



The Influence of Schopenhauer upon Friedrich Nietzsche

Author(s): Grace Neal Dolson

Source: *The Philosophical Review*, May, 1901, Vol. 10, No. 3 (May, 1901), pp. 241-250

Published by: Duke University Press on behalf of *Philosophical Review*

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2176260>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Duke University Press and are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Philosophical Review*

JSTOR

THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOPENHAUER UPON
FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE.

SOME time between October, 1865, and August, 1867, Friedrich Nietzsche, who was then a student of philology at the University of Leipzig, found in an antiquarian shop a copy of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*.¹ The book was new to him and he carried it home. When he had finished reading it, Schopenhauer had gained another disciple. With all the ardor of a newly made convert, Nietzsche began to proselyte. He succeeded in winning over his friends to the faith, and together they paid homage to their divinity. If one was in trouble, the others suggested appropriate passages from Schopenhauer's works. It was no mere collection of doctrines that they studied. Schopenhauer was to them an incarnation of the ideal philosopher, a friend with whom they came into almost personal relationship. Later, when Nietzsche accepted the chair of philology at Bâle, it was with the express intention of infusing the Schopenhauerian spirit into philology.² When he came to write *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, he called one of them *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*, and in it he tried to show what Schopenhauer meant to him. The essay, instead of reproducing Schopenhauer's theories, is rather a description of his 'physiological influence,' as Nietzsche calls it.³ The importance of a philosopher, he goes on to say, rests not so much upon specific doctrines, as upon the example that he sets both in his books and in his life; for a philosopher is not only a great thinker but a genuine man, and it is in these virile qualities that Schopenhauer is preëminent. He makes men see what life means, and what are the essentials of a true culture. He preaches freedom from the prejudices due to individual surroundings, to the end that each soul may learn to live its own life undisturbed by outside influences.⁴ His independence makes

¹ Frau Förster-Nietzsche: *Das Leben Friedrich Nietzsche's*, Vol. I, p. 231.

² *Ibid.*, p. 306.

³ *Werke*, Vol. I, pp. 402-3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 386-392.

him the best possible educator (*Erzieher*). From him men may learn that happiness is not an essential, and that the end of life is the establishment of a nobler culture and the production of genius. The entire essay is written in such a spirit of enthusiasm that the reader is led almost involuntarily to feel that Schopenhauer is one of the greatest names in the history of philosophy. "I belong to the readers of Schopenhauer," Nietzsche says, "who after they have read the first page of him know with certainty that they will read all his pages, and that they will listen to every word that he has said."

After Nietzsche's own system had taken more definite shape, he threw off his whole-hearted allegiance to his master, and even came to feel that in his own nature was to be found the explanation of the deep significance that Schopenhauer had once had for him. Full of the ardor of discipleship, he had read his own ideas into the other's words, and even while making use of the Schopenhauerian forms had filled them with a different content. It may be doubted whether Nietzsche was just in this respect to his early position and the influences that moulded it. He was too much in love with intellectual freedom to find it easy to believe that he had once accepted anyone's philosophy. Nevertheless, the testimony of his books is against him, and it is safe to assume that Schopenhauer's influence was a real and important one. The problem to be solved does not concern its existence, but rather its direction and extent.

Nietzsche's philosophy presents such different aspects at different stages of its development that some chronological arrangement of his views is almost a necessity. His writings lend themselves most readily to a triple division, the three periods of which may be called from their different standpoints the æsthetic, the intellectual, and the ethical. Each gives an answer to the question that occupied Nietzsche's attention during the whole of his literary activity, namely, that of the nature of true culture, or, what was practically the same thing for him, the problem of the supremely valuable. Nietzsche was always asking what it is that is really worth while, and since at different stages of his development the world appeared to him under different aspects, his answers

were naturally inconsistent. To attempt to trace the influence of anyone through so many phases of thought is perhaps a hazardous undertaking. It is difficult to avoid emphasizing overmuch either the differences or the likenesses. Any throughgoing agreement between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer is precluded by the nature of the subjects treated. Nietzsche's interests were never in the direction of metaphysics. He even ridiculed attempts to solve the ultimate problem of the universe, sometimes seeming to base his scorn less upon the frailty of the human reason than upon the conviction that there were no ultimates to be known. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, was a metaphysician. He took seriously such questions as the nature of the phenomenon and the noumenon and the relation of the two to each other. He approached the *Ding-an-sich* with all the traditional reverence of a German philosopher. Naturally, the subject matter of his philosophy and that of Nietzsche's had often nothing in common. In some respects, however, as has been stated, they remained closely related, and although these points of agreement decreased in number as Nietzsche attained greater independence, they nevertheless did not entirely disappear.

At the time of the publication of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* in 1872, Nietzsche was a professed follower of Schopenhauer. The subject of the book precluded any discussion of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, but the published selections from Nietzsche's note-books written at this time show that he accepted most of the theories of his master; and even without these explicit statements the implications of the *Geburt* would be sufficient to establish the importance of Schopenhauer's influence. The fragments found in the note-books contain a discussion of the ultimate nature of the universe, which, in true Schopenhauerian fashion, Nietzsche declares to be the will.¹ The intellect is merely phenomenal: outside of the will and its manifestations nothing can be said to exist at all. The will's efforts to attain individuality are the cause of the phenomenal world, of which man forms a part. No matter what varied shapes the phenomena may assume, in themselves they are less than nothing. Their only

¹ *Werke*, Vol. IX, pp. 47, 66, 67, 69-72, 130, 164-174.

value lies in the degree in which they further existence. Whatever brings about permanence is affirmed by the will without regard to any other characteristics. Nietzsche differs from Schopenhauer in distinguishing between conscious and unconscious idea, and also speaks of an original intelligence that logically precedes individual existence.¹ Individuation is the result of this unconscious idea, of the universal ideating principle, which seems to stand midway between the particular phenomena and the will. The difference, however, is not fundamental, and as it had no influence upon Nietzsche's position in other matters, it may well be ignored, especially since he deliberately refrained from publishing any statement concerning these early metaphysical theories.

The notion of the primal nature of the will is the connecting link between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. In Nietzsche's later writings, although he abandoned the distinctively Schopenhauerian form of the theory, he still gave the will the foremost position, emphasizing in fact more and more the secondary importance of the intellect. To be sure, the will to live has with him become the will for power, but it is still the will. He reduces to it, all the other manifestations of the mind, and even attempts by means of it to explain the world. At least, he says that since the will can act only upon will, the one possible reduction of the world to simple terms is found in the assumption that the will is everywhere present.² In no other way can the relation between the human will and its environment be made intelligible. To complete the simplification, one needs only to suppose that all the impulses of the mind are different manifestations of a single form of the will, 'the will for power.' Unlike Schopenhauer, Nietzsche nowhere goes into details concerning the cosmological side of his theory, so to speak, but devotes all his attention to showing the omnipresence of the 'will for power' in the life of mankind, where it appears not only as the formula for all existence, but as the criterion of value as well. All states of consciousness are due to it, and are to be measured by the degree in which they

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 66, 67.

² *Werke*, Vol. VII, pp. 27, 33, 55-57.

express it. There is little attempt to show in detail the presence of the will as a basis for the individual ideas and feelings. Its fundamental nature was so much a matter of assumption with Nietzsche, that he not only wisely refrained from trying to prove it, but also felt no obligations to point out its various manifestations. He was more interested in establishing the moral value of the will, in correlating degrees of will and degrees of morality. In doing this he differed radically from Schopenhauer, inasmuch as he made the supreme good consist not in complete denial of the will, but in its fullest affirmation.

As soon as one passes from this general attitude to more definite theories, the differences between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer are more numerous than the resemblances. In fact, the one field where they were in anything like agreement is æsthetics. This is doubtless partially due to the early appearance chronologically of Nietzsche's positive contributions to the theory of art and to art criticism ; but even later his revolt from Schopenhauer was scarcely perceptible in this particular field. Even here, however, the subjects treated by the two men were as a rule different, but the Schopenhauerian spirit of Nietzsche's work is evident. One always has a feeling that, in general, Schopenhauer would have treated the subject in the same way, if he had ever had occasion to discuss the same questions.

In fact, an attempt has been made to show that the two forces which Nietzsche found in all forms of artistic expression, and which he called the Apollinic and the Dionysian, are nothing more nor less than Schopenhauer's *Wille* and *Vorstellung*. There are, however, two objections to such an identification. In the first place, Nietzsche never even suggested the extension of his forces beyond the field of art. He never attempted to apply them to the universe as a whole ; and though, if he had done so, the result might have been practically Schopenhauer's ultimates, yet there seems to be no reason why any one should insist upon doing in his name what he deliberately left undone. The second reason for rejecting the proposed parallelism is that the Apollinic and Dionysian correspond much more closely to one of Schopenhauer's specifically æsthetic classifications. Schopenhauer drew

a sharp line of division between the pictorial and plastic arts on the one side and music on the other, which latter he regarded as the more direct expression of the will, and so as more ultimate in its nature. Nietzsche made the same distinction with regard to his two art forces. The Apollinic finds expression in all the static arts, so to speak. The Dionysian, on the contrary, includes all the musical and passionate arts, such as lyric poetry, and especially music itself. The Apollinic is a dream, the Dionysian is intoxication. The latter expresses the will immediately, without veiling its strength of feeling under the form of representation. This is substantially Schopenhauer's position, and the very closeness of the parallel makes the attempted identification with *Wille* and *Vorstellung* seem the more forced.

Outside the field of æsthetics the differences between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer are everywhere evident. One of the most striking is in the valuation put upon truth. Nietzsche regarded the history of civilization as made up of one long line of errors, without which any advance would have been an impossibility. The development of reason, of art, of all the feelings and sentiments that make life full of meaning to us, is based upon false ideas. A knowledge of the truth would have been fatal to much that is worth having. Schopenhauer's position is just the opposite of Nietzsche's. According to him every error is a deadly poison.¹ The truth and the truth alone is worthy of pursuit.

Inasmuch as Nietzsche's most important contributions to philosophic thought are ethical in nature, any discussion of his relations to other writers must concern itself chiefly with the problems of morality. Here, from the very nature of Nietzsche's system, one finds no metaphysical basis for the ethics proper, as there is in Schopenhauer. The will is assumed as the fundamental factor in human life; and although there is a brief account of its universal validity as an explanatory and substantial principle, this is altogether a matter of secondary importance, merely a subordinate issue that has no vital connection with the more important problem of the will as an element of personality. Whether the will in this more restricted form is the same in Nietzsche and in Schop-

¹ *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Bk. I, § 8.

enhauer is a question that hardly admits of a categorical answer. If the 'will to live' and the 'will for power' are taken strictly, the terms are evidently not identical in meaning. Nevertheless the 'will to live' necessarily includes the exercise of power and the effort to get it. No existence is possible without a certain amount of struggle with other existences, and some degree of success in overcoming them. Of course, the desire for life and the desire for power sometimes conflict; they are not always the same. The latter, at least as described by Nietzsche, is more conscious and might be called a higher degree of development. The closeness of the parallel between it and the 'will to live' depends entirely upon the interpretation of the two principles. They may be put far apart, or they may be brought close together; either procedure admits of justification. A middle course would perhaps be the most prudent, but here again the amount of likeness and of difference to be admitted must remain a matter of individual opinion.

However the will for power is interpreted, it is the basal principle of Nietzsche's ethics; and he differed from Schopenhauer in that he regarded the exercise of the will not only as a fact, but as a moral end. The one thing needful is more life, a healthy freedom of feeling and impulse. Nothing could be further from quietism than Nietzsche's deification of force, especially in its physical form. The result is an acceptance of Schopenhauer's pessimistic premises, but a denial of the conclusions drawn from them. There is no doubt that the world is evil, and that wretchedness is everywhere. Life is full of pain and sorrow for which there is no help nor hope, and the future is quite as dark as the present and the past. Man is a poor thing, pitiable in his weakness, and is not even a healthy animal. All this and more Nietzsche believed, but he was never led by it to advocate the inaction of despair. The strong man, who is the only being worthy of consideration, fights the harder when fate is against him. No pain can overcome him, because he will yield to nothing. He is strong enough even to live without hope. He recognizes the condition of the world, he has no illusions, but the very abundance of opposition gives him a fierce joy in his own power of overcoming evil. He is always and everywhere a fighter with no desire to yield.

It may be questioned whether such a position as Nietzsche's can properly be denominated pessimism. To call it optimism seems absurd, and yet according to it life certainly does offer something worth the having. Evil may be predominant, but so long as a man can struggle against it, life is good. There is no suggestion of despair, no feeling that salvation should be sought in the negation of the will. Nietzsche's own name for his position describes it exactly. His attitude toward life is that of a 'tragic optimist.'

Great as is the difference between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer with regard to their valuation of life, they are no less far apart in their relative estimation of the virtues. In fact, one of the main incentives to Nietzsche's work in ethics seems to have been his opposition to Schopenhauer's view of sympathy. Instead of making sympathy the chief virtue, he put it among the vices, and could find no terms opprobrious enough for those thinkers who might defend it. In his eyes it was a mark of weakness, a disgrace to both giver and receiver. In the one it shows a desire to pry into another's secrets, a total lack of delicacy and reserve; in the other, a willingness to acknowledge oneself beaten and no longer self-sufficient. To found all morality upon sympathy is to make every man a slave, whose only criterion of worth is that which makes life easier.

Nietzsche classes with sympathy all the allied virtues, such as humility and self-sacrifice. These he regards as positively vicious, and the only qualities that he considers worthy of praise are those characteristic of the warrior. Strength and power, and pleasure in using them are the virtues of a free man. Nothing that does not express these in some form or other deserves the name of virtue. Complete independence, complete self-assertion, a certain ruthlessness and cruelty are all so much superior to sympathy that a comparison is almost impossible.

The ethical ideals of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche evidently differ as much and in the same way as does their estimation of the different ethical qualities. For the former, the highest end of human existence is found in the negation of the will to live. The first step toward its attainment is sympathy with the sufferings of

others, in which state one feels the underlying identity of all life, even of all being. As this feeling is strengthened, the futility of effort becomes more evident, all desire is suppressed, and life itself ceases to be worth a thought. The final stage is complete quietism, the negation of all positive physical and mental life. The ethical ideal held up by Schopenhauer is that of the Buddhist monk. For both, existence is the greatest of evils, involving all the others, and the saint is he who approaches most closely to the state of Nirvana.

It would be impossible to conceive any form of the ethical ideal more opposed to that of Nietzsche. As his chief virtues are those that best further aggressive life, so his ideal is complete self-affirmation. Its embodiment is the warrior, who crushes all opposition by the exercise of his own strength and power. The ethical aim is not life for others but life for self. The development of one's own personality, self-expression, freedom from restraint even by ideas, are at once means to the will for power and also a part of the end. Napoleon was the incarnation of the noble idea. He had the capacity for power and the will to use it without misgivings. The aim for man is self-assertion, and all that interferes with it is to be ruthlessly cast aside.

In the face of such great differences between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, what is the close connection in their views that is commonly assumed to exist? We have found no great similarity in their theories, and their interests were on the whole even more widely separated. Yet the relation between them was a real and important one. What seems especially to have attracted Nietzsche to Schopenhauer was a radical independence of tradition and public opinion, and where he praises the latter's work it is usually for this freedom from outside influences. Schopenhauer was a man who gloried in disagreeing with established authority, living or dead; and he was able to find little to praise in the systems of any philosophers except Plato and Kant. His manner of expressing his criticisms was often personal in its tone and could hardly fail to be offensive to many of his readers. He advocated greater freedom in many lines of thought, and the fact that the results in his own case were a different

form of dogmatism, rather than more open-mindedness, probably recommended his standpoint to Nietzsche all the more. It was exactly the intellectual attitude that appealed most strongly to him. He controverted many of Schopenhauer's views with great bitterness, but he always recognized that here was an enemy worthy of him; and his strictures were never contemptuous. The chief bond between the two men was that of a similar intellectual personality; and though Schopenhauer's influence upon the latter periods of Nietzsche's philosophy was not always positive, and often appears quite indefinite, it was no less real.

GRACE NEAL DOLSON.

WELLS COLLEGE.