

*Paucis natus est, qui populum aetatis  
suae cogitat. Seneca [Epist. 79, 17]*

("Whoever in his thinking takes note of his  
own age will influence only a few." [Tr.])

# *THE WORLD AS WILL AND REPRESENTATION*

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## CHAPTER XLIX

### The Road to Salvation

There is only one inborn error, and that is the notion that we exist in order to be happy. It is inborn in us, because it coincides with our existence itself, and our whole being is only its paraphrase, indeed our body is its monogram. We are nothing more than the will-to-live, and the successive satisfaction of all our willing is what we think of through the concept of happiness.

So long as we persist in this inborn error, and indeed even become confirmed in it through optimistic dogmas, the world seems to us full of contradictions. For at every step, in great things as in small, we are bound to experience that the world and life are certainly not arranged for the purpose of containing a happy existence. Now, while the thoughtless person feels himself vexed and annoyed hereby merely in real life, in the case of the person who thinks, there is added to the pain in reality the theoretical perplexity as to why a world and a life that exist so that he may be happy in them, answer their purpose so badly. At first it finds expression in pious ejaculations such as, "Ah! why are the tears beneath the moon so many?" and many others; but in their train come disquieting doubts about the assumptions of those preconceived optimistic dogmas. We may still try to put the blame for our individual unhappiness now on the circumstances, now on other people, now on our own bad luck or even lack of skill, and we may know quite well how all these have worked together to bring it about, but this in no way alters the result, that we have missed the real purpose of life, which in fact consists in being happy. The consideration of this then often proves to be very depressing, especially when life is already drawing to an end; hence the countenances of almost all elderly persons wear the expression of what is called *disappointment*. In addition to this, however, every day of our life up to now has taught us that, even when joys and pleasures are attained, they are in themselves deceptive, do not per-

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form what they promise, do not satisfy the heart, and finally that their possession is at least embittered by the vexations and unpleasantnesses that accompany or spring from them. Pains and sorrows, on the other hand, prove very real, and often exceed all expectation. Thus everything in life is certainly calculated to bring us back from that original error, and to convince us that the purpose of our existence is not to be happy. Indeed, if life is considered more closely and impartially, it presents itself rather as specially intended to show us that we are *not* to feel happy in it, since by its whole nature it bears the character of something for which we have lost the taste, which must disgust us, and from which we have to come back, as from an error, so that our heart may be cured of the passion for enjoying and indeed for living, and may be turned away from the world. In this sense, it would accordingly be more correct to put the purpose of life in our woe than in our welfare. For the considerations at the end of the previous chapter have shown that the more one suffers, the sooner is the true end of life attained, and that the more happily one lives, the more is that end postponed. Even the conclusion of Seneca's last letter is in keeping with this: *bonum tunc habebis tuum, quum intelliges infelicissimos esse felices*,<sup>1</sup> which certainly seems to indicate an influence of Christianity. The peculiar effect of the tragedy rests ultimately on the fact that it shakes that inborn error, since it furnishes a vivid illustration of the frustration of human effort and of the vanity of this whole existence in a great and striking example, and thereby reveals life's deepest meaning; for this reason, tragedy is recognized as the sublimest form of poetry. Now whoever has returned by one path or the other from that error which is *a priori* inherent in us, from that *πρῶτον ψεύδος*<sup>2</sup> of our existence, will soon see everything in a different light, and will find that the world is in harmony with his insight, though not with his wishes. Misfortunes of every sort and size will no longer surprise him, although they cause him pain; for he has seen that pain and trouble are the very things that work towards the true end of life, namely the turning away of the will from it. In all that may happen, this will in fact give him a wonderful coolness and composure, similar to that with which a patient undergoing a long and painful cure bears the pain of it as a sign of its efficacy. Suffering expresses itself clearly enough to the whole of human existence as its true destiny. Life is deeply steeped in suffering, and cannot escape from it; our entrance into it takes place amid tears, at bottom its course is always

<sup>1</sup> "Then will you have for yourself your own good, when you see that the lucky ones are the unhappiest of all." [Tr.]

<sup>2</sup> "First false step." [Tr.]