

# THOMAS WHITTAKER

SCHOPENHAUER

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*Schopenhauer:*

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# Thomas Whittaker

## Schopenhauer

### NOTE

As a consequence of the success of the series of *Religions Ancient and Modern*, Messrs. Constable have decided to issue a set of similar primers, with brief introductions, lists of dates, and selected authorities, presenting to the wider public the salient features of the *Philosophies* of Greece and Rome and of the Middle Ages, as well as of modern Europe. They will appear in the same handy Shilling volumes, with neat cloth bindings and paper envelopes, which have proved so attractive in the case of the *Religions*. The writing in each case will be confided to an eminent authority, and one who has already proved himself capable of scholarly yet popular exposition within a small compass.

Among the first volumes to appear will be:—

**Early Greek Philosophy.** By A. W. Benn, author of *The Philosophy of Greece, Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century*.

**Stoicism.** By Professor St. George Stock, author of *Deductive Logic*, editor of the *Apology of Plato*, etc.

**Plato.** By Professor A. E. Taylor, St. Andrews

University, author of *The Problem of Conduct*.

**Scholasticism.** By Father Rickaby, S.J.

**Hobbes.** By Professor A. E. Taylor.

**Locke.** By Professor Alexander, of Owens College.

**Comte and Mill.** By T. Whittaker, author of *The Neoplatonists, Apollonius of Tyana and other Essays*.

**Herbert Spencer.** By W. H. Hudson, author of *An Introduction to Spencer's Philosophy*.

**Schopenhauer.** By T. Whittaker.

**Berkeley.** By Professor Campbell Fraser, D.C.L., LL.D.

**Bergsen.** By Father Tyrrell.

# CHAPTER I

## LIFE AND WRITINGS

Arthur Schopenhauer may be distinctively described as the greatest philosophic writer of his century. So evident is this that he has sometimes been regarded as having more importance in literature than in philosophy; but this is an error. As a metaphysician he is second to no one since Kant. Others of his age have surpassed him in system and in comprehensiveness; but no one has had a firmer grasp of the essential and fundamental problems of philosophy. On the theory of knowledge, the nature of reality, and the meaning of the beautiful and the good, he has solutions to offer that are all results of a characteristic and original way of thinking.

In one respect, as critics have noted, his spirit is different from that of European philosophy in general. What preoccupies him in a special way is the question of evil in the world. Like the philosophies of the East, emerging as they do without break from religion, Schopenhauer's philosophy is in its outcome a doctrine of redemption from sin. The name of pessimism commonly applied to it is in some respects misleading, though it was his own term; but it is correct if understood as he explained it. As he was accustomed to insist, his final ethical doctrine coincides with that of all the religions that aim, for their adepts or their

elect, at deliverance from 'this evil world.' But, as the 'world-fleeing' religions have their mitigations and accommodations, so also has the philosophy of Schopenhauer. At various points indeed it seems as if a mere change of accent would turn it into optimism.

This preoccupation does not mean indifference to the theoretical problems of philosophy. No one has insisted more strongly that the end of philosophy is pure truth, and that only the few who care about pure truth have any concern with it. But for Schopenhauer the desire for speculative truth does not by itself suffice to explain the impulse of philosophical inquiries. On one side of his complex character, he had more resemblance to the men who turn from the world to religion, like St. Augustine, than to the normal type of European thinker, represented pre-eminently by Aristotle. He was a temperamental pessimist, feeling from the first the trouble of existence; and here he finds the deepest motive for the desire to become clear about it. He saw in the world, what he felt in himself, a vain effort after ever new objects of desire which give no permanent satisfaction; and this view, becoming predominant, determined, not indeed all the ideas of his philosophy, but its general complexion as a 'philosophy of redemption.'

With his pessimism, personal misfortunes had nothing to do. He was, and always recognised that he was, among the most fortunately placed of mankind. He does not hesitate to speak sometimes of his own happiness in complete freedom from

the need to apply himself to any compulsory occupation. This freedom, as he has put gratefully on record, he owed to his father, Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer, who was a rich merchant of Danzig, where the philosopher was born on the 22nd of February 1788. Both his parents were of Dutch ancestry. His mother, Johanna Schopenhauer, won celebrity as a novelist; and his sister, Adele, also displayed some literary talent. Generalising from his own case, Schopenhauer holds that men of intelligence derive their character from their father and their intellect from their mother. With his mother, however, he was not on sympathetic terms, as may be read in the biographies. His father intended him for a mercantile career, and with this view began to prepare him from the first to be a cosmopolitan man of the world. The name of Arthur was given to him because it is spelt alike in the leading European languages. He was taken early to France, where he resided from 1797 to 1799, learning French so well that on his return he had almost forgotten his German. Portions of the years 1803 to 1804 were spent in England, France, Switzerland, and Austria. In England he was three months at a Wimbledon boarding-school kept by a clergyman. This experience he found extremely irksome. He afterwards became highly proficient in English: was always pleased to be taken for an Englishman, and regarded both the English character and intelligence as on the whole the first in Europe; but all the more deplorable did he find the oppressive pietism which was the special form taken in the England of that period by the reaction against the French

Revolution. He is never tired of denouncing that phase of 'cold superstition,' the dominance of which lasted during his lifetime; for the publication of Mill's *Liberty* and of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, which may be considered as marking the close of it, came only the year before his death.

The only real break in the conformity of Schopenhauer's circumstances to his future career came in 1805, when he was placed in a merchant's office at Hamburg, whither his father had migrated in disgust at the annexation of his native Danzig, then under a republican constitution of its own, by Prussia in 1793. Soon afterwards his father died; but out of loyalty he tried for some time longer to reconcile himself to commercial life. Finding this at length impossible, he gained permission from his mother, in 1807, to leave the office for the gymnasium. At this time he seems to have begun his classical studies, his education having hitherto been exclusively modern. They were carried on first at Gotha and then at Weimar. In 1809 he entered the university of Göttingen as a student of medicine. This, however, was with a view only to scientific studies, not to practice; and he transferred himself to the philosophical faculty in 1810. Generally he was little regardful of academical authority. His father's deliberately adopted plan of letting him mix early with the world had given him a certain independence of judgment. At Göttingen, however, he received an important influence from his teacher, G. E. Schulze (known by the revived scepticism of his *Ænesidemus*), who advised him to study Plato and Kant

before Aristotle and Spinoza. From 1811 to 1813 he was at Berlin, where he heard Fichte, but was not impressed. In 1813 the degree of Doctor of Philosophy was conferred on him at Jena for the dissertation *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (*Ueber die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde*, 2nd ed., 1847). This was the first result of his Kantian studies. In the same year he began to be acquainted with Goethe at Weimar, where his mother and sister had gone to reside in 1806. A consequence of this acquaintance was that he took up and further developed Goethe's theory of colours. His dissertation *Ueber das Sehen und die Farben* was published in 1816. A second edition did not appear till 1854; but in the meantime he had published a restatement of his doctrine in Latin, entitled *Theoria Colorum Physiologica* (1830). This, however, was an outlying part of his work. He had already been seized by the impulse to set forth the system of philosophy that took shape in him, as he says, by some formative process of which he could give no conscious account. His great work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, was ready for publication before the end of 1818, and was published with the date 1819. Thus he is one of the most precocious philosophers on record. For in that single volume, written before he was thirty, the outlines of his whole system are fixed. There is some development later, and there are endless new applications and essays towards confirmation from all sources. His mind never rested, and his literary power gained by exercise. Still, it has been said with truth, that there never was a greater

illusion than when he thought that he seldom repeated himself. In reality he did little but repeat his fundamental positions with infinite variations in expression.

After completing his chief work, Schopenhauer wrote some verses in which he predicted that posterity would erect a monument to him. This prediction was fulfilled in 1895; but, for the time, the work which he never doubted would be his enduring title to fame seemed, like Hume's *Treatise*, to have fallen 'deadborn from the press.' This he attributed to the hostility of the academical philosophers; and, in his later works, attacks on the university professors form a characteristic feature. The official teachers of the Hegelian school, he declared, were bent only on obtaining positions for themselves by an appearance of supporting Christian dogma; and they resented openness on the part of any one else. Yet on one side he maintained that his own pessimism was more truly Christian than their optimism. The essential spirit of Christianity is that of Brahmanism and Buddhism, the great religions that sprang from India, the first home of our race. He is even inclined to see in it traces of Indian influence. What vitiates it in his eyes is the Jewish element, which finds its expression in the flat modern 'Protestant-rationalistic optimism.' As optimistic religions, he groups together Judaism, Islam, and Græco-Roman Polytheism. His antipathy, however, only extends to the two former. He was himself in great part a child of Humanism and of the eighteenth century, rejoicing over the approaching downfall of all the faiths, and holding that

a weak religion (entirely different from those he admires) is favourable to civilisation. Nothing can exceed his scorn for nearly everything that characterised the Middle Ages. With Catholicism as a political system he has no sympathy whatever; while on the religious side the Protestant are as sympathetic to him as the Catholic mystics. What is common to all priesthoods, he holds, is to exploit the metaphysical need of mankind (in which he also believes) for the sake of their own power. Clericalism, 'Pfaffenthum,' whether Catholic or Protestant, is the object of his unvarying hatred and contempt. If he had cared to appreciate Hegel, he would have found on this point much community of spirit; but of course there was a real antithesis between the two as philosophers. No 'conspiracy' need be invoked to explain the failure of Schopenhauer to win early recognition. Belief in the State and in progress was quite alien to him; and Germany was then full of political hopes, which found nourishment in optimistic pantheism. What at length gave his philosophy vogue was the collapse of this enthusiasm on the failure of the revolutionary movement in 1848. Once known, it contained enough of permanent value to secure it from again passing out of sight with the next change of fashion.

The rest of Schopenhauer's life in its external relations may be briefly summed up. For a few years, it was diversified by travels in Italy and elsewhere, and by an unsuccessful attempt at academical teaching in Berlin. In 1831 he moved to Frankfort, where he finally settled in 1833. He lived unmarried there till his

death on the 21st of September 1860. The monument, already spoken of, was unveiled at Frankfort on the 6th of June 1895.

The almost unbroken silence with which his great work was received, though it had a distemping effect on the man, did not discourage the thinker. The whole series of Schopenhauer's works, indeed, was completed before he attained anything that could be called fame. Constantly on the alert as he was to seize upon confirmations of his system, he published in 1836 his short work *On the Will in Nature*, pointing out verifications of his metaphysics by recent science. In 1839 his prize essay, *On the Freedom of the Human Will* (finished in 1837), was crowned by the Royal Scientific Society of Drontheim in Norway. This and another essay, *On the Basis of Morality*, not crowned by the Royal Danish Society of Copenhagen in 1840, he published in 1841, with the inclusive title, *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik*. In 1844 appeared the second edition of his principal work, to which there was added, in the form of a second volume, a series of elucidations and extensions larger in bulk than the first. This new volume contains much of his best and most effective writing. His last work, *Parerga und Paralipomena*, which appeared in 1851 (2 vols.), is from the literary point of view the most brilliant. It was only from this time that he began to be well known among the general public; though the philosophic 'apostolate' of Julius Frauenstädt, who afterwards edited his works, had begun in 1840. His activity was henceforth confined to modifying and extending his works for new editions; an employment in which

he was always assiduous. In consequence of this, all of them, as they stand, contain references from one to another; but the development of his thinking, so far as there was such a process after 1818, can be easily traced without reference to the earlier editions. There is some growth; but, as has been said, it does not affect many of the chief points. A brief exposition of his philosophy can on the whole take it as something fixed. The heads under which it must fall are those assigned to the original four books of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*.

Although Schopenhauer discountenanced the attempt to connect a philosopher's biography with his work, something has to be said about his character, since this has been dwelt on to his disadvantage by opponents. There is abundant material for a personal estimate in the correspondence and reminiscences published after his death by his disciples Julius Frauenstädt and Wilhelm Gwinner. The apparent contradiction is at once obvious between the ascetic consummation of his ethics and his unascetic life, carefully occupied in its latter part with rules for the preservation of his naturally robust health. He was quite aware of this, but holds it absurd to require that a moralist should commend only the virtues which he possesses. It is as if the requirement were set up that a sculptor is to be himself a model of beauty. A saint need not be a philosopher, nor a philosopher a saint. The science of morals is as theoretical as any other branch of philosophy. Fundamentally character is unmodifiable, though knowledge, it is allowed, may change the

mode of action within the limits of the particular character. The passage to the state of asceticism cannot be effected by moral philosophy, but depends on a kind of 'grace.' After all, it might be replied, philosophers, whether they succeed or not, do usually make at least an attempt to live in accordance with the moral ideal they set up. The best apology in Schopenhauer's case is that the fault may have been as much in his ideal as in his failure to conform to it. The eloquent pages he has devoted to the subject of holiness only make manifest the inconsequence (which he admits) in the passage to it. For, as we shall see, this has nothing in common with the essentially rational asceticism of the schools of later antiquity; which was a rule of self-limitation in view of the philosophic life. He did in a way of his own practise something of this; and, on occasion, he sets forth the theory of it; but he quite clearly sees the difference. His own ideal, which he never attempted to practise, is that of the self-torturing ascetics of the Christian Middle Age. Within the range of properly human virtue, he can in many respects hold his own, not only as a philosopher but as a man. If his egoism and vanity are undeniable, he undoubtedly possessed the virtues of rectitude and compassion. What he would have especially laid stress on was the conscientious devotion to his work. With complete singleness of purpose he used for a disinterested end the leisure which he regarded as the most fortunate of endowments. As he said near the close of his life, his intellectual conscience was clear.

Of Schopenhauer's expositions of his pessimism it would be true to say, as Spinoza says of the Book of Job, that the matter, like the style, is not that of a man sitting among the ashes, but of one meditating in a library. This of course does not prove that they are not a genuine, if one-sided, rendering of human experience. All that can be said is that they did not turn him away from appreciation of the apparent goods of life. His own practical principle was furnished by what he regarded as a lower point of view; and this gives its direction to the semi-popular philosophy of the *Parerga*. From what he takes to be the higher point of view, the belief that happiness is attainable by man on earth is an illusion; but he holds that, by keeping steadily in view a kind of tempered happiness as the end, many mistakes may be avoided in the conduct of life, provided that each recognises at once the strength and weakness of his own character, and does not attempt things that, with the given limitations, are impossible. Of the highest truth, as he conceived it, he could therefore make no use. Only by means of a truth that he was bound to hold half-illusory could a working scheme be constructed for himself and others. This result may give us guidance in seeking to learn what we can from a thinker who is in reality no representative of a decadence, but is fundamentally sane and rational, even in spite of himself.

# CHAPTER II

## THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

The title of Schopenhauer's chief work is rendered in the English translation, *The World as Will and Idea*. Here the term 'idea' is used in the sense it had for Locke and Berkeley; namely, any object of mental activity. Thus it includes not merely imagery, but also perception. Since Hume distinguished ideas' from 'impressions,' it has tended to be specialised in the former sense. The German word, *Vorstellung*, which it is used to render, conveys the generalised meaning of the Lockian 'idea,' now frequently expressed in English and French philosophical works by the more technical term 'presentation' or 'representation.' By Schopenhauer himself the word 'Idea' was used exclusively in the sense of the Platonic Idea, which, as we shall see, plays an important part in his philosophy. The distinction is preserved in the translation by the use of a capital when Idea has the latter meaning; but in a brief exposition it seems convenient to adopt a more technical rendering of *Vorstellung*; and, from its common employment in psychological text-books, I have selected 'presentation' as the most suitable.

The first proposition of Schopenhauer's philosophical system is, 'The world is my presentation.' By this he means that it presents itself as appearance to the knowing subject. This

appearance is in the forms of time, space and causality. Under these forms every phenomenon necessarily appears, because they are *a priori* forms of the subject. The world as it presents itself consists entirely of phenomena, that is, appearances, related according to these forms. The most fundamental form of all is the relation between object and subject, which is implied in all of them. Without a subject there can be no presented object.

Schopenhauer is therefore an idealist in the sense in which we call Berkeley's theory of the external world idealism; though the expressions used are to some extent different. The difference proceeds from his following of Kant. His Kantianism consists in the recognition of *a priori* forms by which the subject constructs for itself an 'objective' world of appearances. With Berkeley he agrees as against Kant in not admitting any residue whatever, in the object as such, that is not wholly appearance. But while he allows that Berkeley, as regards the general formulation of idealism, was more consistent than Kant, he finds him, in working out the principle, altogether inadequate. For the modern mind there is henceforth no way in philosophy except through Kant, from whom dates the revolution by which scholastic dualism was finally overthrown. Kant's systematic construction, however, he in effect reduces to very little. His is a much simplified 'Apriorism.' While accepting the 'forms of sensible intuition,' that is, time and space, just as Kant sets them forth, he clears away nearly all the superimposed mechanism. Kant's 'Transcendental Æsthetic,' he says, was a real discovery in

metaphysics; but on the basis of this he for the most part only gave free play to his architectonic impulse. Of the twelve 'categories of the understanding,' which he professed to derive from the logical forms of judgment, all except causality are mere 'blind windows.' This alone, therefore, Schopenhauer adopts, placing it, however, not at a higher level but side by side with time and space, Kant's forms of intuition. These three forms, according to Schopenhauer, make up the understanding of men and animals. 'All intuition is intellectual.' It is not first mere appearance related in space and time, and waiting for understanding to organise it; but, in animals as in man, it is put in order at once under the three forms that suffice to explain the knowledge all have of the phenomenal world.

To Reason as distinguished from Understanding, Schopenhauer assigns no such exalted function as was attributed to it in portions of his system by Kant, and still more by some of his successors. The name of 'reason,' he maintains, ought on etymological grounds to be restricted to the faculty of abstract concepts. This, and not understanding, is what distinguishes man from animals. It discovers and invents nothing, but it puts in a generalised and available form what the understanding has discovered in intuition.

For the historical estimation of Schopenhauer, it is necessary to place him in relation to Kant, as he himself always insisted. Much also in his chief work is made clearer by knowledge of his dissertation *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient*

*Reason*, to which he is constantly referring. Later, his manner of exposition became more independent; so that he can be read by the general reader with profit simply by himself, and without reference to antecedents. Still, it will always be advisable for an expositor to follow his directions, at least to the extent of giving some short account of the dissertation. This I proceed to give approximately in the place to which he has assigned it in his system.

The name of the principle (*principium rationis sufficientis*) he took over from Leibniz and his successor Wolff, but gave it a new amplitude. With him, it stands as an inclusive term for four modes of connection by which the thoroughgoing relativity of phenomena to one another is constituted for our intelligence. The general statement adopted is, 'Nothing is without a reason why it should be rather than not be.' Its four forms are the principles of becoming (*fiendi*), of knowing (*cognoscendi*), of being (*essendi*), and of acting (*agendi*). (1) Under the first head come 'causes.' These are divided into 'cause proper,' for inorganic things; 'stimulus,' for the vegetative life both of plants and animals, and 'motive,' for animals and men. The law of causation is applicable only to changes; not to the forces of nature, to matter, or to the world as a whole, which are perdurable. Cause precedes effect in time. Not one thing, but one state of a thing, is the cause of another. From the law of causation there results an infinite series *a parte ante* as well as *a parte post*. (2) The principle of sufficient reason of knowing is applicable to concepts, which are all derived

from intuition, that is, from percepts. The laws of logic, which come under this head, can yield nothing original, but can only render explicit what was in the understanding. (3) Under the third head come arithmetical and geometrical relations. These are peculiar relations of presentations, distinct from all others, and only intelligible in virtue of a pure *a priori* intuition. For geometry this is space; for arithmetic time, in which counting goes on. Scientifically, arithmetic is fundamental. (4) As the third form of causality was enumerated 'motive' for the will; but in that classification it was viewed from without, as belonging to the world of objects. Through the direct knowledge we have of our own will, we know also from within this determination by the presentation we call a motive. Hence emerges the fourth form of the principle of sufficient reason. This at a later stage makes possible the transition from physics to metaphysics.

All these forms alike are forms of necessary determination. Necessity has no clear and true sense but certainty of the consequence when the ground is posited. All necessity therefore is conditional. In accordance with the four expressions of the principle of sufficient reason, it takes the fourfold shape of physical, logical, mathematical, and moral necessity.

The sharp distinction between logical and mathematical truth, with the assignment of the former to conceptual and of the latter to intuitive relations, comes to Schopenhauer directly from Kant. So also does his view that the necessary form of causation is sequence; though here his points of contact with English

thinkers, earlier and later, are very marked. Only in his statement of the 'law of motivation' as 'causality seen from within' does he hint at his own distinctive metaphysical doctrine. Meanwhile, it is evident that he is to be numbered with the group of modern thinkers who have arrived in one way or another at a complete scientific phenomenism. Expositors have noted that in his earlier statements of this he tends to lay more stress on the character of the visible and tangible world as mere appearance. The impermanence, the relativity, of all that exists in time and space, leads him to describe it, in a favourite term borrowed from Indian philosophy, as Maya, or illusion. Later, he dwells more on the relative reality of things as they appear. His position, however, does not essentially alter, but only finds varying expression as he turns more to the scientific or to the metaphysical side. From Hume's view on causation he differs not by opposing its pure phenomenism, but only by recognising, as Kant does, an *a priori*

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