

THE FUNDAMENTAL URGE FOR KNOWLEDGE

*Two souls, alas, dwell within my chest,
Each wants to separate from the other,
one, in hearty love lust,
Clings to earth with clutching organs;
The other lifts itself mightily from the dust
To high ancestral regions.*

J. W. Goethe, Faust I, 1112

This chapter is -in part- taken from the book by Rudolf Steiner "Philosophy of Spritual Activity" or also translated as "Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path" and in the original version "Philosophie der Freiheit" and gives a good impression of Rudolf Steiner's stand in the development of thinking and consciousness in current times.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (28 August 1749 – 22 March 1832) was a German writer, philosopher, scientist and politician. His body of work includes epic and lyric poetry written in a variety of metres and styles; prose and verse dramas; memoirs; an autobiography; literary and aesthetic criticism; treatises on botany, anatomy, and color; and four novels. In addition, numerous literary and scientific fragments, more than 10,000 letters, and nearly 3,000 drawings by him are extant.



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

A literary celebrity by the age of 25, Goethe was ennobled by the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, Carl August in 1782 after first taking up residence there in November of 1775 following the success of his first novel, "The Sorrows of Young Werther". He was an early participant in the "Sturm und Drang" literary movement. During his first ten years in Weimar, Goethe served as a member of the Duke's private council, sat on the war and highway commissions, oversaw the reopening of silver mines in nearby Ilmenau, and implemented a series of administrative reforms at the University of Jena. He also contributed to the planning of Weimar's botanical park and the rebuilding of its

Ducal Palace, which in 1998 were together designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

After returning from a tour of Italy in 1788, his first major scientific work, the *Metamorphosis of Plants*, was published. In 1791, he was made managing director of the theatre at Weimar, and in 1794 he began a friendship with the dramatist, historian, and philosopher Friedrich Schiller, whose plays he premiered until Schiller's death in 1805. During this period Goethe published his second novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, the verse epic *Hermann and Dorothea*, and, in 1808, the first part of his most celebrated drama, *Faust*. His conversations and various common undertakings throughout the 1790s with Schiller, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Johann Gottfried Herder, Alexander von Humboldt, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and August and Friedrich Schlegel have, in later years, been collectively termed Weimar Classicism.

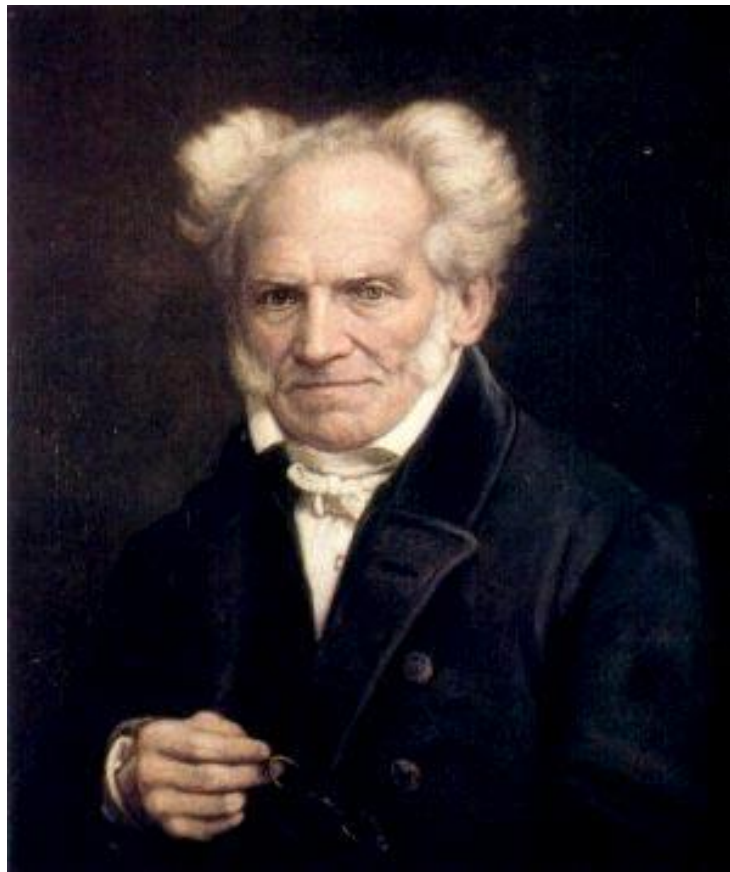


Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) cited *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* as one of the four greatest novels ever written and Ralph Waldo Emerson selected Goethe, along with Plato, Napoleon, and William Shakespeare, as one of six "representative men" in his work of the same name. Goethe's comments and observations form the

basis of several biographical works, most notably Johann Peter Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*. There are frequent references to Goethe's various sayings and maxims throughout the course of Friedrich Nietzsche's work and there are numerous allusions to Goethe in the novels of Hermann Hesse and Thomas Mann as well as in the psychological writings of Jung. Goethe's poems were set to music throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by a number of composers, including Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, Charles Gounod, Richard Wagner, Hugo Wolf, and Gustav Mahler.

Arthur Schopenhauer (22 February 1788 – 21 September 1860) was a German philosopher best known for his book “*The World as Will and Representation*” (German: *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*), in which he claimed that our world is driven by a continually dissatisfied will, continually seeking satisfaction. Influenced by Eastern thought, he maintained that the "truth was recognized by the sages of India." Consequently, his solutions to suffering were similar to those of Vedantic and Buddhist thinkers (i.e., asceticism). His faith in "transcendental ideality" led him to accept atheism and learn from Christian philosophy.

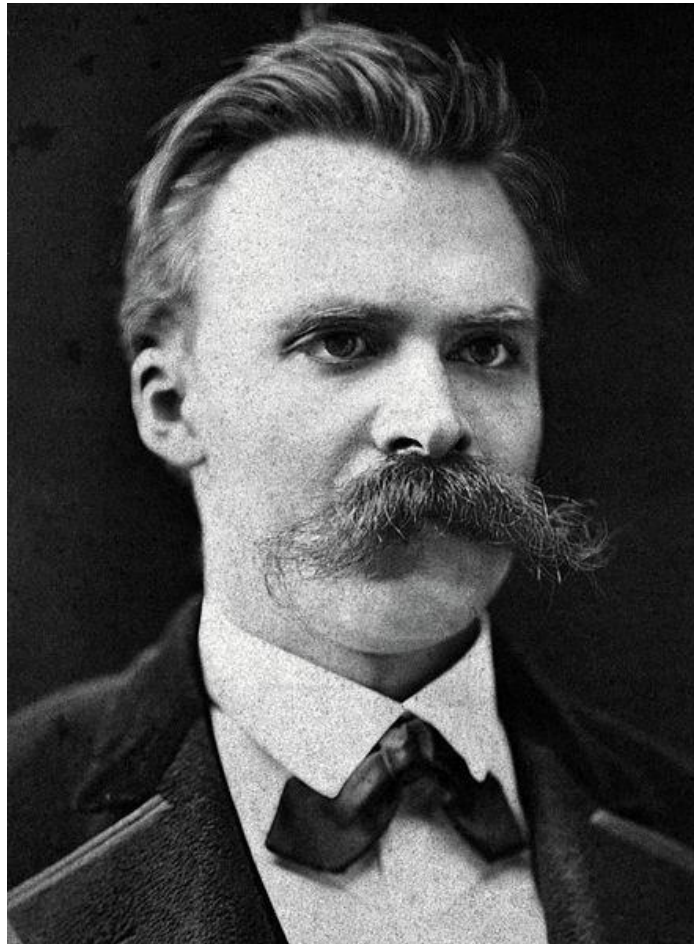


Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)

At age 25, Schopenhauer published his doctoral dissertation: “*On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*”, which examined the four distinct aspects of experience in the phenomenal world; consequently, he has been influential in the history of phenomenology. He has influenced many thinkers, including **Friedrich Nietzsche**, **Richard Wagner**, Otto Weininger, **Ludwig Wittgenstein**, Erwin

Schrödinger, **Albert Einstein**, **Sigmund Freud**, **Otto Rank**, **Carl Jung**, **Joseph Campbell**, **Leo Tolstoy**, **Thomas Mann**, Jorge Luis Borges, Mustafa Mahmud and Edouard d'Araille among others.

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (15 October 1844 – 25 August 1900) was a German philologist, philosopher, cultural critic, poet and composer. He wrote several critical texts on religion, morality, contemporary culture, philosophy and science, displaying a fondness for metaphor, irony and aphorism.

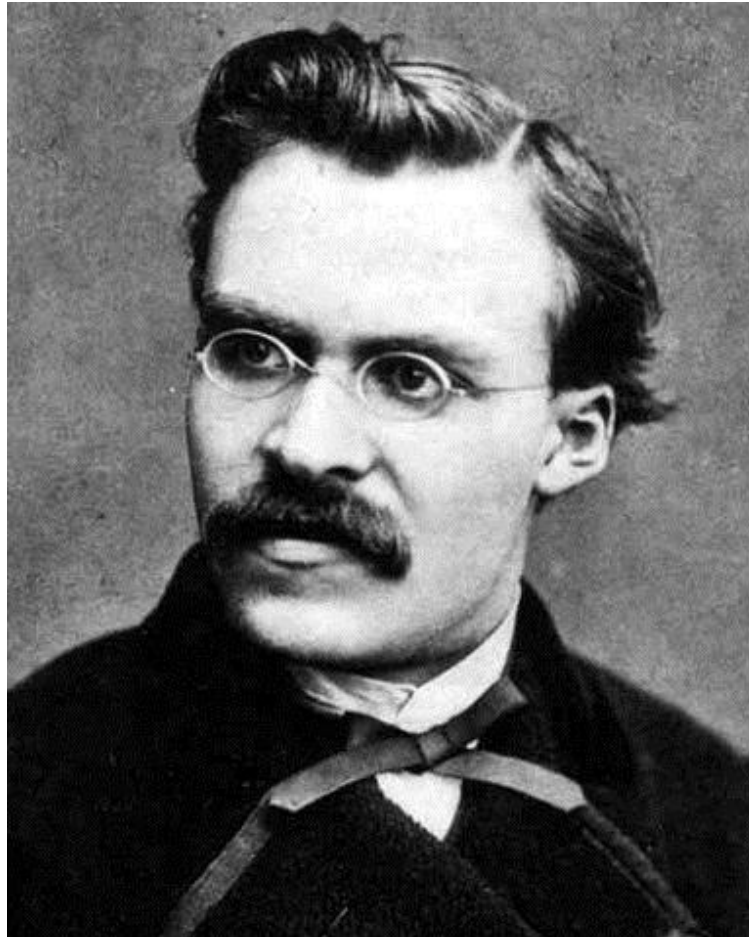


Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Nietzsche's key ideas include the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy, perspectivism, the Will to Power, the "death of God", the Übermensch and eternal recurrence. Central to his philosophy is the idea of "life-affirmation", which involves questioning of any doctrine that drains one's expansive energies, however socially prevalent those ideas might be. His radical questioning of the value and objectivity of truth has been the focus of extensive commentary and his influence remains substantial, particularly in the continental philosophical tradition comprising existentialism, postmodernism, and post-structuralism.

Nietzsche began his career as a classical philologist — a scholar of Greek and Roman textual criticism — before turning to philosophy. In 1869, at age twenty-four, he was appointed to the Chair of Classical Philology at the University of Basel, the youngest

individual to have held this position. He resigned in the summer of 1879 due to health problems that plagued him most of his life.[In 1889, at age forty-four, he suffered a collapse and a complete loss of his mental faculties. The breakdown was later ascribed to atypical general paresis due to tertiary syphilis, but this diagnosis has come into question. Re-examination of Nietzsche's medical evaluation papers show that he almost certainly died of brain cancer, and researchers attribute his posthumous smear to an anti-Nazism campaign.



Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Nietzsche lived his remaining years in the care of his mother until her death in 1897, after which he fell under the care of his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche until his death in 1900.

As his caretaker, his sister assumed the roles of curator and editor of Nietzsche's manuscripts. Förster-Nietzsche was married to a prominent German nationalist and antisemite, Bernhard Förster, and reworked Nietzsche's unpublished writings to fit her husband's ideology, often in ways contrary to Nietzsche's stated opinions, which were strongly and explicitly opposed to antisemitism and nationalism (see Nietzsche's criticism of antisemitism and nationalism). Through Förster-Nietzsche's editions, Nietzsche's name became associated with German militarism and Nazism, although later twentieth-century scholars have attempted to counteract this misconception of his ideas.

With the words, quoted at the top of this chapter, **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**

characterizes a trait deeply based in human nature. As human beings, we are never organized in a fully integrated, unified way. We always demand more than the world freely offers us. Nature gives us needs, and the satisfaction of some of these she leaves to our own activity. The gifts allotted to us are abundant, but even more abundant is our desire. We seem born for dissatisfaction. We look at a tree twice. The first time, we see its branches at rest, the second time in motion. We are unsatisfied with this observation. Why, we ask, does the tree present itself to us at rest, now in motion? Every glance at nature engenders a host of questions within us. We receive a new problem with each phenomenon that greets us. Every experience becomes a riddle. We see a creature similar to the mother animal emerging from the egg, and we ask the reason for this similarity. We observe a living creature's growth and development to a certain degree of perfection, and we seek the conditions of this experience. Nowhere are we content with what nature displays before our senses. We look everywhere for what we call an *explanation* of the facts.

That which we seek in things, over and above what is given to us immediately, splits our entire being into two parts. We become aware of standing in opposition to the world, as independent beings. The universe appears to us as two opposites: "I" or *ego*, and *world*.

We set up this barrier between ourselves and the world as soon as consciousness lights up within us. But we never lose the feeling that we do belong to the world, that a link exists that connects us to it, that we are creatures not *outside*, but within, the universe.

This feeling engenders an effort to bridge the opposition. And, in the final analysis, the whole spiritual striving of humankind consists in bridging this opposition. The history of spiritual life is a continual searching for the unity between the "I" and the world. Religion, art, and science share this as their goal.

The *religious believer* seeks the solution to the world-riddle posed by the "I", which is unsatisfied by the merely phenomenal world, in the revelation meted out by God.

Artists try to incorporate the ideas of their "I" in various materials to reconcile what lives within them to the outer world. They, too, feel unsatisfied with the merely phenomenal world and seek to build into it the something more that their "I", going above and beyond the world phenomena, contains.

Thinkers seek the laws of phenomena, striving to penetrate in thinking what they experience through observation. Only when we have made the *world content* into our *soul content* do we rediscover the connection from which we have sundered ourselves. We shall see later that this goal is reached only when the tasks of scientific research are understood much more profoundly than often occurs.

The whole relation between the "I" and the world that "I" have portrayed here meets us on the stage of history in the contrast between unitary worldview, or in *monism*, and a two-world theory, or *dualism*. Dualism directs its gaze solely to the separation that the human consciousness effects between the "I" and the world. Its whole effort is a futile struggle to reconcile these opposites, which it may call *spirit* and *matter*, *subject* and *object*, or *thinking* and *phenomenon*. It feels that a bridge between the two worlds must exist, but it is incapable of finding it. When human beings

experience themselves as "I", they can do no other than think of this "I" as being on the side of *spirit*.

When to this "I" they then oppose the world, they ascribe to the latter the perceptual world given to the senses: the *material* world. In this way, human beings locate themselves within the opposition of spirit and matter. They do so all the more because their own bodies belong to the material world. The "I" thus belongs to the spiritual, as part of it; while material things and processes, which are perceived by the senses, belong to the "world". All the riddles, therefore, that have to do with spirit and matter must be rediscovered by human beings in the fundamental riddle of their own essential being. *Monism* directs its gaze exclusively to unity, and seeks to deny or erase the opposites, present though these are. Neither monism nor dualism is satisfactory, for neither does justice to the facts.

Dualism sees spirit ("I") and matter (world) as two fundamentally different entities, and therefore it cannot understand how the two can affect another. How could spirit know what is going on in matter, if matter's specific nature is all together foreign to spirit? Or, given these conditions, how could spirit affect matter so that intentions translate to deeds? The most ingenious and absurd hypotheses have been proposed to answer these questions. Yet, to the present day, things are hardly better with monism which, until now, has attempted three solutions: either it denies spirit and becomes materialism; or it denies matter, seeking salvation through spiritualism; or else it claims that matter and spirit are inseparably united even in the simplest entity, so that it should come as no surprise if these two forms of existence, which after all are never apart, appear together in human beings.

Materialism can never offer a satisfactory explanation of the world. For every attempt at an explanation must begin with one's forming *thoughts* about phenomena. Thus, materialism starts with the thought of matter or of material processes. In doing so, it already has two different kinds of facts on hand: the material world and thoughts about it. Materialism attempts to understand the latter by seeing them as a purely material process. It believes that thinking occurs in the brain in the same way as digestion occurs in the animal organism. Just as it ascribes mechanical and organic effects to matter, materialism also assigns to matter the capacity, under certain circumstances, to think. But it forgets that all it has done is to shift the problem to another location. Materialists ascribe the capacity to think to matter rather than to them. And this brings them back to the starting point. How does matter manage to think about its own existence? Why does it not simply go on existing, perfectly content with itself? Materialism turns aside from the specific subject, our own "I", and arrives at an unspecific, hazy configuration: matter. Here the same riddle comes up again. The materialist view can only displace the problem, not solve it.

And what of the spiritualist view? Pure *spiritualists* deny matter any independent existence and conceive of it only as a product of spirit. If they apply this view to the riddle of their own human existence, they are driven into a corner. Over against the I, which may be placed on the side of spirit, there suddenly appears the sensory world. No spiritual point of entry into it seems open; it has to be perceived and experienced by the I through material processes. As long as it tries to explain itself solely as a spiritual entity, the "I" cannot find such material processes within itself. What works out for itself spiritually never contains the sense world. It is as if the "I" has to admit

that the world remains closed to it unless it puts itself into an unspiritual relationship to the world. Similarly, when we decide to act, we must translate our intentions into reality with the help of material stuff and forces. We are thus referred back to the outer world. The most extreme spiritualist, or perhaps the thinker who, through his absolute idealism, presents himself as an extreme spiritualist, is **Johann Gottlieb Fichte** (1762 - 1814), early on a disciple of Kant, went on to develop his own powerful system of transcendental idealism. His influence reached from the Romantic philosophy of **Novalis** and Coleridge to Rudolf Steiner. Steiner returned again and again to Fichte, beginning with his Inaugural Dissertation, "The Fundamentals of a Theory of Cognition with Special Reference to Fichte's Scientific Teaching" (1891), and published as Truth and Science [Knowledge] in 1892). Fichte attempted to derive the whole world structure from the "I". What he in fact succeeded in creating was a magnificent *thought picture* of the world, but one without any experiential content. Just as it is impossible for the materialist to declare spirit out of existence, so the spiritualist cannot disavow the external material world.



Novalis (1772-1801)

Novalis (born as Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg) was born in 1772 at Oberwiederstedt manor (now part of Arnstein, Saxony-Anhalt), in the Harz mountains. The family seat was a manorial estate, not simply a stately home. Novalis descended from ancient, Low German nobility. Different lines of the family include such important, influential magistrates and ministry officials as the Prussian chancellor Karl August von Hardenberg (1750–1822). An oil painting and a christening cap commonly assigned to Novalis are his only possessions now extant. In

the church in Wiederstedt, he was christened Georg Philipp Friedrich. He spent his childhood on the family estate and used it as the starting point for his travels into the Harz mountains.

Novalis's last years were astonishingly creative, filled with encyclopedic studies, the draft of a philosophical system based on idealism, and poetic work. Two collections of fragments that appeared during his lifetime, *Blütenstaub* (1798; "Pollen") and *Glauben und Liebe* (1798; "Faith and Love"), indicate his attempt to unite poetry, philosophy, and science in an allegorical interpretation of the world. His mythical romance *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), set in an idealized vision of the European Middle Ages, describes the mystical and romantic searchings of a young poet. The central image of his visions, a blue flower, became a widely recognized symbol of Romantic longing among Novalis' fellow Romantics. In the essay *Die Christenheit oder Europa* (1799; "Christendom or Europe"), Novalis calls for a universal Christian church to restore, in a new age, a Europe whose medieval cultural, social, and intellectual unity had been destroyed by the Reformation and the Enlightenment

When one directs his cognition to the "I", one initially perceives the activity of this "I" in the development of a world of ideas unfolded through thought. Because of this, those with a spiritualist world view sometimes themselves tempted, in regard to their own human essence, to acknowledge nothing of the spirit except this world of ideas. In such cases, spiritualism becomes one-sided idealism. It does not arrive at the point of seeking a spiritual world *through* a world of ideas. It sees the spiritual world in the idea-world itself. Its world view is forced to remain fixed, spellbound, within the activity of the "I" itself".

"A third form of monism sees both essences, matter and spirit, as already united in the simplest entity (the atom). But here too, nothing is achieved except that the question, which actually originates in our consciousness, is displaced to a different arena. If it is an indivisible unity, how does an unitary entity manage to express itself in a twofold way?"

In regard to all these points of view, we must emphasize that the fundamental and primal opposition confronts us first in our own consciousness. It is we who separate ourselves as "I" in opposition to the "world". Goethe gives this its classical expression in his essay, "Nature", even if his style initially appears quite unscientific: "We live in her [Nature's] midst and we are strangers to her. She speaks to us continually, yet does not betray her secret to us". But Goethe also knows the reverse aspect: "All human beings are within her and she in them".

It is true that we have estranged ourselves from nature; but it is just as true that we feel we are in her and belong to her. It can only be her activity that lives in us. We must find the way back to her again. A simple reflection can show us the way. To be sure, we have torn ourselves away from nature, but we must still have taken something with us into our being. We must seek out this natural being within ourselves, and then we shall also rediscover the connection to her. Dualism fails to do this. It considers the inner human as a spiritual being, quite foreign to nature, and then seeks to attach this being to nature. No wonder that it cannot find the connecting link. We can only find nature outside us if we first know her *within* us. What is akin to her within us will be our guide. Our way is thus mapped out for us. We do not wish to speculate about the interaction of nature and spirit. We wish to descend into the

depths of our own being, to find there those elements that we have saved in our flight out of nature.

The investigation of our own being must bring us the solution to the riddle. We must come to a point where we can say to ourselves: Here I am no longer merely "I". There is something here that is more than "I". And that is an enormous step forwards in our development as human beings."

("Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path" by Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophic Press, ISBN 0-88010-385-X).