

## The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer

Introduction by Robert L. Wicks (2020)

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1831) is popularly known as a “pessimist,” a characterization that refers commonly to those who harbor a downbeat and defeatist attitude of resignation when hope should still remain alive. His work can induce this interpretation, for he indeed states that it would have been better in the first place had this world never existed. Schopenhauer’s practical message, though, is to do one’s best to live at peace, both with oneself and others; to feel compassion for other living things; to appreciate the beauty of art and music; to try to rise more objectively and tranquilly above the petty disputes, desires, and concerns that tend to absorb the lives of so many; to apprehend that we are all essentially of the same substance and endure the same kinds of sufferings; and, ultimately, to achieve a transcendent state of consciousness of such profundity that it renders into unimportance the ordinary spatio-temporal world in which we live, laugh, suffer, and die.

Schopenhauer stands distinctively among nineteenth-century philosophers for his honest sensitivity to the human condition and his culturally sophisticated manner of expressing hope for an enhanced understanding of ourselves, other people, and the world around us. Born in 1788, he was twelve years old at the turn of the century, and, as a highly intelligent, avid learner with a strong sense of originality, he published his magnum opus, *The World as Will and Representation* in 1818, by the time he had reached the age of thirty. A quarter of a century later, he published a second, complementary volume to this work, and, in 1851, nine years before his death, another two-volume work, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, which precipitated his long-awaited fame.

The second volume of *The World as Will and Representation* appeared in 1844, the year, coincidentally, in which Friedrich Nietzsche was born, whose philosophy was notably influenced by his reading of Schopenhauer when in his early twenties. At the end of his own period of intellectual productivity, after developing a contrasting outlook that prescribed an unconditional affirmation of life, Nietzsche looked back on Schopenhauer’s philosophy and described it memorably in his own autobiographical work, *Ecce Homo* (1888), as pervaded by a “cadaverous perfume.” In its funereal suggestions of death, beauty, stillness, and the macabre, Nietzsche’s phrase is moderately suitable, for Schopenhauer referred to the daily world as a phantasmagoria, invoking the image of the early horror theaters called “phantasmagorias,” initially popular in Paris of the 1790s, that featured magic lanterns whose painted glass slides projected upon darkened walls images of demons, ghosts, and skeletons to scores of terrifically astonished audiences.

Schopenhauer’s vision of the world can stimulate scenes of carnival nights, Halloween costumes, and Gothic horror stories—it is not pure coincidence that Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was published in 1818, the same year as *The World as Will and Representation*—but he is serious

about how we often fail to appreciate the suffering of others. His philosophy cannot be understood without comprehending how the experience of compassion allows the exceedingly painful nature of life to touch us first-hand. As an ideal, he presents us with an image of Jesus as someone who, as some describe him, absorbed the depth of everyone's suffering by shouldering the totality of the world's sins. Schopenhauer also brings us to a beachhead in Java, where hundreds of giant turtles emerge yearly from the water to lay their eggs only to be torn apart by packs of wild dogs. As a paradigm, he holds up the image of the bulldog ant, which, when cut in half, viciously attacks itself, with head and tail fighting each other to the death.

Such is the cannibalistic nature of life for Schopenhauer, where every living being is the living grave of thousands of others. As a lesson on how disappointment is concealed in our most powerful drive to reproduce and preserve ourselves, he recalls the story of a man hopelessly consumed with a passionate attraction for a particular woman, who discovers at the culmination of his seduction that the shapely body beneath her garments had been hideously consumed by cancer. Shaken to the core and alienated from his fleshly desires, the man subsequently became a monk.

Schopenhauer grew up in an affluent family—his father was a wealthy merchant—and he traveled throughout Europe at an early age. Having a more reflective and sensitive nature, impressing him indelibly during his travels was the widespread suffering he witnessed for it quickly led him to question the existence of God and the meaning of human life. His philosophy consequently speaks to us all: he does not dwell on refined conceptual technicalities or the analysis of life's merely local aspects; his concern is with the nature of existence and, as he put it, solving the riddle of the world. Religious thought inevitably enters into his reflections, in particular that of Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism—a religion whose aim is the enlightened release from suffering through the minimization of desire. [...]

Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory looks into both the past and the future. Continuing in the long classical tradition that associates beauty with idealized forms, his account of the visual and verbal arts reinforces how beauty is aligned with perfection and transcendence. Anticipating what was to come, his theory of music as the formal expression of human feeling stands among the foundations of modern music, having inspired composers such as Richard Wagner, Johannes Brahms, Antonín Dvořák, Gustav Mahler, and Arnold Schönberg.

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## **Western Philosophy: An Anthology, 2nd Edition**

***Edited by John Cottingham***

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### **SCHOPENHAUER: MANIFESTATIONS OF WILL**

[Many thinkers in the Western tradition argued for] *a conception of the mental and the physical realms as somehow opposed, or in tension. Some philosophers attempted to overcome the tension by reducing the mental to the physical. For Schopenhauer, it makes no sense to talk of a world 'out there' independently of the 'representations' of the mind; the phenomenal world, the world we experience, is world as 'idea' or 'representation' (Vorstellung). But Schopenhauer proceeds to ground this framework in a highly distinctive theory of his own: all phenomena - whether those which we observe in the world around us, or those which we are aware of in our own mental operations - are merely manifestations of the underlying reality that is will. The philosophy of Immanuel Kant, which strongly influenced Schopenhauer, had stressed the role of the mind in interpreting phenomena, but had left the nature of the ultimate reality behind those phenomena (the 'thing in itself') unknown and unknowable (see above, Part II, extract 8). Schopenhauer argues, by contrast, that each of us, in the conscious awareness we have of what is going on inside us, is directly in touch with the ultimate basis - Will - on which all phenomena, or 'representations' are founded.*

*For Schopenhauer, a correct account of the phenomenal world will include reference to my body and its workings (and indeed bodies in general): as is made clear in the following extract, Schopenhauer firmly rejects the notion that we are incorporeal entities (like a 'winged cherub without a body'). So what is the relationship between these physical workings and the activities of the will?*

*Schopenhauer proposes an account of the relationship between body and mind that is strongly influenced by Spinoza: 'the act of the will and the movement of the body are not two things, but one thing' (compare Spinoza, extract 6, above). For Schopenhauer, we are directly and introspectively aware of the activity or force of our will, and that selfsame event is represented in physiological terms (for example as a series of occurrences in the nervous system). The notion that there is a single event here, but, in Schopenhauer's words, 'given in two entirely different ways' is an extremely suggestive one.*

*From Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea [Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, 1819], Trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Routledge, 1883), extracts from Vol. I, Bk 2, §§ 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23.*

We can never arrive at the real nature of things from the outside. However much we investigate, we can never reach anything but images and names. We are like a man who goes round a castle seeking in vain for an entrance, and sometimes sketching all the facades. And yet this is the method that has been followed by all philosophers before me. In fact, the meaning for which we seek of that world which is present to us only as our idea, for the transition from the world as mere idea of the knowing subject to whatever it may be besides this, would never be found if the investigator himself were nothing more than the pure

knowing subject (a winged cherub without a body). But he is himself rooted in that world; he finds himself in it as an individual, that is to say his knowledge, which is the necessary supporter of the whole world as idea, is none the less always given through the medium of a body, whose affections are the starting-point for the understanding in its perception of that world. His body is for the pure knowing subject an idea like every other idea, an object among objects. Its movements and actions are so far known to him in precisely the same way as the changes of all other perceived objects, and would be just as strange and incomprehensible to him if their meaning were not explained for him in an entirely different way. Otherwise he would see his actions follow upon given motives with the constancy of a law of nature, just as the changes of other objects follow upon causes, stimuli or motives. But he would not understand the influence of the motives; any more than the connection between every other affect which he sees and its cause. He would then call the inner nature of these manifestations and actions of his body which he did not understand a force, a quality or a character as he pleased, but he would have no further insight into it. But all this is not the case; indeed, the answer to the riddle is given to the subject of knowledge who appears as an individual, and the answer is will. This and this alone gives him the key to his own existence, reveals to him the significance, shows him the inner mechanism of his being, of his action, his movements.

The body is given in two entirely different ways to the subject of knowledge, which becomes an individual only through his identity with it. It is given as an idea in the perception of the understanding, as an object among objects and subject to the laws of objects. And it is also given in quite a different way, as that which is immediately known to everyone, and is signified by the word will. Every true act of his will is also at once and without exception a movement of his body. The act of will and the movement of the body are not two different things objectively known, which the bond of causality unites; they do not stand in the relation of cause and effect; they are one and the same but they are given in entirely different ways - on the one hand immediately, and on the other in perception for the understanding. The action of the body is nothing but the act of the will objectified, i.e. passed into perception. It will appear that this is true of every movement of the body, not merely those which follow upon motives, but also involuntary movements which follow upon mere stimuli, and indeed that the whole body is nothing but objectified will, i.e. will become idea. All this will be proved and become clear in the course of this work . . .

If every action of my body is the manifestation of an act of will in which my will itself in general, and as a whole, thus my character, expresses itself under given motives, manifestation of the will must be the inevitable condition and presupposition of every action. For the fact of its manifestation cannot depend upon something which does not exist directly and only through it, which consequently is for it merely accidental, and through which its manifestation itself would be merely accidental. Now that condition is just the whole body itself. Thus the body itself must be manifestation of the will, and it must be related to my will as a whole, that is to my intelligible character, as the particular action of the body is related to the particular action of the will. The

whole body then must be simply my will become visible, must be my will itself, so far as this is object of perception . . .

Whoever has gained from all these expositions a knowledge in the abstract, and therefore clear and certain, of what everyone knows directly and in the concrete, i.e. as feeling, a knowledge that his will is the real inner nature of his phenomenal being, which manifests itself to him as an idea . . . will find that of itself it affords him the key to the knowledge of the inmost being of the whole of nature. For he now transfers it to all those phenomena which are not given to him, like his own phenomenal existence, both in direct and indirect knowledge, but only in the latter, thus entirely one-sidedly, as idea alone. He will recognize this will of which we are speaking not only in those phenomenal existences which exactly resemble his own, in men and animals as their inmost nature, but the course of reflecting will lead him to recognize the force which germinates and vegetates in the plant, and indeed the force through which the crystal is formed, that by which the magnet turns to the north pole, the force whose shock he experienced from the contact of two different kinds of metal, the force which appears in the elective affinities of matter as repulsion and attraction, decomposition and combination, and lastly even gravitation, which acts so powerfully throughout matter, draws the stone to the earth and the earth to the sun - all these, I say, he will recognize as different only in their phenomenal existence, but in their nature as identical, as that which is directly known to him so intimately and so much better than anything else, and which in its most distinct manifestation is called will.

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Hitherto it was not recognized that every kind of active and operating force in nature is essentially identical with will, and therefore the multifarious kinds of phenomena were not seen to be merely different species of the same genus, but were treated as heterogeneous. Consequently there could be no word to denote the concept of this genus. I therefore name the genus after its most important species, the direct knowledge of which lies nearer to us and guides us to the indirect knowledge of all other species. But whoever is incapable of carrying out the required extension of the concept will remain involved in a permanent misunderstanding. For by the word will he understands only that species of it which has hitherto been exclusively denoted by it, the will which is guided by knowledge, and whose manifestation follows only upon motives, and indeed merely abstract motives, and thus takes place under the guidance of reason. This, we have seen, is only the most prominent example of the manifestation of will. We must now distinctly separate in thought the inmost essence of this manifestation which is known to us directly, and then transfer it to all the weaker, less distinct manifestations of the same nature, and thus we shall accomplish the desired extension of the concept of will. From another point of view, I should be equally misunderstood by anyone who thought that it is all the same in the end whether we denote this inner nature of all phenomena by the word will or by any other. This would be the case if the thing in itself were something whose existence we merely inferred, and thus know indirectly and only in the abstract. Then indeed we might call it what we pleased; the name would stand merely as the symbol of an unknown quantity. But the word will, which like a magic spell discloses to us the inmost being of everything in nature, is by no means an unknown

quantity, something arrived at only by inference, but is fully and immediately comprehended, and is so familiar to us that we can know and understand what will is far better than anything else whatever. The concept of will has hitherto commonly been subordinated to that of force, but I reverse the matter entirely, and desire that every force in nature should be thought as will. It must not be supposed that this is mere verbal quibbling of no consequence; rather it is of the greatest significance and importance. For at the foundation of the concept of force, as of all other concepts, there ultimately lies the knowledge in sense perception of the objective world, that is to say, the phenomenon, the idea; and the concept is constructed out of this. It is an abstraction from the province in which cause and effect reign, i.e. from ideas of perception, and means just the causal nature of causes at the point at which this causal nature is not further causally explicable, but is the necessary presupposition of all causal explanation. The concept of the will, on the other hand, is of all possible concepts the only one which has its source not in the phenomenal, not in the mere idea of perception, but comes from within, and proceeds from the most immediate consciousness of each of us, in which each of us knows his own individuality, according to its nature, immediately, apart from all form, even that of subject and object, and which at the same time is this individuality; for here the subject and the object of knowledge are one. If, therefore, we refer the concept of force to that of will, we have in fact referred the less known to what is infinitely better known - indeed to the one thing that is really immediately and fully known to us - and have very greatly extended our knowledge. If, on the contrary, we subsume the concept of will under that of force, as has hitherto always been done, we renounce the only immediate knowledge which we have of the inner nature of the world, for we allow it to disappear in a concept which is abstracted from the phenomenal and with which we can therefore never go beyond the phenomenal . . .

If we observe the strong and unceasing impulse with which the waters hurry to the ocean, the persistency with which the magnet turns ever to the north pole, the readiness with which iron flies to the magnet, the eagerness with which the electric poles seek to be reunited, and which, just like human desire, is increased by obstacles; if we see the crystal quickly and suddenly take form with such wonderful regularity of construction, which is clearly only a perfectly definite and accurately determined impulse in different directions, seized and retained by crystallization; if we observe the choice with which bodies repel and attract each other, combine and separate, when they are set free in a fluid state, and emancipated from the bounds of rigidity; lastly, if we feel directly how a burden which hampers our body by its gravitation towards the earth unceasingly presses and strains upon it in pursuit of its one tendency; if we observe all this, I say, it will require no great effort of the imagination to recognize, even at so great a distance, our own nature. That which in us pursues its ends by the light of knowledge, but here in the weakest of its manifestations only strives dumbly and blindly in a one-sided and unchangeable manner, must yet in both cases come under the name of will. For it is everywhere one and the same, just as the first dim light of dawn must share the name of sunlight with the rays of the full midday. The name will denote that which is the inner nature of everything in the world, and the kernel of every phenomenon.

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## SCHOPENHAUER: LIFE AS A MEANINGLESS STRUGGLE

[The vast majority of thinkers from antiquity through the Enlightenment] *all suppose that the conditions for a worthwhile human life are not beyond our reach. As we move forward to the work of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, in the mid-nineteenth century, we see an altogether bleaker and more pessimistic picture. Schopenhauer's general picture of reality regards the will as the fundamental basis of all the phenomena in the universe (see Part IV, extract 7, above); and, as shown in the following extract, he draws out the implications of this for human life. The human organism, like everything else in the world, is characterized by an elemental striving; yet because we are mortal, it is inevitable that all our strivings will in the end come to nothing: 'this most perfect manifestation of the will to live, the human organism, with the cunning and complex working of its machinery, must fall to dust and yield up itself and all its strivings to extinction.'* The conclusion Schopenhauer draws is that *'the whole struggle of this will [is] in its very essence barren and unprofitable', and hence that 'human life must be some kind of mistake'.*

Several questions might be raised about this. One might object to Schopenhauer's basic premise: *do we have to concede that all existence, including our own, boils down to a kind of raw struggling and striving? Admittedly, it is clear that without certain basic drives (for example, to eat and to reproduce), all animal existence would soon come to an end; but cannot the life that is maintained in this way be directed towards activities and goals that are rewarding and fulfilling, and which therefore have genuine value? Schopenhauer's answer to this is that 'even when [a man's needs] are satisfied, all he obtains is a state of painlessness, where nothing remains to him but abandonment to boredom. This is direct proof that existence has no real value in itself; for what is boredom but the feeling of the emptiness of life?'* Here we see the seeds of the 'absurdist' philosophy developed by some later writers in the twentieth century (see for example extract 9, below, by Albert Camus): *humans are condemned to an endless struggle, which by its nature cannot ever achieve final success. Critics of Schopenhauer's position will no doubt want to put pressure on his claim that it is 'only distance and difficulties to be overcome [that] make our goal look as if it would satisfy us - an illusion which vanishes when we reach it'. The claim here - that the hope of genuine satisfaction is always illusory - may seem to have appeal only for an already depressive temperament; nevertheless, there is no gainsaying the power Schopenhauer's vision has to disturb us, with its stark message of unavoidable futility lurking at the heart of human existence.*

*From Arthur Schopenhauer, Parerga und Paralipomena [1851], vol. II, ch. 2. Trans. T. Bailey Saunders in Schopenhauer, Studies in Pessimism (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1900), ch. 2; with minor modifications.*

This vanity finds expression in the whole way in which things exist; in the infinite nature of Time and Space, as opposed to the finite nature of the individual in both; in the ever-passing present moment as the only mode of actual existence; in the interdependence and relativity of all things; in continual Becoming without ever Being; in constant wishing and never being satisfied; in the long battle which forms the history of life, where every effort is checked by difficulties, and stopped until they are overcome. Time is that in which all things pass away; it is merely the form under which the will to live - the thing-in-itself and therefore imperishable - has revealed to it that its efforts are in vain; it is that agent by which at every moment all things in our hands become as nothing, and lose any real value they possess.

That which has been exists no more; it exists as little as that which has never been. But of everything that exists you must say, in the next moment, that it has been. Hence something of great importance now past is inferior to something of little importance now present, in that the latter is a reality, and related to the former as something to nothing.

A man finds himself, to his great astonishment, suddenly existing, after thousands and thousands of years of non-existence: he lives for a little while; and then, again, comes an equally long period when he must exist no more. The heart rebels against this, and feels that it cannot be true. The crudest intellect cannot speculate on such a subject without having a presentiment that Time is something ideal in its nature. This ideality of Time and Space is the key to every true system of metaphysics; because it provides for quite another order of things than is to be met with in the domain of nature. This is why Kant is so great.

Of every event in our life we can say only for one moment that it is; forever after, that it was. Every evening we are poorer by a day. It might, perhaps, make us mad to see how rapidly our short span of time ebbs away; if it were not that in the furthest depths of our being we are secretly conscious of our share in the exhaustible spring of eternity, so that we can always hope to find life in it again.

Consideration of the kind touched on above might, indeed, lead us to embrace the belief that the greatest wisdom is to make the enjoyment of the present the supreme object of life; because that is the only reality, all else being merely the play of thought. On the other hand, such a course might just as well be called the greatest folly: for that which in the next moment exists no more, and vanishes utterly, like a dream, can never be worth a serious effort.

The whole foundation on which our existence rests is the present - the ever-fleeting present. It lies, then, in the very nature of our existence to take the form of constant motion, and to offer no possibility of our ever attaining the rest for which we are always striving. We are like a man running downhill, who cannot keep on his legs unless he runs on, and will inevitably fall if he stops; or, again, like a pole balanced on the tip of one's finger; or like a planet, which would fall into its sun the moment it ceased to hurry forward on its way. Unrest is the mark of existence.



In a world where all is unstable, and nought can endure, but is swept onwards at once in the hurrying whirlpool of change; where a man, if he is to keep erect at all, must always be advancing and moving, like an acrobat on a rope - in such a world, happiness is inconceivable. How can it dwell where, as Plato says, continual Becoming and never Being is the sole form of existence? In the first place, a man never is happy, but spends his whole life striving after something which he thinks will make him so; he seldom attains his goal, and when he does, it is only to be disappointed; he is mostly shipwrecked in the end, and comes into harbour with masts and rigging gone. And then, it is all one whether he has been happy or miserable; for his life was never anything more than a present moment always vanishing; and now it is over.

At the same time it is a wonderful thing that, in the world of human beings as in that of animals in general, this manifold restless motion is produced and kept up by the agency of two simple impulses - hunger and the sexual instinct; aided a little, perhaps, by the influence of boredom, but by nothing else; and that, in the theatre of life, these suffice to form the primum mobile of how complicated a machinery, setting in motion how strange and varied a scene!

On looking a little closer, we find that inorganic matter presents a constant conflict between chemical forces, which eventually works dissolution; and on the other hand, that organic life is impossible without continual change of matter, and cannot exist if it does not receive perpetual help from without. This is the realm of finality; and its opposite would be an infinite existence, exposed to no attack from without, and needing nothing to support it; the realm of eternal peace; some timeless, changeless state, one and undiversified; the negative knowledge of which forms the dominant note of the Platonic philosophy. It is to some such state as this that the denial of the will to live opens up the way.

The scenes of our life are like pictures done in rough mosaic. Looked at close, they produce no effect. There is nothing beautiful to be found in them, unless you stand some distance off. So, to gain anything we have longed for is only to discover how vain and empty it is; and even though we are always living in expectation of better things, at the same time we often repent and long to have the past back again. We look upon the present as something to be put up with while it lasts, and serving only as the way towards our goal. Hence most people, if they glance back when they come to the end of life, will find that all along they have been living ad interim: they will be surprised to find that the very thing they disregarded and let slip by unenjoyed, was just the life in the expectation of which they passed all their time. Of how many a man may it not be said that hope made a fool of him until he danced into the arms of death!

Then again, how insatiable a creature is man! Every satisfaction he attains lays the seeds of some new desire, so that there is no end to the wishes of each individual will. And why is this? The real reason is simply that, taken in itself, Will is the lord of all worlds: everything belongs to it, and therefore no one single thing can ever give it satisfaction, but only the whole, which is endless. For all that, it must rouse our sympathy to think how very little the Will, this lord of the world, really gets when it takes the form of an individual; usually only just enough to keep the body together. This is why man is so very miserable.

Life presents itself chiefly as a task - the task, I mean, of subsisting at all, '*gagner sa vie*' (to win at life/earn a living). If this is accomplished, life is a burden, and then there comes the second task of doing something with that which has been won - of warding off boredom, which, like a bird of prey, hovers over us, ready to swoop wherever it sees a life secure from need. The first task is to win something; the second, to banish the feeling that it has been won; otherwise it is a burden.

Human life must be some kind of mistake. The truth of this will be sufficiently obvious if we only remember that man is a compound of needs and necessities hard to satisfy; and that even when they are satisfied, all he obtains is a state of painlessness, where nothing remains to him but abandonment to boredom. This is direct proof that existence has no real value in itself; for what is boredom but the feeling of the emptiness of life? If life - the craving for which is the very essence of our being - were possessed of any positive intrinsic value, there would be no such thing as boredom at all: mere existence would satisfy us in itself, and we should want for nothing. But as it is, we take no delight in existence except when we are struggling for something; and then distance and difficulties to be overcome make our goal look as though it would satisfy us - an illusion which vanishes when we reach it; or else when we are occupied with some purely intellectual interest - when in reality we have stepped forth from life to look upon it from the outside, much after the manner of spectators at a play. And even sensual pleasure itself means nothing but a struggle and aspiration; ceasing the moment its aim is attained. Whenever we are not occupied in one of these ways, but cast upon existence itself, its vain and worthless nature is brought home to us; and this is what we mean by boredom. The hankering after what is strange and uncommon - an innate and ineradicable tendency of human nature - shows how glad we are at any interruption of that natural course of affairs which is so very tedious.

That this most perfect manifestation of the will to live, the human organism, with the cunning and complex working of its machinery, must fall to dust and yield up itself and all its strivings to extinction - this is the naive way in which Nature, who is always so true and sincere in what she says, proclaims the whole struggle of this will as in its very essence barren and unprofitable. Were it of any value in itself, anything unconditioned and absolute, it could not thus end in mere nothing. If we turn from contemplating the world as a whole, and, in particular, the generations of men as they live their little hour of mock-existence and then are swept away in rapid succession; if we turn from this, and look at life in its small details, as presented, say, in a comedy, how ridiculous it all seems! It is like a drop of water seen through a microscope, a single drop teeming with suspended particles; or a speck of cheese full of mites invisible to the naked eye. How we laugh as they bustle about so eagerly, and struggle with one another in so tiny a space! And whether here, or in the little span of human life, this terrible activity produces a comic effect. It is only in the microscope that our life looks so big. It is an indivisible point, drawn out and magnified by the powerful lenses of Time and Space.

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## SCHOPENHAUER: MUSIC AS THE DIRECT EMBODIMENT OF THE WILL

*No wonder that Schopenhauer was the darling of composers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, for he argued that music has a truly exceptional status among the arts and uniquely reveals the essence of the “in itself” of the world. Music that affords such insight—the only music he deems worthy of the name—is Classical/Romantic, non-programmatic music without a text, or what was termed late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “absolute music.” Unlike all of the other arts, which express or copy the Ideas (the essential features of the phenomenal world), Schopenhauer affirmed that music expresses or copies the will qua thing in itself, bypassing the Ideas altogether. This puts music and the Ideas on a par in terms of the directness of their expression of the thing in itself. In order to understand Schopenhauer’s reasoning for this rather stunning view of the cognitive significance of music, one needs to pay attention to the role of feeling in Schopenhauer’s epistemology, and especially to the feeling of embodiment that a subject can experience by attending to ordinary acts of volition.*

*It is the feeling of embodiment—the intuitive, immediate knowledge that one wills when, for instance, one wills to raise one’s arm—that is monumentally significant for Schopenhauer in his identification of the Kantian thing in itself with will. First-personal knowledge that one wills is immediate, rather than inferred from observation, according to Schopenhauer, and is shorn of all of the forms of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (including space, causality, and even being-an-object-for-a-subject) with one exception, the form of time.*

*Similarly, Schopenhauer holds that the experience of “absolute” music (music that does not seek to imitate the phenomenal world and is unaccompanied by narrative or text), occurs in time, but does not involve any of the other cognitive conditions on experience. Thus, like the feeling of embodiment, Schopenhauer believes the experience of music brings us epistemically closer to the essence of the world as will—it is as direct an experience of the will qua thing in itself as is possible for a human being to have. Absolutely direct experience of the will is impossible, because it will always be mediated by time, but in first-personal experience of volition and the experience of music, the thing in itself is no longer veiled by our other forms of cognitive conditioning. Thus, these experiences are epistemically distinctive and metaphysically significant.*

Now that we have considered all the fine arts in the general way that is suitable to our point of view, beginning with architecture, the peculiar end of which is to elucidate the objectification of will at the lowest grades of its visibility, in which it shows itself as the dumb unconscious tendency of the mass in accordance with laws, and yet already reveals a breach of the unity of will with itself in a conflict between gravity and rigidity—and ending with the consideration of tragedy, which presents to us at the highest grades of the objectification of will this very conflict with itself in terrible magnitude and distinctness; we find that there is still another fine art which has been excluded from our consideration, and had to be excluded, for in the systematic connection of our exposition there was no fitting place for it—I mean *music*. It stands alone, quite cut off from all the other arts. In it we do not recognise the copy or repetition of any Idea of existence in the world. Yet it is such a great and exceedingly noble art, its effect on the inmost nature of man is so powerful, and it is so entirely and deeply understood by him in his inmost consciousness as a perfectly universal language, the distinctness of which surpasses even that of the perceptible world itself, that we certainly have more to look for in it than an *exercitum arithmeticae occultum nescientis se numerare animi* (Music is a hidden arithmetic exercise of the soul, which doesn't know that it is counting), which Leibnitz called it. Yet he was perfectly right, as he considered only its immediate external significance, its form. But if it were nothing more, the satisfaction which it affords would be like that which we feel when a sum in arithmetic comes out right, and could not be that intense pleasure with which we see the deepest recesses of our nature find utterance. From our standpoint, therefore, at which the æsthetic effect is the criterion, we must attribute to music a far more serious and deep significance, connected with the inmost nature of the world and our own self, and in reference to which the arithmetical proportions, to which it may be reduced, are related, not as the thing signified, but merely as the sign. That in some sense music must be related to the world as the representation to the thing represented, as the copy to the original, we may conclude from the analogy of the other arts, all of which possess this character, and affect us on the whole in the same way as it does, only that the effect of music is stronger, quicker, more necessary and infallible. Further, its representative relation to the world must be very deep, absolutely true, and strikingly accurate, because it is instantly understood by every one, and has the appearance of a certain infallibility, because its form may be reduced to perfectly definite rules expressed in numbers, from which it cannot free itself without entirely ceasing to be music. Yet the point of comparison between music and the world, the respect in which it stands to the world in the relation of a copy or repetition, is very obscure. Men have practised music in all ages without being able to account for this; content to understand it directly, they renounce all claim to an abstract conception of this direct understanding itself.

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The (Platonic) Ideas are the adequate objectification of will. To excite or suggest the knowledge of these by means of the representation of particular things (for works of art themselves are always representations of particular things) is the end of all the other arts, which can only be attained by a corresponding change in the knowing subject. Thus all these arts objectify the will indirectly only by means of the Ideas; and since our world is nothing but the

manifestation of the Ideas in multiplicity, though their entrance into the *principium individuationis* (the form of the knowledge possible for the individual as such), music also, since it passes over the Ideas, is entirely independent of the phenomenal world, ignores it altogether, could to a certain extent exist if there was no world at all, which cannot be said of the other arts. Music is as *direct* an objectification and copy of the whole *will* as the world itself, nay, even as the Ideas, whose multiplied manifestation constitutes the world of individual things. Music is thus by no means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but the *copy of the will itself*, whose objectivity the Ideas are. This is why the effect of music is so much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts, for they speak only of shadows, but it speaks of the thing itself. Since, however, it is the same will which objectifies itself both in the Ideas and in music, though in quite different ways, there must be, not indeed a direct likeness, but yet a parallel, an analogy, between music and the Ideas whose manifestation in multiplicity and incompleteness is the visible world. The establishing of this analogy will facilitate, as an illustration, the understanding of this exposition, which is so difficult on account of the obscurity of the subject. I recognise in the deepest tones of harmony, in the bass, the lowest grades of the objectification of will, unorganised nature, the mass of the planet. It is well known that all the high notes which are easily sounded, and die away more quickly, are produced by the vibration in their vicinity of the deep bass-notes. When, also, the low notes sound, the high notes always sound faintly, and it is a law of harmony that only those high notes may accompany a bass-note which actually already sound along with it of themselves (its *sons harmoniques*) on account of its vibration. This is analogous to the fact that the whole of the bodies and organisations of nature must be regarded as having come into existence through gradual development out of the mass of the planet; this is both their supporter and their source, and the same relation subsists between the high notes and the bass. There is a limit of depth, below which no sound is audible. This corresponds to the fact that no matter can be perceived without form and quality, *i.e.*, without the manifestation of a force which cannot be further explained, in which an Idea expresses itself, and, more generally, that no matter can be entirely without will. Thus, as a certain pitch is inseparable from the note as such, so a certain grade of the manifestation of will is inseparable from matter. Bass is thus, for us, in harmony what unorganised nature, the crudest mass, upon which all rests, and from which everything originates and develops, is in the world. Now, further, in the whole of the complementary parts which make up the harmony between the bass and the leading voice singing the melody, I recognise the whole gradation of the Ideas in which the will objectifies itself. Those nearer to the bass are the lower of these grades, the still unorganised, but yet manifold phenomenal things; the higher represent to me the world of plants and beasts. The definite intervals of the scale are parallel to the definite grades of the objectification of will, the definite species in nature. The departure from the arithmetical correctness of the intervals, through some temperament, or produced by the key selected, is analogous to the departure of the individual from the type of the species. Indeed, even the impure discords, which give no definite interval, may be compared to the monstrous abortions produced by beasts of two species, or by man and beast. But to all these bass and complementary parts which make up the *harmony* there is wanting

that connected progress which belongs only to the high voice singing the melody, and it alone moves quickly and lightly in modulations and runs, while all these others have only a slower movement without a connection in each part for itself. The deep bass moves most slowly, the representative of the crudest mass. Its rising and falling occurs only by large intervals, in thirds, fourths, fifths, never by *one* tone, unless it is a base inverted by double counterpoint. This slow movement is also physically essential to it; a quick run or shake in the low notes cannot even be imagined. The higher complemental parts, which are parallel to animal life, move more quickly, but yet without melodious connection and significant progress. The disconnected course of all the complemental parts, and their regulation by definite laws, is analogous to the fact that in the whole irrational world, from the crystal to the most perfect animal, no being has a connected consciousness of its own which would make its life into a significant whole, and none experiences a succession of mental developments, none perfects itself by culture, but everything exists always in the same way according to its kind, determined by fixed law. Lastly, in the *melody*, in the high, singing, principal voice leading the whole and progressing with unrestrained freedom, in the unbroken significant connection of *one* thought from beginning to end representing a whole, I recognise the highest grade of the objectification of will, the intellectual life and effort of man. As he alone, because endowed with reason, constantly looks before and after on the path of his actual life and its innumerable possibilities, and so achieves a course of life which is intellectual, and therefore connected as a whole; corresponding to this, I say, the *melody* has significant intentional connection from beginning to end. It records, therefore, the history of the intellectually enlightened will. This will expresses itself in the actual world as the series of its deeds; but melody says more, it records the most secret history of this intellectually-enlightened will, pictures every excitement, every effort, every movement of it, all that which the reason collects under the wide and negative concept of feeling, and which it cannot apprehend further through its abstract concepts. Therefore it has always been said that music is the language of feeling and of passion, as words are the language of reason. Plato explains it as ἡ τῶν μελῶν κινήσις μεμιμημένη, ἐν τοῖς παθημασιν ὅταν ψυχὴ γίνηται (*melodiarum motus, animi affectus imitans*) ["The movement of the melody which it imitates, when the soul is stirred by passions"], De Leg. vii.; and also Aristotle says: διὰ τι οἱ ρυθμοὶ καὶ τὰ μέλη, φωνηοῦσα, ἠθεσὶν εἰσὶν εἰκὲς (*cur numeri musici et modi, qui voces sunt, moribus similes sese exhibent?*) [How is it that rhythms and melodies, although only sound, resemble states of the soul?]: Probl. c. 19.

Now 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 desire to satisfaction, and from satisfaction to a new desire. For the absence of satisfaction is suffering, the empty longing for a new desire, 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 desire to satisfaction, and from satisfaction to a new desire, 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 keynote 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 keynote, 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 all 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. In this respect it resembles geometrical figures and numbers, which are the universal forms of all possible objects of experience and applicable to them all *a priori*, and yet are not abstract but perceptible and thoroughly determined. 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, or, more accurately, the adequate objectivity of will, 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 proportion 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.

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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. Consequently the saying of Leibnitz quoted above, which is quite accurate from a lower standpoint, may be parodied in the following way to suit our higher view of music: *Musica est exercitium metaphysices occultum nescientis se philosophari animi* [music is a hidden metaphysical exercise of the soul, that doesn't know it is philosophizing]; for *scire*, to know, always means to have fixed in abstract concepts. But further, on account of the truth of the saying of Leibnitz, which is confirmed in various ways, music, regarded apart from its æsthetic or inner significance, and looked at merely externally and

purely empirically, is simply the means of comprehending directly and in the concrete large numbers and complex relations of numbers, which otherwise we could only know indirectly by fixing them in concepts. Therefore by the union of these two very different but correct views of music we may arrive at a conception of the possibility of a philosophy of number, such as that of Pythagoras and of the Chinese in I-Ching, and then interpret in this sense the saying of the Pythagoreans which Sextus Empiricus quotes (adv. Math., L. vii.): τῷ ἀριθμῷ δε τα παντ' ἐπεοικεν (*numero cuncta assimilantur*) [all things are similar to number]. And if, finally, we apply this view to the interpretation of harmony and melody given above, we shall find that a mere moral philosophy without an explanation of Nature, such as Socrates wanted to introduce, is precisely analogous to a mere melody without harmony, which Rousseau exclusively desired; and, in opposition to this mere physics and metaphysics without ethics, will correspond to mere harmony without melody. Allow me to add to these cursory observations a few more remarks concerning the analogy of music with the phenomenal world. We found in the second book that the highest grade of the objectification of will, man, could not appear alone and isolated, but presupposed the grades below him, as these again presupposed the grades lower still. In the same way music, which directly objectifies the will, just as the world does, is complete only in full harmony. In order to achieve its full effect, the high leading voice of the melody requires the accompaniment of all the other voices, even to the lowest bass, which is to be regarded as the origin of all. The melody itself enters as an integral part into the harmony, as the harmony enters into it, and only thus, in the full harmonious whole, music expresses what it aims at expressing. Thus also the one will outside of time finds its full objectification only in the complete union of all the steps which reveal its nature in the innumerable ascending grades of distinctness. The following analogy is also very remarkable. We have seen in the preceding book that notwithstanding the self-adaptation of all the phenomena of will to each other as regards their species, which constitutes their teleological aspect, there yet remains an unceasing conflict between those phenomena as individuals, which is visible at every grade, and makes the world a constant battle-field of all those manifestations of one and the same will, whose inner contradiction with itself becomes visible through it. In music also there is something corresponding to this. A complete, pure, harmonious system of tones is not only physically but arithmetically impossible. The numbers themselves by which the tones are expressed have inextricable irrationality. There is no scale in which, when it is counted, every fifth will be related to the keynote as 2 to 3, every major third as 4 to 5, every minor third as 5 to 6, and so on. For if they are correctly related to the keynote, they can no longer be so to each other; because, for example, the fifth must be the minor third to the third, &c. For the notes of the scale may be compared to actors who must play now one part, now another. Therefore a perfectly accurate system of music cannot even be thought, far less worked out; and on this account all possible music deviates from perfect purity; it can only conceal the discords essential to it by dividing them among all the notes, *i.e.*, by temperament. On this see Chladni's "Akustik," § 30, and his "Kurze Uebersicht der Schall- und Klanglehre."

I might still have something to say about the way in which music is perceived, namely, in and through time alone, with absolute exclusion of space, and also apart from the influence of the knowledge of causality, thus without understanding; for the tones make the æsthetic impression as effect, and without obliging us to go back to their causes, as in the case of perception. I do not wish, however, to lengthen this discussion, as I have perhaps already gone too much into detail with regard to [some things in this Third Book, or have dwelt too much on particulars. But my aim made it necessary, and it will be the less disapproved if the importance and high worth of art, which is seldom sufficiently recognised, be kept in mind. For if, according to our view, the whole visible world is just the objectification, the mirror, of the will, conducting it to knowledge of itself, and, indeed, as we shall soon see, to the possibility of its deliverance; and if, at the same time, the world as idea, if we regard it in isolation, and, freeing ourselves from all volition, allow it alone to take possession of our consciousness, is the most joy-giving and the only innocent side of life; we must regard art as the higher ascent, the more complete development of all this, for it achieves essentially just what is achieved by the visible world itself, only with greater concentration, more perfectly, with intention and intelligence, and therefore may be called, in the full significance of the word, the flower of life. If the whole world as idea is only the visibility of will, the work of art is to render this visibility more distinct. It is the *camera* which shows the objects more purely, and enables us to survey them and comprehend them better. It is the play within the play, the stage upon the stage in “Hamlet.”

The pleasure we receive from all beauty, the consolation which art affords, the enthusiasm of the artist, which enables him to forget the cares of life,—the latter an advantage of the man of genius over other men, which alone repays him for the suffering that increases in proportion to the clearness of consciousness, and for the desert loneliness among men of a different race,—all this rests on the fact that the in-itself of life, the will, existence itself, is, as we shall see farther on, a constant sorrow, partly miserable, partly terrible; while, on the contrary, as idea alone, purely contemplated, or copied by art, free from pain, it presents to us a drama full of significance. This purely knowable side of the world, and the copy of it in any art, is the element of the artist. He is chained to the contemplation of the play, the objectification of will; he remains beside it, does not get tired of contemplating it and representing it in copies; and meanwhile he bears himself the cost of the production of that play, *i.e.*, he himself is the will which objectifies itself, and remains in constant suffering. That pure, true, and deep knowledge of the inner nature of the world becomes now for him an end in itself: he stops there. Therefore it does not become to him a quieter of the will, as, we shall see in the next book, it does in the case of the saint who has attained to resignation; it does not deliver him for ever from life, but only at moments, and is therefore not for him a path out of life, but only an occasional consolation in it, till his power, increased by this contemplation and at last tired of the play, lays hold on the real. The St. Cecilia of Raphael may be regarded as a representation of this transition. To the real, then, we now turn in the following book.

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# Sigmund Freud

1856–1939

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Sigmund Freud, the patriarch of psychoanalysis, was by no means primarily a literary critic, but his ideas have had a major influence on twentieth-century literary theory, and his influence has been as far-reaching on those who are outraged by his ideas as it has been on his disciples. (Freud's theory of the unconscious is given more complete exposition in the introduction to *Psychoanalytic Theory* in Part Two of this book, to which the reader is referred; see p. 1106.)

Freud was born in Moravia (now part of the Czech Republic) but lived most of his assiduous life in the imperial capital of Vienna, where he received his M.D. from the university in 1881. He studied under Charcot in Paris, and then with Josef Breuer in Vienna, where their collaborative investigations of the treatment of hysterical patients, though not well received by the rest of the profession, led Freud to devise his famed analytical technique, based on free association, to reveal the contents of the unconscious mind. Freud's epochal *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and other ground-breaking studies met with much skeptical antagonism; nevertheless, by 1910 his fame had spread throughout Europe and had reached America.

A group calling itself "The International Psycho-Analytical Association" gathered around him, but by 1913 — the year Freud published *Totem and Taboo* — two of its most impressive members, Carl Jung and Alfred Adler, had resigned to form their own schools in protest against Freud's insistence on the primacy of infantile sexuality. During and after World War I, despite hardships that included agonizing jaw cancer, Freud continued to publish important work, notably *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923). His last year was spent in London, where he fled in 1938 after the Nazi invasion of Austria.

Freud's most important general discussion of art is "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming"; it was delivered as a lecture in 1907 and published in 1908. Here Freud draws an analogy between nocturnal dreams, daytime fantasies, and the conscious constructions of literary artists, all of which he views as disguised versions of repressed wishes. Freud does not explain his method of dream-analysis fully in this brief essay (which had been contained in his earlier treatise, *The Interpretation of Dreams*), but the key to his explication is that what motivates the dream is the *pleasure principle*, in which one's unconscious desires are magically fulfilled. The unconscious wish for pleasure or power is the latent content of the dream. But the dream as it appears to the dreamer and is reported to the analyst consists of what Freud termed *manifest content* — it is a story that has, in effect, been censored by the defenses of the ego. One could say that latent content is to manifest content, as primary process (the basic urges and drives) is to secondary process (in which those urges and drives are shifted, filtered, sublimated, and altered into more socially acceptable forms). The analysis of a dream involves peeling back the ego-defenses that have distorted the wish in order to reveal the working of the primary process beneath.

In the sections on "The Dream-Work" included below from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, we can see some examples of how Freud approached the question of how

dreams signify. What may seem most surprising is that Freud treats the unconscious psyche of the dreamer as a kind of poet. The raw fantasies that make up the latent content are transformed by substitutions and analogies, so as to disinfect them, so to speak, of the unacceptable content that the dreamer has to censor from awareness. What Freud calls "displacement" is a process similar to poetic metaphor, and the process can be recursively repeated to create a more complicated code, a signifying chain of metaphors of metaphors. If displacement corresponds to metaphor, condensation corresponds to poetic metonymy or synecdoche, where several different associations to the forbidden fantasy coalesce into a single complex vision. As with a poem, a dream operates on several levels: it represents the dreamer's history, but some of its elements may need to be interpreted symbolically. Visual symbols may need to be turned into words, that in turn need to be examined for puns and other verbal transformations.

Like nocturnal dreams, Freud believes, literature contains a latent and a manifest content. According to Freud, the primary process that lurks behind popular novels (for example, ranging from *The Godfather* to *The Bridges of Madison County*) obviously embodies the ambitious and erotic wishes to dominate others and to possess loved objects, wishes that formed during the Oedipal phase of childhood development. But those same drives underlie the greatest masterpieces, like *Emma* or *The Great Gatsby*. The differences between popular fiction and literature is not in the latent content but in the way the ego's defenses are marshalled. Freud suggests that "better" fiction contains the same Oedipal fantasies but that they are expressed in a form that is more carefully and elaborately defended. Because the form is less raw, the fantasy content is more acceptable to refined readers.

While Freud was once attacked by Jung (p. 542) for implying that the artist is sick, creating out of personal neurotic needs, it is now widely accepted that nearly all of us are at least slightly neurotic and that the artist's need to create comes not from any incapacitating lunacy but merely from a greater sensitivity to the lacks and dissatisfactions that plague us all. The primary objection to Freudian criticism of this sort is its insensitivity to aesthetic quality: Although Freud was personally deeply moved by art and literature, in his version of artistic creation, form itself enters the work of art merely as a sugar-coating that allows the reader to swallow the dose of fantasy more easily. Later analytic critics, like Peter Brooks, have tried to deal more constructively with this issue, although the function of artistic form remains one of the vexing questions within the psychoanalytic approach to literature. (See Brooks, p. 797.)

Freud also wrote several papers analyzing particular literary texts, including *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear*. But "The Uncanny" (1919, revised 1924), an analysis of the novella *The Sandman* (1817) by Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, is probably the most complex and interesting of these papers. Freud takes off from Ernst Jentsch's 1906 article on the psychology of the uncanny, and his focus of interest here, unlike in "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," is not the poet, but the reader's experience of the text. Freud is not happy with Jentsch's conclusion about the uncanny, that it is all about the reader's uncertainty over whether what appears alive is in fact dead, or whether what appears to be dead is in fact alive. Jentsch's examples of the uncanny are people in the throes of an epileptic fit, or the insane, who appear to be mechanical objects rather than sentient humans; in his analysis, he

adds the mechanical doll, Olympia, in Hoffman's *The Sandman*. Freud sees something else at work here, and approaches it first through language.

In the first section of the paper, Freud takes apart the word *unheimlich*, German for uncanny. Its opposite, *heimlich*, has two distinct meanings: what is homey or familiar (*heim* = home) and what is hidden or concealed (*geheim* = mystery). *Unheimlich* similarly has two meanings: what is unfamiliar and what has been inadvertently revealed. The contraries thus coalesce: the *heimlich* is known but also hidden and therefore unknown; the *unheimlich* is unknown but also revealed and therefore known. (These coalescing contraries also appear in English, in the overlapping meanings of the words "canny" and "uncanny.") For Freud, these contraries describe the process of repression (making the known unknown) and also the "return of the repressed" (where what we have attempted to repress comes to light).

Freud then shows how the plot of *The Sandman*, through three repeated stages, represents the narrative of the Oedipus complex. The Sandman who tears out children's eyes symbolizes Nathaniel's "evil" father who comes to castrate the son. Both Coppélius and Coppola take on this role, while the Father and Professor Spalanzani symbolize the "good" father Nathaniel wants to supplant. Olympia and Clara both symbolize the desired mother who is withheld from Nathaniel. What makes the story uncanny for readers, according to Freud, is that the story starts out as realistic, seemingly true, but we suddenly find ourselves in a dream world where what should be hidden (the repressed Oedipal struggle) is instead quite clearly revealed.

From this point Freud clarifies his position, expanding it, and also qualifying it. If the uncanny is the return of the repressed, then it must appear in other infantile psychic material that we repress. Uncanny stories about being buried alive relate to the wish to return to the womb, an "inter-uterine existence" that Freud calls "lascivious" because it involves fusion with the mother. Stories about doubles or doppelgängers may relate to the post-Oedipal creation of the superego, a "second self" that chides us about our sinful desires: the stories are usually about doubles that enact those desires while the protagonist stands about too repressed to act. And similarly, Freud analyzes other causes of the uncanny, haunted houses, revenants who return from death, severed hands with a will of their own. But Freud also discusses why this repressed material does not always strike us as uncanny in fictional form, what special literary qualities uncanny stories possess that force us to enter this forbidden world of fantasy without being aware of what we are doing.

Our last, very brief Freud selection is one of the few places where Freud interprets a single image from a Greek myth. Published posthumously in 1940, "Medusa's Head" is interesting primarily because of what it displays about Freud himself, and secondarily because of the feminist reaction to it. Freud analyzes the decapitated head as a symbol of female castration, a visual metaphor that connects with the moment "when a boy . . . catches sight of the female genitals . . . surrounded by hair . . . those of his mother." In childhood, the episode advances the Oedipal struggle, but is repressed; in adult life, the repressed returns when the decapitated female head is seen, an open mouth surrounded with snakes, an image of horror that "makes the spectator stiff." This in turn reminds Freud that the male erection can be displayed to ward off evil, and is comforting evidence that one has come through the Oedipal struggle

intact. Today's reader may feel that Freud's penultimate comment — "I am not afraid of you. I defy you. I have a penis" — reveals rather more than we wanted to know about the sage of Vienna. Certainly Freud's discourse seems disconcertingly male-oriented. The myth takes the shape it does because of what boys discover; the stiffening response to horror is what men do to ward off an evil whose deep meaning is female sexuality. Women have no part in the struggle except as objects of the male gaze, or as demonic enemies who are designated victims. It seems appropriate that the French feminist Hélène Cixous has taken the image of a triumphantly laughing medusa as the aegis of the woman who, in spite of patriarchy, finds her own voice. (See Cixous, pp. 1643.)

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## *The Dream-Work<sup>1</sup>* from *The Interpretation of Dreams*

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Every attempt that has hitherto been made to solve the problem of dreams has dealt directly with their *manifest* content as it is presented in our memory. All such attempts have endeavored to arrive at an interpretation of dreams from their

manifest content or (if no interpretation was attempted) to form a judgement as to their nature on the basis of that same manifest content. We are alone in taking something else into account. We have introduced a new class of psychical material between the manifest content of dreams and the conclusions of our inquiry: namely, their *latent* content, or (as we say) the "dream-thoughts," arrived at by means of our procedure. It is from these dream-thoughts and not from a dream's manifest content that we disentangle its meaning. We are thus presented with a new task which had

Translated by A. A. Brill.

<sup>1</sup>Lecture XI of Freud's *Introductory Lectures* (1916–17) deals with the dream-work on a much less extensive scale. This refers to the German publication *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*. (Wien: H. Heller, 1916–17). [Tr.]

no previous existence: the task, that is, of investigating the relations between the manifest content of dreams and the latent dream-thoughts, and of tracing out the processes by which the latter have been changed into the former.

The dream-thoughts and the dream-content are presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages. Or, more properly, the dream-content seems like a transcript of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation. The dream-thoughts are immediately comprehensible, as soon as we have learnt them. The dream-content, on the other hand, is expressed as it were in a pictographic script,<sup>2</sup> the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts. If we attempted to read these characters according to their pictorial value instead of according to their symbolic relation, we should clearly be led into error. Suppose I have a picture-puzzle, a rebus, in front of me. It depicts a house with a boat on its roof, a single letter of the alphabet, the figure of a running man whose head has been conjured away, and so on. Now I might be misled into raising objections and declaring that the picture as a whole and its component parts are nonsensical. A boat has no business to be on the roof of a house, and a headless man cannot run. Moreover, the man is bigger than the house; and if the whole picture is intended to represent a landscape, letters of the alphabet are out of place in it since such objects do not occur in nature. But obviously we can only form a proper judgement of the rebus if we put aside criticisms such as these of the whole composition and its parts and if, instead, we try to replace each separate element by a syllable or word that can be represented by that element in some way or other. The words which are put together in this way are no longer nonsensical but may form a poetical phrase of the greatest beauty and significance. A dream is a picture-puzzle of this sort and our predecessors in the field of dream-interpretation

<sup>2</sup>Form of writing in which each character pictorially represents a separate word (as in Chinese) rather than a syllable or a phoneme.

have made the mistake of treating the rebus as a pictorial composition: and as such it has seemed to them nonsensical and worthless.

## THE WORK OF CONDENSATION

The first thing that becomes clear to anyone who compares the dream-content with the dream-thoughts is that a work of *condensation* on a large scale has been carried out. Dreams are brief, meager and laconic in comparison with the range and wealth of the dream-thoughts. If a dream is written out it may perhaps fill half a page. The analysis setting out the dream-thoughts underlying it may occupy six, eight or a dozen times as much space. This relation varies with different dreams; but so far as my experience goes its direction never varies. As a rule one underestimates the amount of compression that has taken place, since one is inclined to regard the dream-thoughts that have been brought to light as the complete material, whereas if the work of interpretation is carried further it may reveal still more thoughts concealed behind the dream. I have already had occasion to point out that it is in fact never possible to be sure that a dream has been completely interpreted. Even if the solution seems satisfactory and without gaps, the possibility always remains that the dream may have yet another meaning. Strictly speaking, then, it is impossible to determine the amount of condensation.

There is an answer, which at first sight seems most plausible, to the argument that the great lack of proportion between the dream-content and the dream-thoughts implies that the psychical material has undergone an extensive process of condensation in the course of the formation of the dream. We very often have an impression that we have dreamt a great deal all through the night and have since forgotten most of what we dreamt. On this view, the dream which we remember when we wake up would only be a fragmentary remnant of the total dream-work; and this, if we could recollect it in its entirety, might well be as extensive as the dream-thoughts. There is undoubtedly some truth in this: there can be no question that dreams can be reproduced most accurately if we try to recall them as soon as we wake up and that our memory of them becomes more and more



incomplete towards evening. But on the other hand it can be shown that the impression that we have dreamt a great deal more than we can reproduce is very often based on an illusion, the origin of which I shall discuss later. Moreover the hypothesis that condensation occurs during the dream-work is not affected by the possibility of dreams being forgotten, since this hypothesis is proved to be correct by the quantities of ideas which are related to each individual piece of the dream which has been retained. Even supposing that a large piece of the dream has escaped recollection, this may merely have prevented our having access to another group of dream-thoughts. There is no justification for supposing that the lost pieces of the dream would have related to the same thoughts which we have already reached from the pieces of the dream that have survived.<sup>3</sup>

In view of the very great number of associations produced in analysis to each individual element of the content of a dream, some readers may be led to doubt whether, as a matter of principle, we are justified in regarding as part of the dream-thoughts all the associations that occur to us during the subsequent analysis — whether we are justified, that is, in supposing that all these thoughts were already active during the state of sleep and played a part in the formation of the dream. Is it not more probable that new trains of thought have arisen in the course of the analysis which had no share in forming the dream? I can only give limited assent to this argument. It is no doubt true that some trains of thought arise for the first time during the analysis. But one can convince oneself in all such cases that these new connections are only set up between thoughts which were already linked in some other way in the dream-thoughts. The new connections are, as it were, loop-lines or short-circuits, made possible by the existence of other and deeper-lying connecting paths. It must be allowed that the great bulk of the thoughts which are revealed in analysis were already active during the process of

forming the dream; for, after working through a string of thoughts which seem to have no connection with the formation of the dream, one suddenly comes upon one which is represented in its content and is indispensable for its interpretation, but which could not have been reached except by this particular line of approach. I may here recall the dream of the botanical monograph,<sup>4</sup> which strikes one as the product of an astonishing amount of condensation, even though I have not reported its analysis in full.

How, then, are we to picture psychical conditions during the period of sleep which precedes dreams? Are all the dream-thoughts present alongside one another? or do they occur in sequence? or do a number of trains of thought start out simultaneously from different centers and afterwards unite? There is no need for the present, in my opinion, to form any plastic idea of psychical conditions during the formation of dreams. It must not be forgotten, however, that we are dealing with an *unconscious* process of thought, which may easily be different from what we perceive during purposive reflection accompanied by consciousness.

The unquestionable fact remains, however, that the formation of dreams is based on a process of condensation. How is that condensation brought about?

When we reflect that only a small minority of all the dream-thoughts revealed are represented in the dream by one of their ideational elements, we might conclude that condensation is brought about by *omission*: that is, that the dream is not a faithful translation or a point-for-point projection of the dream-thoughts, but a highly incomplete and fragmentary version of them. This view, as we shall soon discover, is a most inadequate one. But we may take it as a provisional starting-point and go on to a further question. If only a few elements from the dream-thoughts find their way into the dream-content, what are the conditions which determine their selection? . . .

<sup>3</sup>[Footnote added 1914:] The occurrence of condensation in dreams has been hinted at by many writers. Du Prel (1885, 85) has a passage in which he says it is absolutely certain that there has been a process of condensation of the groups of ideas in dreams. [Freud]

<sup>4</sup>Freud's own dream, in which he has written a learned article on a certain plant. "The book lies before me. I am just turning over a folded colored plate. A dried specimen of the plant, as though from a herbarium, is bound up with every copy."

## THE WORK OF DISPLACEMENT

In making our collection of instances of condensation in dreams, the existence of another relation, probably of no less importance, had already become evident. It could be seen that the elements which stand out as the principal components of the manifest content of the dream are far from playing the same part in the dream-thoughts. And, as a corollary, the converse of this assertion can be affirmed: what is clearly the essence of the dream-thoughts need not be represented in the dream at all. The dream is, as it were, differently centered from the dream-thoughts — its content has different elements as its central point. Thus in the dream of the botanical monograph, for instance, the central point of the dream-content was obviously the element "botanical"; whereas the dream-thoughts were concerned with the complications and conflicts arising between colleagues from their professional obligations, and further with the charge that I was in the habit of sacrificing too much for the sake of my hobbies. The element "botanical" had no place whatever in this core of the dream-thoughts, unless it was loosely connected with it by an antithesis — the fact that botany never had a place among my favorite studies. In my patient's *Sappho* dream<sup>5</sup> the central position was occupied by climbing up and down and being up above and down below; the dream-thoughts, however, dealt with the dangers of sexual relations with people of an inferior social class. So that only a single element of the dream-thoughts seems to have found its way into the dream-content, though that element was expanded to a disproportionate extent. Similarly, in the dream of the may-beetles,<sup>6</sup> the topic of which was the relations of sexuality to cruelty, it is true that the factor of cruelty emerged in the dream-content; but it did so in another connection and without any mention of sexuality, that is to

say, divorced from its context and consequently transformed into something extraneous. Once again, in my dream about my uncle,<sup>7</sup> the fair beard which formed its center-point seems to have had no connection in its meaning with my ambitious wishes which, as we saw, were the core of the dream-thoughts. Dreams such as these give a justifiable impression of "displacement." In complete contrast to these examples, we can see that in the dream of Irma's injection<sup>8</sup> the different elements were able to retain, during the process of constructing the dream, the approximate place which they occupied in the dream-thoughts. This further relation between the dream-thoughts and the dream-content, wholly variable as it is in its sense or direction, is calculated at first to create astonishment. If we are considering a psychical process in normal life and find that one of its several component ideas has been picked out and has acquired a special degree of vividness in consciousness, we usually regard this effect as evidence that a specially high amount of psychical value — some particular degree of interest — attaches to this predominant idea. But we now discover that, in the case of the different elements of the dream-thoughts, a value of this kind does not persist or is disregarded in the process of dream-formation. There is never any doubt as to which of the elements of the dream-thoughts have the highest psychical value; we learn that by direct judgement. In the course of the formation of a dream these essential elements, charged, as they are, with intense interest, may be treated as though they were of small value, and their place may be taken in the dream by other elements, of whose small value in the dream-thoughts there can be no question. At first sight it looks as though no attention whatever is paid to the psychical intensity<sup>9</sup> of the various ideas in

<sup>5</sup>A patient dreams that he is part of an acting company changing their clothes in an inn, some of whom are given rooms on the ground floor, some on the floor above.

<sup>6</sup>An elderly female patient dreams that "she had two may-beetles in a box and that she must set them free or they would suffocate." She opens the box and one flies out the open window, the other is crushed as she shuts the window casement.

<sup>7</sup>Freud's own dream, that a friend of his ("R") is his uncle, and that his face has a particularly distinctive blond beard.

<sup>8</sup>Freud's own dream, that a patient of his whom he had cured of hysterical symptoms is still unwell; he examines her and finds disease in her mouth, an infection originating in an injection, given by his friend Otto, who had used a dirty syringe.

<sup>9</sup>Psychical intensity or value or the degree of interest of an idea is of course to be distinguished from sensory intensity or the intensity of the image presented. [Freud]

making the choice among them for the dream, and as though the only thing considered is the greater or less degree of multiplicity of their determination. What appears in dreams, we might suppose, is not what is *important* in the dream-thoughts but what occurs in them several times over. But this hypothesis does not greatly assist our understanding of dream-formation, since from the nature of things it seems clear that the two factors of multiple determination and inherent psychical value must necessarily operate in the same sense. The ideas which are most important among the dream-thoughts will almost certainly be those which occur most often in them, since the different dream-thoughts will, as it were, radiate out from them. Nevertheless a dream can reject elements which are thus both highly stressed in themselves and reinforced from many directions, and can select for its content other elements which possess only the second of these attributes.

In order to solve this difficulty we shall make use of another impression derived from our inquiry [in the previous section] into the overdetermination of the dream-content. Perhaps some of those who have read that inquiry may already have formed an independent conclusion that the overdetermination of the elements of dreams is no very important discovery, since it is a self-evident one. For in analysis we start out from the dream-elements and note down all the associations which lead off from them; so that there is nothing surprising in the fact that in the thought-material arrived at in this way we come across these same elements with peculiar frequency. I cannot accept this objection; but I will myself put into words something that sounds not unlike it. Among the thoughts that analysis brings to light are many which are relatively remote from the kernel of the dream and which look like artificial interpolations made for some particular purpose. That purpose is easy to divine. It is precisely *they* that constitute a connection, often a forced and far-fetched one, between the dream-content and the dream-thoughts; and if these elements were weeded out of the analysis the result would often be that the component parts of the dream-content would be left not only without overdetermination but without any satisfactory determination at all.

We shall be led to conclude that the multiple determination which decides what shall be included in a dream is not always a primary factor in dream-construction but is often the secondary product of a psychical force which is still unknown to us. Nevertheless multiple determination must be of importance in choosing what particular elements shall enter a dream, since we can see that a considerable expenditure of effort is used to bring it about in cases where it does not arise from the dream-material unassisted.

It thus seems plausible to suppose that in the dream-work a psychical force is operating which on the one hand strips the elements which have a high psychical value of their intensity, and on the other hand, *by means of overdetermination*, creates from elements of low psychical value new values, which afterwards find their way into the dream-content. If that is so, a *transference and displacement of psychical intensities* occurs in the process of dream-formation, and it is as a result of these that the difference between the text of the dream-content and that of the dream-thoughts comes about. The process which we are here presuming is nothing less than the essential portion of the dreamwork; and it deserves to be described as "dream-displacement." Dream-displacement and dream-condensation are the two governing factors to whose activity we may in essence ascribe the form assumed by dreams.

Nor do I think we shall have any difficulty in recognizing the psychical force which manifests itself in the facts of dream-displacement. The consequence of the displacement is that the dream-content no longer resembles the core of the dream-thoughts and that the dream gives no more than a distortion of the dream-wish which exists in the unconscious. But we are already familiar with dream-distortion. We traced it back to the censorship which is exercised by one psychical agency in the mind over another.<sup>10</sup> Dream-displacement is one of the chief methods by which that distortion is achieved. *Is fecit cui profuit*.<sup>11</sup> We may assume, then, that dream-displacement comes about

<sup>10</sup>That is, the ego is using defense mechanisms against unacceptable images of desire coming from the id.

<sup>11</sup>The old legal tag: "He did the deed who gained by it." [Tr.]

through the influence of the same censorship — that is, the censorship of endopsychic defence.<sup>12</sup>

The question of the interplay of these factors — of displacement, condensation and overdetermination — in the construction of dreams, and the question which is a dominant factor and which a subordinate one — all of this we shall leave aside for later investigation. But we can state provisionally a second condition which must be satisfied by those elements of the dream-thoughts which make their way into the dream: *they must*

<sup>12</sup>[Footnote added 1909:] Since I may say that the kernel of my theory of dreams lies in my derivation of dream-distortion from the censorship, I will here insert the last part of a story from *Phantasien eines Realisten* [*Phantasies of a Realist*] by "Lynkeus" (Vienna, 2nd edition, 1900 [1st edition, 1899]), in which I have found this principal feature of my theory once more expounded. [See above, postscript, 1909, to Chapter I, p. 94 f.; also Freud 1923f and 1932c.] The title of the story is "Traumen wie Wachen" ["Dreaming like Waking"]:

"About a man who has the remarkable attribute of never dreaming nonsense. . . .

"'This splendid gift of yours, for dreaming as though you were waking, is a consequence of your virtues, of your kindness, your sense of justice, and your love of truth; it is the moral serenity of your nature which makes me understand all about you.'

"'But when I think the matter over properly,' replied the other, 'I almost believe that everyone is made like me, and that no one at all ever dreams nonsense. Any dream which one can remember clearly enough to describe it afterwards — any dream, that is to say, which is not a fever-dream — must *always* make sense, and it cannot possibly be otherwise. For things that were mutually contradictory could not group themselves into a single whole. The fact that time and space are often thrown into confusion does not affect the true content of the dream, since no doubt neither of them are of significance for its real essence. We often do the same thing in waking life. Only think of fairy tales and of the many daring products of the imagination, which are full of meaning and of which only a man without intelligence could say: "This is nonsense for it's impossible."'

"'If only one always knew how to interpret dreams in the right way, as you have just done with mine!' said his friend.

"'That is certainly no easy task; but with a little attention on the part of the dreamer himself it should no doubt always succeed. — You ask why it is that for the most part it does *not* succeed? In your other people there seems always to be something that lies concealed in your dreams, something unchaste in a special and higher sense, a certain secret quality in your being which it is hard to follow. And that is why your dreams so often seem to be without meaning or even to be nonsense. But in the deepest sense this is not in the least so; indeed, it cannot be so at all — for it is always the same man, whether he is awake or dreaming.'" [Freud, (Tr.)]

*escape the censorship imposed by resistance.*<sup>13</sup> And henceforward in interpreting dreams we shall take dream-displacement into account as an undeniable fact.

## THE MEANS OF REPRESENTATION IN DREAMS

In the process of transforming the latent thoughts into the manifest content of a dream we have found two factors at work: dream-condensation and dream-displacement. As we continue our investigation we shall, in addition to these, come across two further determinants which exercise an undoubted influence on the choice of the material which is to find access to the dream.

But first, even at the risk of appearing to bring our progress to a halt, I should like to take a preliminary glance at the processes involved in carrying out the interpretation of a dream. I cannot disguise from myself that the easiest way of making those processes clear and of defending their trustworthiness against criticism would be to take some particular dream as a sample, go through its interpretation (just as I have done with the dream of Irma's injection in my second chapter), and then collect the dream-thoughts which I have discovered and go on to reconstruct from them the process by which the dream was formed — in other words, to complete a dream-analysis by a dream-synthesis. I have in fact carried out that task for my own instruction on several specimens; but I cannot reproduce them here, since I am forbidden to do so for reasons connected with the nature of the psychological material involved — reasons which are of many kinds and which will be accepted as valid by any reasonable person. Such considerations interfered less in the *analysis* of dreams, since an analysis could be incomplete and nevertheless retain its value, even though it penetrated only a small way into the texture of the dream. But in the case of the *synthesis* of a dream I do not see how it can be convincing unless it is complete. I could only give a complete synthesis

<sup>13</sup>The first condition being that they must be overdetermined. (See p. 504.) [Tr.]

of dreams dreamt by people unknown to the reading public. Since however, this condition is fulfilled only by my patients, who are neurotics, I must postpone this part of my exposition of the subject till I am able — in another volume — to carry the psychological elucidation of neuroses to a point at which it can make contact with our present topic.<sup>14</sup>

My attempts at building up dreams by synthesis from the dream-thoughts have taught me that the material which emerges in the course of interpretation is not all of the same value. One part of it is made up of the essential dream-thoughts — those, that is, which completely replace the dream, and which, if there were no censorship of dreams, would be sufficient in themselves to replace it. The other part of the material is usually to be regarded as of less importance. Nor is it possible to support the view that all the thoughts of this second kind had a share in the formation of the dream. On the contrary, there may be associations among them which relate to events that occurred *after* the dream, between the times of dreaming and interpreting. This part of the material includes all the connecting paths that led from the manifest dream-content to the latent dream-thoughts, as well as the intermediate and linking associations by means of which, in the course of the process of interpretation, we came to discover these connecting paths.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>[Footnote added 1909:] Since writing the above words, I have published a complete analysis and synthesis of two dreams in my "Fragment of the Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" [Freud, 1905e (Sections II and III)]. See also the synthesis of the "Wolf Man's" dream in Section IV of Freud (1918b). — Added 1914:] Otto Rank's analysis "Ein Traum, der sich selbst deutet" ["A Dream which Interprets Itself," 1910], deserves mention as the most complete interpretation that has been published of a dream of considerable length. [Freud, (Tr.)]

<sup>15</sup>The last four sentences (beginning with "the other part of the material") date in their present form from 1919. In editions earlier than that, this passage ran as follows: "The other part of the material may be brought together under the term 'collaterals.' As a whole, they constitute the paths over which the true wish, which arises from the dream-thoughts, passes before becoming the dream-wish. The first set of these 'collaterals' consist in derivatives from the dream-thoughts proper; they are, schematically regarded, displacements from what is essential to what is inessential. A second set of them comprise the thoughts that connect these inessential elements

We are here interested only in the essential dream-thoughts. These usually emerge as a complex of thoughts and memories of the most intricate possible structure, with all the attributes of the trains of thought familiar to us in waking life. They are not infrequently trains of thought starting out from more than one center, though having points of contact. Each train of thought is almost invariably accompanied by its contradictory counterpart, linked with it by antithetical association.

The different portions of this complicated structure stand, of course, in the most manifold logical relations to one another. They can represent foreground and background, digressions and illustrations, conditions, chains of evidence and counter-arguments. When the whole mass of these dream-thoughts is brought under the pressure of the dream-work, and its elements are turned about, broken into fragments and jammed together — almost like pack-ice — the question arises of what happens to the logical connections which have hitherto formed its framework. What representation do dreams provide for "if," "because," "just as," "although," "either — or," and all the other conjunctions without which we cannot understand sentences or speeches?

In the first resort our answer must be that dreams have no means at their disposal for representing these logical relations between the dream-thoughts. For the most part dreams disregard all these conjunctions, and it is only the substantive content of the dream-thoughts that they take over and manipulate. The restoration of the connections which the dream-work has destroyed is a task which has to be performed by the interpretative process.

The incapacity of dreams to express these things must lie in the nature of the psychical material out of which dreams are made. The plastic arts of painting and sculpture labor, indeed, under a similar limitation as compared with poetry, which can make use of speech; and here

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(which have become important owing to displacement) with one another, and extend from them to the dream-content. Finally, a third set consist in the associations and trains of thought by means of which the work of interpretation leads us from the dream-content to the second group of collaterals. It need not be supposed that the whole of this third set were necessarily also concerned in the formation of the dream." [Tr.]



once again the reason for their incapacity lies in the nature of the material which these two forms of art manipulate in their effort to express something. Before painting became acquainted with the laws of expression by which it is governed, it made attempts to get over this handicap. In ancient paintings small labels were hung from the mouths of the persons represented, containing in written characters the speeches which the artist despaired of representing pictorially.

At this point an objection may perhaps be raised in dispute of the idea that dreams are unable to represent logical relations. For there are dreams in which the most complicated intellectual operations take place, statements are contradicted or confirmed, ridiculed or compared, just as they are in waking thought. But here again appearances are deceitful. If we go into the interpretation of dreams such as these, we find that the whole of this *is part of the material of the dream-thoughts and is not a representation of intellectual work performed during the dream itself*. What is reproduced by the ostensible thinking in the dream is the *subject matter* of the dream-thoughts and not the *mutual relations between them*, the assertion of which constitutes thinking. I shall bring forward some instances of this. But the easiest point to establish in this connection is that all spoken sentences which occur in dreams and are specifically described as such are unmodified or slightly modified reproductions of speeches which are also to be found among the recollections in the material of the dream-thoughts. A speech of this kind is often no more than an allusion to some event included among the dream-thoughts, and the meaning of the dream may be a totally different one.

Nevertheless, I will not deny that critical thought-activity which is not a mere repetition of material in the dream-thoughts *does* have a share in the formation of dreams. I shall have to elucidate the part played by this factor at the end of the present discussion. It will then become apparent that this thought-activity is not produced by the dream-thoughts but by the dream itself after it has already, in a certain sense, been completed.

Provisionally, then, it may be said that the logical relations between the dream-thoughts are not given any separate representation in dreams.

For instance, if a contradiction occurs in a dream, it is either a contradiction of the dream itself or a contradiction derived from the subject-matter of one of the dream-thoughts. A contradiction in a dream can only correspond in an exceedingly indirect manner to a contradiction *between* the dream-thoughts. But just as the art of painting eventually found a way of expressing, by means other than the floating labels, at least the *intention* of the words of the personages represented — affection, threats, warnings, and so on — so too there is a possible means by which dreams can take account of some of the logical relations between their dream-thoughts, by making an appropriate modification in the method of representation characteristic of dreams. Experience shows that different dreams vary greatly in this respect. While some dreams completely disregard the logical sequence of their material, others attempt to give as full an indication of it as possible. In doing so dreams depart sometimes more and sometimes less widely from the text that is at their disposal for manipulation. Incidentally dreams vary similarly in their treatment of the *chronological* sequence of the dream-thoughts, if such a sequence has been established in the unconscious (as, for instance, in the dream of Irma's injection).

What means does the dream-work possess for indicating these relations in the dream-thoughts which it is so hard to represent? I will attempt to enumerate them one by one.

In the first place, dreams take into account in a general way the connection which undeniably exists between all the portions of the dream-thoughts by combining the whole material into a single situation or event. They reproduce *logical connection* by *simultaneity in time*. Here they are acting like the painter who, in a picture of the School of Athens or of Parnassus, represents in one group all the philosophers or all the poets. It is true that they were never in fact assembled in a single hall or on a single mountain-top; but they certainly form a group in the conceptual sense.

Dreams carry this method of reproduction down to details. Whenever they show us two elements close together, this guarantees that there is some specially intimate connection between what corresponds to them among the dream-thoughts.

In the same way, in our system of writing, "ab" means that the two letters are to be pronounced in a single syllable. If a gap is left between the "a" and the "b," it means that the "a" is the last letter of one word and the "b" is the first of the next one.<sup>16</sup> So, too, collocations in dreams do not consist of any chance, disconnected portions of the dream-material, but of portions which are fairly closely connected in the dream-thoughts as well.

For representing *causal relations* dreams have two procedures which are in essence the same. Suppose the dream-thoughts run like this: "Since this was so and so, such and such was bound to happen." Then the commoner method of representation would be to introduce the dependent clause as an introductory dream and to add the principal clause as the main dream. If I have interpreted aright, the temporal sequence may be reversed. But the more extensive part of the dream always corresponds to the principal clause. . . .

## CONSIDERATIONS OF REPRESENTABILITY

We have been occupied so far with investigating the means by which dreams represent the relations between the dream-thoughts. In the course of this investigation, however, we have more than once touched upon the further topic of the general nature of the modifications which the material of the dream-thoughts undergoes for the purpose of the formation of a dream. We have learnt that material, stripped to a large extent of its relations, is submitted to a process of compression, while at the same time displacements of intensity between its elements necessarily bring about a psychical transvaluation of the material. The displacements we have hitherto considered turned out to consist in the replacing of some one particular idea by another in some way closely associated with it, and they were used to facilitate condensation in so far as, by their means, instead of *two* elements, a single common element intermediate between

them found its way into the dream. We have not yet referred to any other sort of displacement. Analyses show us, however, that another sort exists and that it reveals itself in a change in the *verbal expression* of the thoughts concerned. In both cases there is a displacement along a chain of associations; but a process of such a kind can occur in various psychical spheres, and the outcome of the displacement may in one case be that one element is replaced by another, while the outcome in another case may be that a single element has its *verbal form* replaced by another.

This second species displacement which occurs in dream-formation is not only of great theoretical interest but is also specially well calculated to explain the appearance of fantastic absurdity in which dreams are disguised. The direction taken by the displacement usually results in a colorless and abstract expression in the dream-thought being exchanged for a pictorial and concrete one. The advantage, and accordingly the purpose, of such a change jumps to the eyes. A thing that is pictorial is, from the point of view of a dream, a thing that is *capable of being represented*: it can be introduced into a situation in which abstract expressions offer the same kind of difficulties to representation in dreams as a political leading article<sup>17</sup> in a newspaper would offer to an illustrator. But not only representability, but the interests of condensation and the censorship as well, can be the gainers from this exchange. A dream-thought is unusable so long as it is expressed in an abstract form; but when once it has been transformed into pictorial language, contrasts and identifications of the kind which the dream-work requires, and which it creates if they are not already present, can be established more easily than before between the new form of expression and the remainder of the material underlying the dream. This is so because in every language concrete terms, in consequence of the history of their development, are richer in associations than conceptual ones. We may suppose that a good part of the intermediate work done during the formation of a dream, which seeks to reduce the dispersed dream-thoughts to the most succinct and unified expression possible,

<sup>16</sup>This simile is a favorite one of Freud's. He uses it . . . [in this essay] and again in the middle of Section I of the case history of Dora (1905c) It is possibly derived from a lyric of Goethe's ("Schwer in Waldes Busch") in which the same image occurs. [Tr.]

<sup>17</sup>Editorial.

proceeds along the line of finding appropriate verbal transformations for the individual thoughts. Any one thought, whose form of expression may happen to be fixed for other reasons, will operate in a determinant and selective manner on the possible forms of expression allotted to the other thoughts, and it may do so, perhaps, from the very start — as is the case in writing a poem. If a poem is to be written in rhymes, the second line of a couplet is limited by two conditions: it must express an appropriate meaning, and the expression of that meaning must rhyme with the first line. No doubt the best poem will be one in which we fail to notice the intention of finding a rhyme, and in which the two thoughts have, by mutual influence, chosen from the very start a verbal expression which will allow a rhyme to emerge with only slight subsequent adjustment.

In a few instances a change of expression of this kind assists dream-condensation even more directly, by finding a form of words which owing to its ambiguity is able to give expression to more than one of the dream-thoughts. In this way the whole domain of verbal wit is put at the disposal of the dream-work. There is no need to be astonished at the part played by words in dream-formation. Words, since they are the nodal points of numerous ideas, may be regarded as predestined to ambiguity; and the neuroses (e.g. in framing obsessions and phobias), no less than dreams, make unashamed use of the advantages thus

offered by words for purposes of condensation and disguise. It is easy to show that dream-distortion too profits from displacement of expression. If one ambiguous word is used instead of two unambiguous ones the result is misleading; and if our everyday, sober method of expression is replaced by a pictorial one, our understanding is brought to a halt, particularly since a dream never tells us whether its elements are to be interpreted literally or in a figurative sense or whether they are to be connected with the material of the dream-thoughts directly or through the intermediary of some interpolated phraseology. In interpreting any dream-element it is in general doubtful

- (a) whether it is to be taken in a positive or negative sense (as an antithetic relation),
- (b) whether it is to be interpreted historically (as a recollection),
- (c) whether it is to be interpreted symbolically, or
- (d) whether its interpretation is to depend on its wording.

Yet, in spite of all this ambiguity, it is fair to say that the productions of the dream-work, which, it must be remembered, *are not made with the intention of being understood*, present no greater difficulties to their translators than do the ancient hieroglyphic scripts to those who seek to read them.