. Maybe another time though. It would be lovely. Really, it would.' Another smile. The napkin disintegrates under pressure.

Despair is alleviated by a promise that she will call from Germany, and that they must meet again soon, perhaps on the very day of her return. But there is no call until late on the appointed day, when she rings from a booth at Frankfurt airport. In the background are crowds and metallic voices announcing the departure of flights to the Orient. She tells him she can see huge planes out of the window and that this place is like hell.



She says that the fucking Lufthansa flight has been delayed, that she will try to get a seat on another airline but that he shouldn't wait. There follows a pause before the worst is confirmed. Things are a little complicated in her life right now really, she goes on, she doesn't quite know what she wants, but she knows she needs space and some time, and if it is all right with him, she will be the one to call once her head is a little clearer.

1. The philosopher might have offered unflattering explanations of why we fall in love, but there was consolation for rejection – the consolation of knowing that our pain is normal. We should not feel confused by the enormity of the upset that can ensue from only a few days of hope. It would be unreasonable if a force powerful enough to push us towards child-rearing could – if it failed in its aim – vanish without devastation. Love could not induce us to take on the burden of propagating the species without promising us the greatest happiness we could imagine. To be shocked at how deeply rejection hurts is to ignore what acceptance involves. We must never allow our suffering to be compounded by suggestions that there is something odd in suffering so deeply. There would be something amiss if we didn't.
2. What is more, we are not inherently unlovable. There is nothing wrong with us *per se*. Our characters are not repellent, nor our faces abhorrent. The union collapsed because we were unfit to produce a balanced child with one particular person. There is no need to hate ourselves. One day we will come across someone who can find us wonderful and who will feel exceptionally natural and open with us (because our chin and their chin make a desirable combination from the will-to-life's point of view).
3. We should in time learn to forgive our rejectors. The break-up was not their choice. In every clumsy attempt by one person to inform another that they need more space or time, that they are reluctant to commit or are afraid of intimacy, the rejector is striving to intellectualize an essentially unconscious negative

verdict formulated by the will-to-life. Their reason may have had an appreciation of our qualities, their will-to-life did not and told them so in a way that brooked no argument – by draining them of sexual interest in us. If they were seduced away by people less intelligent than we are, we should not condemn them for shallowness. We should remember, as Schopenhauer explains, that:

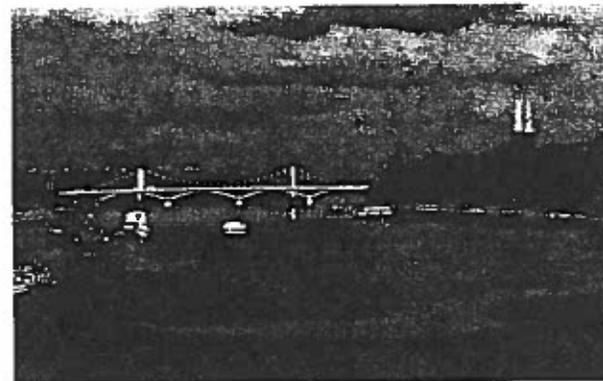
What is looked for in marriage is not intellectual entertainment, but the procreation of children.

4. We should respect the edict from nature against procreation that every rejection contains, as we might respect a flash of lightning or a lava flow – an event terrible but mightier than ourselves. We should draw consolation from the thought that a lack of love:

between a man and a woman is the announcement that what they might produce would only be a badly organized, unhappy being, wanting in harmony in itself.

We might have been happy with our beloved, but nature was not – a greater reason to surrender our grip on love.

*F*or a time, the man is beset by melancholy. At the weekend, he takes a walk in Battersea Park, and sits on a bench overlooking the Thames. He has with him a paperback edition of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, first published in Leipzig in 1774.



There are couples pushing prams and leading young children by the hand. A little girl in a blue dress covered in chocolate, points up to a plane descending towards Heathrow. 'Daddy, is God in there?' she asks, but Daddy is in a hurry and in a mood, and picks her up and says he doesn't know, as though he had been asked for directions. A four-year-old boy drives his tricycle into a shrub and wails for his mother, who has just shut her eyes on a rug spread on a tattered patch of grass. She requests that her husband assist the child. He gruffly replies that it is her turn. She snaps that it is his. He says nothing. She says he's crap and stands up. An elderly couple on an adjacent bench silently share an egg-and-cress sandwich.

1. Schopenhauer asks us not to be surprised by the misery. We should not ask for a point to being alive, in a couple or a parent.
2. There were many works of natural science in Schopenhauer's library – among them William Kirby and William Spence's *Introduction to Entomology*, François Huber's *Des Abeilles* and Cadet de Vaux's *De la taupe, de ses moeurs, de ses habitudes et des moyens de la détruire*. The philosopher read of ants, beetles, bees, flies, grasshoppers, moles and migratory birds, and observed, with compassion and puzzlement, how all these creatures displayed an ardent, senseless commitment to life. He felt particular sympathy for the mole, a stunted monstrosity dwelling in damp narrow corridors, who rarely saw the light of day and whose offspring looked like gelatinous worms – but who still did everything in its power to survive and perpetuate itself:

To dig strenuously with its enormous shovel-paws is the business of its whole life; permanent night surrounds it; it has its embryo eyes merely to avoid the light . . . what does it attain by this course of life that is full of trouble and devoid of pleasure? . . . The cares and troubles of life are out of all proportion to the yield or profit from it.

Every creature on earth seemed to Schopenhauer to be equally committed to an equally meaningless existence:

Contemplate the restless industry of wretched little ants . . . the life of most insects is nothing but a restless labour for preparing nourishment and dwelling for the future offspring that will come from their eggs. After the offspring have consumed the nourishment and have turned into the chrysalis stage, they enter into life merely to begin the same task again from the beginning . . . we cannot help but ask what comes of all of this . . . there is nothing to show but the satisfaction of hunger and sexual passion, and . . . a little momentary gratification . . . now and then, between . . . endless needs and exertions.

3. The philosopher did not have to spell out the parallels. We pursue love affairs, chat in cafés with prospective partners and have children, with as much choice in the matter as moles and ants – and are rarely any happier.



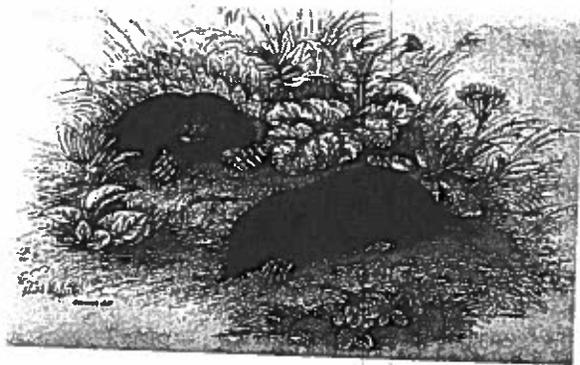
4. He did not mean to depress us, rather to free us from expectations which inspire bitterness. It is consoling, when love has let

us down, to hear that happiness was never part of the plan. The darkest thinkers may, paradoxically, be the most cheering:

There is only one inborn error, and that is the notion that we exist in order to be happy . . . So long as we persist in this inborn error . . . the world seems to us full of contradictions. For at every step, in great things and small, we are bound to experience that the world and life are certainly not arranged for the purpose of maintaining a happy existence . . . hence the countenances of almost all elderly persons wear the expression of what is called *disappointment*.

They would never have grown so disappointed if only they had entered love with the correct expectations:

What disturbs and renders unhappy . . . the age of youth . . . is the hunt for happiness on the firm assumption that it must be met with in life. From this arises the constantly deluded hope and so also dissatisfaction. Deceptive images of a vague happiness of our dreams hover before us in capriciously selected shapes and we search in vain for their original . . . Much would have been gained if through timely advice and instruction young people could have had eradicated from their minds the erroneous notion that the world has a great deal to offer them.



We do have one advantage over moles. We may have to fight for survival and hunt for partners and have children as they do, but we can in addition go to the theatre, the opera and the concert hall, and in bed in the evenings, we can read novels, philosophy and epic poems – and it is in these activities that Schopenhauer located a supreme source of relief from the demands of the will-to-life. What we encounter in works of art and philosophy are objective versions of our own pains and struggles, evoked and defined in sound, language or image. Artists and philosophers not only show us what we have felt, they present our experiences more poignantly and intelligently than we have been able; they give shape to aspects of our lives that we recognize as our own, yet could never have understood so clearly on our own. They explain our condition to us, and thereby help us to be less lonely with, and confused by it. We may be obliged to continue burrowing underground, but through creative works, we can at least acquire moments of insight into our woes, which spare us feelings of alarm and isolation (even persecution) at being afflicted by them. In their different ways, art and philosophy help us, in Schopenhauer's words, to turn pain into knowledge.

The philosopher admired his mother's friend Johann Wolfgang von Goethe because he had turned so many of the pains of love into knowledge, most famously in the novel he had published at the age of twenty-five, and which had made his name throughout Europe. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* described the unrequited love felt by a particular young man for a particular young woman (the charming Lotte, who shared Werther's taste for *The Vicar of Wakefield* and wore white dresses with pink ribbons at the sleeves),

but it simultaneously described the love affairs of thousands of its readers (Napoleon was said to have read the novel nine times). The greatest works of art speak to us without knowing of us. As Schopenhauer put it:

The ... poet takes from life that which is quite particular and individual, and describes it accurately in its individuality; but in this way he reveals the whole of human existence ... though he appears to be concerned with the particular, he is actually concerned with that which is everywhere and at all times. From this it arises that sentences, especially of the dramatic poets, even without being general apophthegms, find frequent application in real life.

Goethe's readers not only *recognized* themselves in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, they also *understood* themselves better as a result, for Goethe had clarified a range of the awkward, evanescent moments of love, moments that his readers would previously have lived through, though would not necessarily have fathomed. He laid bare certain laws of love, what Schopenhauer termed essential 'Ideas' of romantic psychology. He had, for example, perfectly captured the apparently kind - yet infinitely cruel - manner with which the person who does not love deals with the one who does. Late in the novel, tortured by his feelings, Werther breaks down in front of Lotte:

'Lotte' he cried, 'I shall never see you again!' - 'Why ever not?' she replied: 'Werther, you may and must see us again, but do be less agitated in your manner. Oh, why did you have to be born with this intense spirit, this uncontrollable passion for everything you are close to! I implore you,' she went on, taking his hand, 'be calmer. Think of the many joys your spirit, your knowledge and your gifts afford you!'

We need not have lived in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century to appreciate what is involved. There are fewer stories than there are people on earth, the plots repeated ceaselessly while the names and backdrops alter. 'The essence of art is that its one case applies to thousands,' knew Schopenhauer.

In turn, there is consolation in realizing that our case is *only* one of thousands. Schopenhauer made two trips to Florence, in 1818 and again in 1822. He is likely to have visited the Brancacci chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine, in which Masaccio had painted a series of frescos between 1425 and 1426.



The distress of Adam and Eve at leaving paradise is not theirs alone. In the faces and posture of the two figures, Masaccio has captured the essence of distress, the very Idea of distress, his fresco a universal symbol of our fallibility and fragility. We have all been expelled from the heavenly garden.

But by reading a tragic tale of love, a rejected suitor raises himself above his own situation; he is no longer one man suffering alone, singly and confusedly, he is part of a vast body of human beings who have throughout time fallen in love with other humans in the agonizing drive to propagate the species. His suffering loses a little

of its sting, it grows more comprehensible, less of an individual curse. Of a person who can achieve such objectivity, Schopenhauer remarks:

In the course of his own life and in its misfortunes, he will look less at his own individual lot than at the lot of mankind as a whole, and accordingly will conduct himself. . . more as a *knower* than as a *sufferer*.

We must, between periods of digging in the dark, endeavour always to transform our tears into knowledge.

## VI

### *Consolation for Difficulties*

Philosopher's Name (last, first). "Name of Reading." In *Readings in Philosophy*, John Herman Randall, Jr., Justus Buchler, and Evelyn Urban Shirk, Eds. New York: Barnes & Noble, Incorporated.

exactly because of the difficulty of providing in a general statement for all cases. What should be the character of the laws if rightly enacted has not yet been ascertained; on the contrary our old difficulty still remains. This only is indisputable, that the laws enacted are necessarily relative to the polity in which they exist.

## 16

### ART AND THE ART OF MUSIC \*

by

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

(1788-1860)

Not merely philosophy but also the fine arts work at bottom towards the solution of the problem of existence. For in every mind that once gives itself up to the purely objective contemplation of nature a desire has been excited, however concealed and unconscious it may be, to comprehend the true nature of things, of life and existence. For this alone has interest for the intellect as such, *i.e.*, for the pure subject of knowledge which has become free from the aims of the will; as for the subject which knows as a mere individual the aims of the will alone have interest. On this account the result of the purely objective apprehension of things is an expression more of the nature of life and existence, more an answer to the question, "What is life?" Every genuine and successful work of art answers this question in its own way with perfect correctness. But all the arts speak only the naïve and childish language of perception, not the abstract and serious language of *reflection*; their answer is therefore a fleeting image: not permanent and general knowledge. Thus for *perception* every work of art answers that question, every painting,

\* [From Bk. III, Supplement, Ch. 34, and Bk. III, Sec. 52 of *The World as Will and Idea* (1819). Translated from the German by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (1883-1886).]

poem, every scene upon the stage: music also understood more profoundly than all the rest, for in its understood with absolute directness, but which into that of the reason, the inner nature of all expresses itself. Thus all the other arts hold up to the questioner a perceptible image, and say, "Look here, this is life." Their answer, however correct it may be, will yet always afford merely a temporary, not a complete and final, satisfaction. For they always give merely a fragment, an example instead of the rule, not the whole, which can only be given in the universality of the *conception*. For this, therefore, thus for reflection and in the abstract, to give an answer which just on that account shall be permanent and suffice for always, is the task of philosophy. However, we see here upon what the relationship of philosophy to the fine arts rests, and can conclude from that to what extent the capacity of both, although in its direction and in secondary matters very different, is yet in its root the same.

Every work of art accordingly really aims at showing us life and things as they are in truth, but cannot be directly discerned by every one through the mist of objective and subjective contingencies. Art takes away this mist.

The works of the poets, sculptors, and representative artists in general contain an unacknowledged treasure of profound wisdom; just because out of them the wisdom of the nature of things itself speaks, whose utterances they merely interpret by illustrations and purer repetitions. On this account, however, every one who reads the poem or looks at the picture must certainly contribute out of his own means to bring that wisdom to light; accordingly he comprehends only so much of it as his capacity and culture admit of; as in the deep sea each sailor only lets down the lead as far as the length of the line will allow. Before a picture, as before a prince, every one must stand, waiting to see whether and what it will speak to him; and, as in the case of a prince, so here he must not himself address it, for then he would only hear himself. It follows from all this that in the works of the representative arts all truth is certainly contained, yet only *virtualiter* or *implicite*; philosophy, on the other hand, endeavours to supply the same truth *actualiter* and *explicite*, and therefore, in this sense, is related to art as wine to grapes. What it promises to supply would be, as it were, an already realised and clear gain, a firm and abiding possession; while that which proceeds from the achievements and works of art is one which has constantly to be reproduced anew. Therefore, however, it makes demands, not only upon those who produce its works, but also upon those who are to enjoy them which are discouraging and hard to

comply with. Therefore its public remains small, while that of art is large.

The co-operation of the beholder, which is referred to above, as demanded for the enjoyment of a work of art, depends partly upon the fact that every work of art can only produce its effect through the medium of the fancy; therefore it must excite this, and can never allow it to be left out of the play and remain inactive. This is a condition of the aesthetic effect, and therefore a fundamental law of all fine arts. But it follows from this that, through the work of art, everything must not be directly given to the senses, but rather only so much as is demanded to lead the fancy on to the right path; something, and indeed the ultimate thing, must always be left over for the fancy to do. Even the author must always leave something over for the reader to think; for Voltaire has very rightly said, "*Le secret d'être ennuyeux, c'est de tout dire*" ["The surest way to be a bore is to leave nothing unsaid"]. But besides this, in art the best of all is too spiritual to be given directly to the senses; it must be born in the imagination of the beholder, although begotten by the work of art. It depends upon this that the sketches of great masters often effect more than their finished pictures; although another advantage certainly contributes to this, namely, that they are completed offhand in the moment of conception; while the perfected painting is only produced through continued effort, by means of skilful deliberation and persistent intention, for the inspiration cannot last till it is completed. From the fundamental aesthetical law we are speaking of, it is further to be explained why wax figures never produce an aesthetic effect, and therefore are not properly works of fine art, although it is just in them that the imitation of nature is able to reach its highest grade. For they leave nothing for the imagination to do. Sculpture gives merely the form without the colour; painting gives the colour, but the mere appearance of the form; thus both appeal to the imagination of the beholder. The wax figure, on the other hand, gives all, form and colour at once; whence arises the appearance of reality, and the imagination is left out of account. Poetry, on the contrary, appeals indeed to the imagination alone, which it sets in action by means of mere words.

An arbitrary playing with the means of art without a proper knowledge of the end is, in every art, the fundamental characteristic of the dabbler. Such a man shows himself in the pillars that support nothing, aimless volutes, juttings and projections of bad architecture, in the meaningless runs and figures, together with the aimless noise of bad music, in the jingling of the rhymes of senseless poetry. . . .

. . . A work of art which has proceeded from mere distinct conceptions is always ungenueine. If now, in considering a work of plastic

art, or in reading a poem, or in hearing a piece of music (which aims at describing something definite), we see, through all the rich materials of art, the distinct, limited, cold, dry conception shine out, and at last come to the front, the conception which was the kernel of this work, the whole notion of which consequently consisted in the distinct thinking of it, and accordingly is absolutely exhausted by its communication, we feel disgusted and indignant, for we see ourselves deceived and cheated out of our interest and attention. We are only perfectly satisfied by the impression of a work of art when it leaves something which, with all our thinking about it, we cannot bring down to the distinctness of conception. The mark of that hybrid origin from mere conceptions is that the author of a work of art could, before he set about it, give in distinct words what he intended to present; for then it would have been possible to attain his whole end through these words. Therefore it is an undertaking as unworthy as it is absurd if, as has often been tried at the present day, one seeks to reduce a poem of Shakspeare's or Goethe's to the abstract truth which it was its aim to communicate. Certainly the artist ought to think in the arranging of his work; but only that thought which was *perceived* before it was thought has afterwards, in its communication, the power of animating or rousing, and thereby becomes imperishable. We shall not refrain from observing here that certainly the work which is done at a stroke, like the sketches of painters already referred to, the work which is completed in the inspiration of its first conception, and as it were unconsciously dashed off, like the melody which comes entirely without reflection, and quite as if by inspiration, and finally, also the lyrical poem proper, the mere song, in which the deeply felt mood of the present, and the impression of the surroundings, as if involuntarily, pours itself forth in words, whose metre and rhyme come about of their own accord—that all these, I say, have the great advantage of being purely the work of the ecstasy of the moment, the inspiration, the free movement of genius, without any admixture of intention and reflection; hence they are through and through delightful and enjoyable, without shell and kernel, and their effect is much more inevitable than that of the greatest works of art, of slower and more deliberate execution. In all the latter, thus in great historical paintings, in long epic poems, great operas, &c., reflection, intention, and deliberate selection has had an important part; understanding, technical skill, and routine must here fill up the gaps which the conception and inspiration of genius has left, and must mix with these all kinds of necessary supplementary work as cement of the only really genuinely brilliant parts. This explains why all such works, only excepting the perfect masterpieces of the very greatest masters

(as, for example, "Hamlet," "Faust," the opera of "Don Juan"), inevitably contain an admixture of something insipid and wearisome, which in some measure hinders the enjoyment of them. Proofs of this are the "Messiah," "*Gerusalemme liberata*," even "Paradise Lost" and the "Æneid"; and Horace already makes the bold remark, "*Quandoque dormitat bonus Homerus*" ["Even the good Homer is sometimes caught napping"]. But that this is the case is the consequence of the limitation of human powers in general.

The mother of the useful arts is necessity; that of the fine arts superfluity. As their father, the former have understanding; the latter genius, which is itself a kind of superfluity, that of the powers of knowledge beyond the measure which is required for the service of the will.

The nature of man consists in this, that his will strives, is satisfied and strives anew, and so on for ever. Indeed, his happiness and well-being consist simply in the quick transition from wish to satisfaction, and from satisfaction to a new wish. For the absence of satisfaction is suffering, the empty longing for a new wish, languor, *ennui*. And corresponding to this the nature of melody is a constant digression and deviation from the key-note in a thousand ways, not only to the harmonious intervals to the third and dominant, but to every tone, to the dissonant sevenths and to the superfluous degrees; yet there always follows a constant return to the key-note. In all these deviations melody expresses the multifarious efforts of will, but always its satisfaction also by the final return to an harmonious interval, and still more, to the key-note. The composition of melody, the disclosure in it of all the deepest secrets of human willing and feeling, is the work of genius, whose action, which is more apparent here than anywhere else, lies far from all reflection and conscious intention, and may be called an inspiration. The conception is here, as everywhere in art, unfruitful. The composer reveals the inner nature of the world, and expresses the deepest wisdom in a language which his reason does not understand; as a person under the influence of mesmerism tells things of which he has no conception when he awakes. Therefore in the composer, more than in any other artist, the man is entirely separated and distinct from the artist. Even in the explanation of this wonderful art, the concept shows its poverty and limitation. I shall try, however, to complete our analogy. As quick transition from wish to satisfaction, and from satisfaction to a new wish, is happiness and well-being, so quick melodies without great deviations are cheerful; slow melodies, striking painful discords, and only winding back through many bars to the key-note are, as analogous to the delayed and hardly won satisfaction, sad.

The delay of the new excitement of will, languor, could have no other expression than the sustained key-note, the effect of which would soon be unbearable; very monotonous and unmeaning melodies approach this effect. The short intelligible subjects of quick dance-music seem to speak only of easily attained common pleasure. On the other hand, the *Allegro maestoso*, in elaborate movements, long passages, and wide deviations, signifies a greater, nobler effort towards a more distant end, and its final attainment. The *Adagio* speaks of the pain of a great and noble effort which despises a trifling happiness. But how wonderful is the effect of the *minor* and *major*! How astounding that the change of half a tone, the entrance of a minor third instead of a major, at once and inevitably forces upon us an anxious painful feeling, from which again we are just as instantaneously delivered by the major. The *Adagio* lengthens in the minor the expression of the keenest pain, and becomes even a convulsive wail. Dance-music in the minor seems to indicate the failure of that trifling happiness which we ought rather to despise, seems to speak of the attainment of a lower end with toil and trouble. The inexhaustibleness of possible melodies corresponds to the inexhaustibleness of Nature in difference of individuals, physiognomies, and courses of life. The transition from one key to an entirely different one, since it altogether breaks the connection with what went before, is like death, for the individual ends in it; but the will which appeared in this individual lives after him as before him, appearing in other individuals, whose consciousness, however, has no connection with his.

But it must never be forgotten, in the investigation of all these analogies I have pointed out, that music has no direct, but merely an indirect relation to them, for it never expresses the phenomenon, but only the inner nature, the in-itself of all phenomena, the will itself. It does not therefore express this or that particular and definite joy, this or that sorrow, or pain, or horror, or delight, or merriment, or peace of mind; but joy, sorrow, pain, horror, delight, merriment, peace of mind *themselves*, to a certain extent in the abstract, their essential nature, without accessories, and therefore without their motives. Yet we completely understand them in this extracted quintessence. Hence it arises that our imagination is so easily excited by music, and now seeks to give form to that invisible yet actively moved spirit-world which speaks to us directly, and clothe it with flesh and blood, *i.e.*, to embody it in an analogous example. This is the origin of the song with words, and finally of the opera, the text of which should therefore never forsake that subordinate position in order to make itself the chief thing and the music a mere means of expressing it, which is a great misconception and a piece of utter

perversity; for music always expresses only the quintessence of life and its events, never these themselves, and therefore their differences do not always affect it. It is precisely this universality, which belongs exclusively to it, together with the greatest determinateness, that gives music the high worth which it has as the panacea for all our woes. Thus, if music is too closely united to the words, and tries to form itself according to the events, it is striving to speak a language which is not its own. No one has kept so free from this mistake as Rossini; therefore his music speaks *its own language* so distinctly and purely that it requires no words, and produces its full effect when rendered by instruments alone.

According to all this, we may regard the phenomenal world, or nature, and music as two different expressions of the same thing, which is therefore itself the only medium of their analogy, so that a knowledge of it is demanded in order to understand that analogy. Music, therefore, if regarded as an expression of the world, is in the highest degree a universal language, which is related indeed to the universality of concepts, much as they are related to the particular things. Its universality, however, is by no means that empty universality of abstraction, but quite of a different kind, and is united with thorough and distinct definiteness. . . . All possible efforts, excitements, and manifestations of will, all that goes on in the heart of man and that reason includes in the wide, negative concept of feeling, may be expressed by the infinite number of possible melodies, but always in the universal, in the mere form, without the material, always according to the thing-in-itself, not the phenomenon, the inmost soul, as it were, of the phenomenon, without the body. This deep relation which music has to the true nature of all things also explains the fact that suitable music played to any scene, action, event, or surrounding seems to disclose to us its most secret meaning; and appears as the most accurate and distinct commentary upon it. This is so truly the case, that whoever gives himself up entirely to the impression of a symphony, seems to see all the possible events of life and the world take place in himself, yet if he reflects, he can find no likeness between the music and the things that passed before his mind. For, as we have said, music is distinguished from all the other arts by the fact that it is not a copy of the phenomenon . . . but is the direct copy of the will itself, and therefore exhibits itself as the metaphysical to everything physical in the world, and as the thing-in-itself to every phenomenon. We might, therefore, just as well call the world embodied music as embodied will; and this is the reason why music makes every picture, and indeed every scene, of real life and of the world, at once appear with higher significance, certainly all the more in pro-

portion as its melody is analogous to the inner spirit of the given phenomenon. It rests upon this that we are able to set a poem to music as a song, or a perceptible representation as a pantomime, or both as an opera. Such particular pictures of human life, set to the universal language of music, are never bound to it or correspond to it with stringent necessity; but they stand to it only in the relation of an example chosen at will to a general concept. In the determinateness of the real, they represent that which music expresses in the universality of mere form. For melodies are to a certain extent, like general concepts, an abstraction from the actual. This actual world, then, the world of particular things, affords the object of perception, the special and individual, the particular case, both to the universality of the concepts and to the universality of the melodies. But these two universalities are in a certain respect opposed to each other; for the concepts contain particulars only as the first forms abstracted from perception, as it were, the separated shell of things; thus they are, strictly speaking, *abstracta*; music, on the other hand, gives the inmost kernel which precedes all forms, or the heart of things. . . . To the universal significance of a melody to which a poem has been set, it is quite possible to set other equally arbitrarily selected examples of the universal expressed in this poem corresponding to the significance of the melody in the same degree. This is why the same composition is suitable to many verses; and this is also what makes the *vaudeville* possible. But that in general a relation is possible between a composition and a perceptible representation rests, as we have said, upon the fact that both are simply different expressions of the same inner being of the world. When now, in the particular case, such a relation is actually given, that is to say, when the composer has been able to express in the universal language of music the emotions of will which constitute the heart of an event, then the melody of the song, the music of the opera, is expressive. But the analogy discovered by the composer between the two must have proceeded from the direct knowledge of the nature of the world unknown to his reason, and must not be an imitation produced with conscious intention by means of conceptions, otherwise the music does not express the inner nature of the will itself, but merely gives an inadequate imitation of its phenomenon. All specially imitative music does this; for example, "The Seasons," by Haydn; also many passages of his "Creation," in which phenomena of the external world are directly imitated; also all battle-pieces. Such music is entirely to be rejected.

The unutterable depth of all music by virtue of which it floats through our consciousness as the vision of a paradise firmly believed in yet ever distant from us, and by which also it is so fully

understood and yet so inexplicable, rests on the fact that it restores to us all the emotions of our inmost nature, but entirely without reality and far removed from their pain. So also the seriousness which is essential to it, which excludes the absurd from its direct and peculiar province, is to be explained by the fact that its object is not the idea, with reference to which alone deception and absurdity are possible; but its object is directly the will, and this is essentially the most serious of all things, for it is that on which all depends. How rich in content and full of significance the language of music is, we see from the repetitions, as well as the *Da capo*, the like of which would be unbearable in works composed in a language of words, but in music are very appropriate and beneficial, for, in order to comprehend it fully, we must hear it twice.

In the whole of this exposition of music I have been trying to bring out clearly that it expresses in a perfectly universal language, in a homogeneous material, mere tones, and with the greatest determinateness and truth, the inner nature, the in-itself of the world, which we think under the concept of will, because will is its most distinct manifestation. Further, according to my view and contention, philosophy is nothing but a complete and accurate repetition or expression of the nature of the world in very general concepts, for only in such is it possible to get a view of that whole nature which will everywhere be adequate and applicable. Thus, whoever has followed me and entered into my mode of thought, will not think it so very paradoxical if I say, that supposing it were possible to give a perfectly accurate, complete explanation of music, extending even to particulars, that is to say, a detailed repetition in concepts of what it expresses, this would also be a sufficient repetition and explanation of the world in concepts, or at least entirely parallel to such an explanation, and thus it would be the true philosophy.

## 17

## REFLECTIONS ON THE GOOD OF MAN \*

by

BENEDICT SPINOZA

(1632-1677)

## I

After experience had taught me that all the usual surroundings of social life are vain and futile; seeing that none of the objects of my fears contained in themselves anything either good or bad, except in so far as the mind is affected by them, I finally resolved to inquire whether there might be some real good having power to communicate itself, which would affect the mind singly, to the exclusion of all else: whether, in fact, there might be anything of which the discovery and attainment would enable me to enjoy continuous, supreme, and unending happiness. I say "I finally resolved," for at first sight it seemed unwise willingly to lose hold on what was sure for the sake of something then uncertain. I could see the benefits which are acquired through fame and riches, and that I should be obliged to abandon the quest of such objects, if I seriously devoted myself to the search for something different and new. I perceived that if true happiness chanced to be placed in the former I should necessarily miss it; while if, on the other hand, it were not so placed, and I gave them my whole attention, I should equally fail.

I therefore debated whether it would not be possible to arrive at the new principle, or at any rate at a certainty concerning its existence, without changing the conduct and usual plan of my life; with this end in view I made many efforts, but in vain. For the ordinary surroundings of life which are esteemed by men (as their actions testify) to be the highest good, may be classed under the three heads—Riches, Fame, and the Pleasures of Sense: with these three the mind is so absorbed that it has little power to reflect on any different good. By sensual pleasure the mind is enthralled to

\* [The first of the three sections is from *On the Improvement of the Understanding* (1677); the second, from Part IV of the *Ethics* (1677); the third, from Ch. 4 of the *Theological Political Treatise* (1670). All translated from the Latin by R. H. M. Elwes (1883).]