

# RELIGION



ARTHUR  
SCHOPENHAUER

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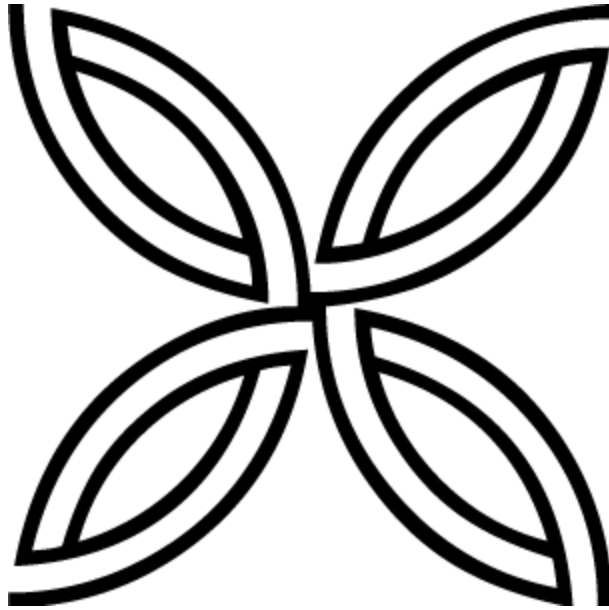
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# **Religion**

**Arthur Schopenhauer**



# Prefatory Note

Schopenhauer is one of the few philosophers who can be generally understood without a commentary. All his theories claim to be drawn direct from the facts, to be suggested by observation, and to interpret the world as it is; and whatever view he takes, he is constant in his appeal to the experience of common life. This characteristic endows his style with a freshness and vigor which would be difficult to match in the philosophical writing of any country, and impossible in that of Germany. If it were asked whether there were any circumstances apart from heredity, to which he owed his mental habit, the answer might be found in the abnormal character of his early education, his acquaintance with the world rather than with books, the extensive travels of his boyhood, his ardent pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and without regard to the emoluments and endowments of learning. He was trained in realities even more than in ideas; and hence he is original, forcible, clear, an enemy of all philosophic indefiniteness and obscurity; so that it may well be said of him, in the words of a writer in the *Revue Contemporaine*, *ce n'est pas un philosophe comme les autres, c'est un philosophe qui a vu le monde* .

It is not my purpose, nor would it be possible within the limits of a prefatory note, to attempt an account of Schopenhauer's philosophy, to indicate its sources, or to suggest or rebut the objections which may be taken to it. M. Ribot, in his excellent little book, [Footnote: *La Philosophie de Schopenhauer* , par Th. Ribot.] has done all that is necessary in this direction. But the essays here presented need a word of explanation. It should be observed, and Schopenhauer himself is at pains to point out, that his system is like a citadel with a hundred gates:

at whatever point you take it up, wherever you make your entrance, you are on the road to the center. In this respect his writings resemble a series of essays composed in support of a single thesis; a circumstance which led him to insist, more emphatically even than most philosophers, that for a proper understanding of his system it was necessary to read every line he had written. Perhaps it would be more correct to describe *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* as his main thesis, and his other treatises as merely corollary to it. The essays in this volume form part of the corollary; they are taken from a collection published towards the close of Schopenhauer's life, and by him entitled *Parerga und Paralipomena*, as being in the nature of surplusage and illustrative of his main position. They are by far the most popular of his works, and since their first publication in 1851, they have done much to build up his fame. Written so as to be intelligible enough in themselves, the tendency of many of them is towards the fundamental idea on which his system is based. It may therefore be convenient to summarize that idea in a couple of sentences; more especially as Schopenhauer sometimes writes as if his advice had been followed and his readers were acquainted with the whole of his work.

All philosophy is in some sense the endeavor to find a unifying principle, to discover the most general conception underlying the whole field of nature and of knowledge. By one of those bold generalizations which occasionally mark a real advance in Science, Schopenhauer conceived this unifying principle, this underlying unity, to consist in something analogous to that *will* which self-consciousness reveals to us. *Will* is, according to him, the fundamental reality of the world, the thing-in-itself; and its objectivation is what is presented in phenomena. The struggle of the will to realize itself evolves the organism, which in its turn evolves intelligence as the servant of the will. And in practical life the antagonism between the will and the

intellect arises from the fact that the former is the metaphysical substance, the latter something accidental and secondary. And further, will is *desire*, that is to say, need of something; hence need and pain are what is positive in the world, and the only possible happiness is a negation, a renunciation of *the will to live*.

It is instructive to note, as M. Ribot points out, that in finding the origin of all things, not in intelligence, as some of his predecessors in philosophy had done, but in will, or the force of nature, from which all phenomena have developed, Schopenhauer was anticipating something of the scientific spirit of the nineteenth century. To this it may be added that in combating the method of Fichte and Hegel, who spun a system out of abstract ideas, and in discarding it for one based on observation and experience, Schopenhauer can be said to have brought down philosophy from heaven to earth.

In Schopenhauer's view the various forms of Religion are no less a product of human ingenuity than Art or Science. He holds, in effect, that all religions take their rise in the desire to explain the world; and that, in regard to truth and error, they differ, in the main, not by preaching monotheism polytheism or pantheism, but in so far as they recognize pessimism or optimism as the true description of life. Hence any religion which looked upon the world as being radically evil appealed to him as containing an indestructible element of truth. I have endeavored to present his view of two of the great religions of the world in the extract which concludes this volume, and to which I have given the title of *The Christian System*. The tenor of it is to show that, however little he may have been in sympathy with the supernatural element, he owed much to the moral doctrines of Christianity and of Buddhism, between which he traced great resemblance. In the following *Dialogue* he applies himself to a discussion of the practical efficacy of religious forms; and though he was an

enemy of clericalism, his choice of a method which allows both the affirmation and the denial of that efficacy to be presented with equal force may perhaps have been directed by the consciousness that he could not side with either view to the exclusion of the other. In any case his practical philosophy was touched with the spirit of Christianity. It was more than artistic enthusiasm which led him in profound admiration to the Madonna di San Sisto:

Sie trägt zur Welt ihn, und er schaut entsetzt  
In ihrer Gräu'l chaotische Verwirrung,  
In ihres Tobens wilde Raserei,  
In ihres Treibens nie geheilte Thorheit,  
In ihrer Quaalen nie gestillten Schmerz;  
Entsetzt: doch strahlet Rub' and Zuversicht  
Und Siegesglanz sein Aug', verkündigend  
Schon der Erlösung ewige gewissheit.

Pessimism is commonly and erroneously supposed to be the distinguishing feature of Schopenhauer's system. It is right to remember that the same fundamental view of the world is presented by Christianity, to say nothing of Oriental religions.

That Schopenhauer conceives life as an evil is a deduction, and possibly a mistaken deduction, from his metaphysical theory. Whether his scheme of things is correct or not — and it shares the common fate of all metaphysical systems in being unverifiable, and to that extent unprofitable — he will in the last resort have made good his claim to be read by his insight into the varied needs of human life. It may be that a future age will consign his metaphysics to the philosophical lumber-room; but he is a literary artist as well as a philosopher, and he can make a bid for fame in either capacity. What is remarked with much truth of many another writer, that he suggests more than he achieves, is in the highest degree applicable to Schopenhauer; and his *obiter dicta*, his sayings by the way, will always find an

audience.



# Religion. a Dialogue.

*Demopheles* . Between ourselves, my dear fellow, I don't care about the way you sometimes have of exhibiting your talent for philosophy; you make religion a subject for sarcastic remarks, and even for open ridicule. Every one thinks his religion sacred, and therefore you ought to respect it.

*Philalethes* . That doesn't follow! I don't see why, because other people are simpletons, I should have any regard for a pack of lies. I respect truth everywhere, and so I can't respect what is opposed to it. My maxim is *Vigeat veritas et pereat mundus* , like the lawyers' *Fiat justitia et pereat mundus* . Every profession ought to have an analogous advice.

*Demopheles* . Then I suppose doctors should say *Fiant pilulae et pereat mundus* — there wouldn't be much difficulty about that!

*Philalethes* . Heaven forbid! You must take everything *cum grano salis* .

*Demopheles* . Exactly; that's why I want you to take religion *cum grano salis* . I want you to see that one must meet the requirements of the people according to the measure of their comprehension. Where you have masses of people of crude susceptibilities and clumsy intelligence, sordid in their pursuits and sunk in drudgery, religion provides the only means of proclaiming and making them feel the high import of life. For the average man takes an interest, primarily, in nothing but what will satisfy his physical needs and hankerings, and beyond this, give him a little amusement and pastime. Founders of religion and philosophers come into the world to rouse him from his stupor and point to the lofty meaning of existence; philosophers for the few, the emancipated, founders of