

---

# **schopenhauer**

---

Robert Wicks

---



schopenhauer

The *Blackwell Great Minds* series gives readers a strong sense of the fundamental views of the great western thinkers and captures the relevance of these figures to the way we think and live today.

- 1 Kant by Allen W. Wood
- 2 Augustine by Gareth B. Matthews
- 3 Descartes by André Gombay
- 4 Sartre by Katherine J. Morris
- 5 Charles Darwin by Michael Ruse
- 6 Schopenhauer by Robert Wicks

**Forthcoming**

Aristotle by Jennifer Whiting  
Nietzsche by Richard Schacht  
Plato by Paul Woodruff  
Spinoza by Don Garrett  
Wittgenstein by Hans Sluga  
Heidegger by Taylor Carman  
Maimonides by Tamar Rudavsky  
Berkeley by Margaret Atherton  
Leibniz by Christa Mercer  
Shakespeare by David Bevington  
Hume by Stephen Buckle  
Kierkegaard by M. Jamie Ferreira  
Mill by Wendy Donner and Richard Fumerton  
Camus by David Sherman  
Socrates by George H. Rudebusch  
Hobbes by Edwin Curley  
Locke by Gideon Yaffe

---

# **schopenhauer**

---

Robert Wicks

---

© 2008 by Robert Wicks

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK

550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

The right of Robert Wicks to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

The publisher and the author make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this work and specifically disclaim all warranties, including without limitation warranties of fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales or promotional materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every situation. This work is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. If professional assistance is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought. Neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for damages arising herefrom. The fact that an organization or website is referred to in this work as a citation and/or a potential source of further information does not mean that the author or the publisher endorses the information the organization or website may provide or recommendations it may make. Further, readers should be aware that Internet websites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read.

First published 2008 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

1 2008

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Wicks, Robert, 1954–

Schopenhauer / Robert Wicks.

p. cm. — (Blackwell great minds series ; 6)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-3479-8 (hardcover : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-1-4051-3480-4 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Schopenhauer, Arthur, 1788–1860. I. Title.

B3148.W53 2008

193–dc22

2007024792

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 9.5/12pt Trump Medieval

by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

Printed and bound in Singapore

by C.O.S. Printers Pte Ltd

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on

Blackwell Publishing, visit our website at

[www.blackwellpublishing.com](http://www.blackwellpublishing.com)

Materialism is the philosophy of the subject who forgets to take account of himself.

*WWR* (II), Chapter I, "On the Fundamental View of Idealism,"  
P 13, HK 176, ZA 21

All thought is a physiological function of the brain, just as digestion is a function of the stomach.

*PP* (I), "Fragments for a History of Philosophy," §4, P 46, ZA 59





---

---

# contents

---

---

preface	viii
acknowledgments	xiii
list of abbreviations	xv
1 the philosophy of a nonconformist (1788–1860)	1
part i schopenhauer's theoretical philosophy	15
2 historical background	17
3 the principle of sufficient reason	30
4 schopenhauer's idealism and his criticism of kant	39
5 the world in itself as a meaningless and almighty will	53
6 critical interpretations of the world as will	67
part ii schopenhauer's practical philosophy	81
7 endless suffering in the daily world	83
8 tranquility i: sublimity, genius, and aesthetic experience	95
9 tranquility ii: christlike virtue and moral awareness	114
10 tranquility iii: asceticism, mysticism, and buddhism	127
part iii schopenhauer in perspective	143
11 schopenhauer, nietzsche, and eternal life	145
12 schopenhauer, hegel, and alienated labor	161
13 schopenhauer, wittgenstein, and the unspeakable	173
conclusion: idealism and the will to peace	184
bibliography	191
index	194

---

# preface

---

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) has endured a long reputation as a dyed-in-the-wool pessimist, combative curmudgeon, misanthrope, and vitriolic critic of German Idealist philosophers such as his University of Berlin teacher J. G. Fichte (1762–1814), his near-contemporary, F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854), and his rival associate on the philosophy faculty at Berlin G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831). Schopenhauer is also known for his sexism and, in anecdotes, for having been involved in a lawsuit that issued from a brief shoving-match with a seamstress who was living in his Berlin apartment house. Scholars of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) will also recall Nietzsche’s teasing query in *Beyond Good and Evil* that asked how Schopenhauer could be a genuine pessimist if he enjoyably played the flute almost every day!<sup>1</sup> Those aware of Schopenhauer’s fashionable upbringing might also puzzle about how someone who was raised in such outstandingly privileged and socially comfortable surroundings could conclude that the world is fundamentally a frustrating and miserable penitentiary, the only rational reaction towards which should be a quest for detachment and inner peace.

The present philosophical portrait of Schopenhauer tempers the above characterization by acknowledging Schopenhauer’s asceticism, while positively highlighting the tranquil virtues of Buddhist detachment as they stand opposed to a dim estimate of human potentialities. Anyone who is knowledgeable of the details of Buddha’s life will not be alarmed at how an aristocrat, as was Buddha himself, could prescribe a supremely detached attitude in view of the futility involved in clutching constantly for material satisfactions. Nor will there be any surprise at how Schopenhauer’s thought focuses so centrally on aesthetic experience and values, given how Buddha so sublimely and silently held up a flower to illustrate the enlightened mentality.

In reference to Schopenhauer’s aesthetics and his philosophical outlook as a whole, we will see how his leading aesthetic concept is sublimity, rather than beauty. Schopenhauer devotes much of his thought to artistic matters, but this is informed by a culminating interest in

religious asceticism – one characterized by states of enlightened awareness that involve a distinctively sublime mixture of pain and tranquility. This ascetic quality of Schopenhauer’s outlook will be presented in mainly Buddhist terms, giving a subordinate role to his philosophy’s affinities to Christian quietism, mysticism, pantheism, and the yogic style of consciousness encountered in classical Indian thought. Schopenhauer read the Upanishads during the evenings in the way many read the Bible, and this invites confident, useful, and coincident reflections about the affinities between *The World as Will and Representation* (WWR) and the pre-Buddhist, Vedic tradition. From the standpoint of philosophical consistency, however, the Buddhist outlook, rather than the Hindu, will provide us with a more coherent interpretation of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics.<sup>2</sup>

We will acknowledge Schopenhauer’s well-known view that the world is the manifestation of a blind, driving, and senseless force that can be characterized as “Will” and that our direct awareness of this Will closely reflects how reality is in itself. Schopenhauer admits that our contact with the world in itself is not absolute, but he typically assumes that it is close to being absolute, notwithstanding our human finitude.

From this philosophical angle, his pessimistic account of the daily world as a world of frustration and suffering emerges in connection with his account of human nature and its pursuit of scientific knowledge. Schopenhauer maintains that we can apprehend the nature of things only through our finite human situation, but it remains an open question whether our human finitude enables, impedes, or precludes our awareness of how things absolutely are. The most consistent way to answer this question in Schopenhauerian terms, it will be argued, is to presume that we apprehend the ultimate nature of things as if we were looking through a mildly translucent glass or through a sheet of colored cellophane. At one extreme, this differs from saying that we are facing an opaque wall, where the absolute truth remains inaccessible on the other side. At the other, neither is it to say we can apprehend the absolute truth without any distortion, as if our own presence and activity of perceiving were like a perfectly polished mirror that makes no difference to the presentation of what we apprehend.

Schopenhauer agrees that the human factor always affects our apprehension of anything whatsoever, so whether we are perceiving an ordinary object, or whether we are trying to grasp the subtle underlying reality of that object, this factor must be taken into account in any accurate presentation of his outlook. The theory of sublimity will clarify this human factor’s role and it will be at the forefront of the exposition. A consequence will be that Schopenhauer’s ideal types of awareness – the aesthetic, the moral, and the religious – will emerge as sublime, rather than beautiful, modes of consciousness. This will imply that the highest

levels of salvation and inner peace are not painless. Neither will they be detached absolutely and unrealistically from the human perspective.

Two further reflections underlie our emphasis upon sublimity and the idea that it is possible only to approach the knowledge of how things absolutely are, even if this approach is very close. The first focuses upon the theory of perception expressed by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), whose influence on Schopenhauer cannot be underestimated. Kant's account of our perception of ordinary objects will stand for us as a model for understanding Schopenhauer's characterization of our apprehension of the absolute truth, of our own inner timeless nature, and of the timeless essences of other things. Schopenhauer highlights the importance of perception as opposed to pure conception, and he virtually invites us to explore how Kant's own theory of perception sheds light on his own philosophic perspective.

Secondly, at the foundation of Schopenhauer's outlook, we will identify a prevailing logical relationship that yields a more consistent expression of his various metaphysical claims, all of which aim to reveal the fundamental unity of the world. This contrasts with the more divisive logic of "cause and effect" where "cause" and "effect" remain differentiated from each other, just as one billiard ball moves another other upon contact. Schopenhauer's logic – a logic, as we shall see, is based on an alternative relationship of "manifestation" or "objectification" – is eminently suitable for expressing matters of degree, continuity, and identity between the elements in relation.

As a preview, we can succinctly appreciate this suitability by reflecting upon the relationship between ice cubes and water. Water does not "cause" ice cubes. Rather, ice cubes are a manifestation or objectification of water. Ice cubes "are" water. Terms such as "manifestation" and "objectification" render it possible to say that the ice cubes and the water are identical in substance, but non-identical in form, since water can assume the form of liquid or steam as well. We will use this logic of manifestation as a key to understanding the main principles of Schopenhauer's philosophy, for he believes that "Will" is like the water described here.

This study divides into three parts: (1) Schopenhauer's theoretical philosophy, (2) Schopenhauer's practical philosophy, and (3) Schopenhauer in perspective. The first part articulates the foundations of Schopenhauer's thought in issues concerning perception, explanation, and metaphysical speculation. The second sets forth the more familiar, wisdom-related aspects of his thought, such as his account of the world as involving endless frustration, and his prescriptions for salvation in aesthetic, moral, and ascetic experience.

The third part attends to some structural relationships and influences between Schopenhauer's philosophy and three world-historical

philosophers, namely, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951). Nietzsche, especially in his early years, was an enthusiastic advocate of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Hegel, in Schopenhauer’s eyes, was an arch-enemy. Wittgenstein, who was highly influential in the twentieth century, was impressed by Schopenhauer’s ascetic mysticism. The chapters on Nietzsche and Hegel present Schopenhauer’s vision of the world through alternative Nietzschean and Hegelian lenses. The chapter on Wittgenstein reveals some of the debt that twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy has to Schopenhauer. This chapter also shows the later Wittgenstein’s positive relationship to Schopenhauer, advancing beyond the common opinion that Schopenhauer’s influence on Wittgenstein’s philosophical writings began and ended when the latter was still a young man.

Schopenhauer sympathized with the peaceful attitude of Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and the concluding proposal will be that cultivating a higher level of Schopenhauerian personal detachment and inner peace coheres with the moral aims of three of the world’s major religions. This locates Schopenhauer’s philosophy among those outlooks that carry a great reserve of untapped spiritual potential. The present adherents of Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism presently constitute over 50 percent of the present human population, and it stands to reason that a person’s cultivated inner peace – however it is achieved – inevitably becomes redirected into the worldly social sphere within which that person is a living part. If this is so, then a Schopenhauerian attitude of detachment can lead to a more peaceful social end without the divisive burden of religious doctrinal details.

This, however, is not all. The great attractiveness of Schopenhauer’s philosophy resides in its appeal to those who have strong moral sympathies, but who harbor doubts about God’s existence, often as a result of perceiving painfully the world’s violence and irrationality. Although it advocates universal compassion, his philosophy is decidedly atheistic. Such a mixture of propositions is itself sufficient to stimulate one’s intellectual curiosity, since it is commonly believed that moral values cannot be reasonably defended or advanced unless one postulates for them an eternal, intelligent, good-natured, and realistic ground. If we add the large segment of the world’s unaffiliated atheistic and agnostic population to the theistic population described above, then the potential benefit that Schopenhauer’s philosophy can produce is immense, since he prescribes a moral attitude that coheres with the sentiments of anyone, atheist or not, who acknowledges the value of traditional morality.

Schopenhauer nonetheless believes that the core of the universe is meaningless and that bodily death annihilates our individual consciousnesses. The following pages articulate why he believes this. Part of the

paradoxical and macabre attractiveness of Schopenhauer's outlook is his sympathy with the ethical, compassionate, core of the world's main religions, while admitting that from a metaphysical standpoint, individual personalities are insubstantial in a world that simply drives on meaninglessly. Among the world's main religions, the closest to this view is Buddhism, and we will emphasize this spiritual association in what now follows.

## notes

- 1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), §186.
- 2 In the Schopenhauer-Archiv in Berlin (c. 2006), it is revealing that the room containing the library of the Schopenhauer scholar, Arthur Hübscher (1897–1985) is arranged dramatically with Hübscher's large, museum-quality Buddha at the center of the wall of books. Schopenhauer's own study in Frankfurt also contained a 100-year-old statue of Buddha, either of iron or brass, originally painted black. Schopenhauer had ordered it from Paris and believed that it was probably from Tibet. He had it gilded in 1857, three years before his death.

---

# acknowledgments

---

This presentation of Schopenhauer's philosophy would never have materialized, had not Ivan Soll helped me realize years ago how Arthur Schopenhauer deserved a far more widespread philosophical reception. I would like to dedicate this book to Ivan as a small measure of gratitude for many years of friendship and personal inspiration in both my professional and private life from Wisconsin to Germany, and through Arizona to Auckland. A. David Roth and Herbert Garelick also deserve respectful, if belated, thanks for having first introduced me to the cadaverous perfume of Schopenhauer's philosophy amidst memorably white and snowy Michigan surroundings. Similarly, Ronald Suter has been the source of some of my healthiest and formative philosophical memories; at exactly the right time in my education, his deep admiration of Wittgenstein's philosophy impressed itself upon me inspirationally.

In New Zealand, the University of Auckland Philosophy Department and Faculty of Arts kindly granted travel funds and a period of academic leave in Germany and New York, during which time most of this book was peacefully completed. Warm acknowledgment is also due to my students of Schopenhauer and of Asian philosophy in Auckland whose presence over the years stimulated many of the reflections contained herein. Among my good colleagues in Auckland, Julian Young has been an especially positive and supportive presence in connection with our mutual interest in Schopenhauer's thought. Many thanks go out to Julian, to Sean Kinsler, and to Markus Weidler for our conversations. The Schopenhauer Archives in Frankfurt also kindly assisted me with my research while I was in Germany during the summer of 2005. It is also a pleasure to acknowledge Steve Nadler's open-mindedness and encouragement during the beginnings of this project, along with Jeff Dean's keen literary eye, patience, and editorial wisdom, all of which contributed substantially to this book's development.

The translations from the German and French texts are my own. James Stewart's bodhisattva-like generosity and knowledge of the Pali language substantially informed the translation of Buddha's first noble truth. Thanks are due additionally to my colleague Chris Martin, who

shared with me his professional expertise in Latin at crucial points. This is also the place to acknowledge the many productive conversations about Karl Marx that Paul Warren and I have had over the years, for they led me to appreciate the kinship between Schopenhauer and the intellectual tradition that so humanistically concerns itself with the plight of alienated labor.

Finally, my intellectual horizons have been broadened immeasurably by the presence of Kathleen M. Higgins and Robert C. Solomon during their yearly academic visits to Auckland during the last decade, their frequent guest-lecturing in my German philosophy classes, and the stimulating discussions we have had on Schopenhauer-related topics in nineteenth-century German Idealism and aesthetics in general. Bob's untimely death in January 2007 has been a great loss, and I hope that this study can somehow commemorate the inspiring presence and example that he was for me.

Auckland, New Zealand  
March 2007

xiv	acknowledgments



# abbreviations

PSR Principle of Sufficient Reason

## works by schopenhauer

*BM* "On the Foundations of Morality" [1840]

*FFR* *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* [1813]

*FW* "On the Freedom of Human Will" [1839]

*MSR* (I–IV) *Arthur Schopenhauer, Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*

*PP* (I) *Parerga and Paralipomena, Vol. I* [1851]

*PP* (II) *Parerga and Paralipomena, Vol. II* [1851]

*WWR* (I) *The World as Will and Representation, Vol. I* [1818]

*WWR* (II) *The World as Will and Representation, Vol. II* [1844]

*ZA* *Arthur Schopenhauer, Zürcher Ausgabe, Werke in zehn Bänden.*

## other works cited

*CPR* *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781/87]

See the Bibliography for further details. In the references, supplementary page numbers will be provided for *Arthur Schopenhauer, Zürcher Ausgabe, Werke in zehn Bänden*, Diogenes, 1977 [ZA], along with the paginations for the translations by E. J. F. Payne [P] and R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp [HK], as appropriate. In all of the quotations, the italics are in Schopenhauer's original manuscript.



# the philosophy of a nonconformist (1788–1860)

## i the unsettled years: 1788–1831

**A**s one of the most erudite and cosmopolitan thinkers in the history of western philosophy, Arthur Schopenhauer offers us an image of the world that is both astounding and sobering. He never left Europe in his 72-year lifetime, but he traveled extensively and observantly throughout the continent during his early years, with fluent linguistic abilities in German, French, English, Greek, Latin, and, in later years, Spanish. He had the good fortune to live when traditional religious texts from India were first reaching Europe in accessible translation, and he became notable as being among the first western philosophers to incorporate Vedic and Buddhist themes into his philosophical outlook. His philosophical approach also displayed a distinctively universalist character in its effort to establish conclusions that apply to all times and places. Known popularly as one of philosophy's great pessimists, Schopenhauer – as the chapters ahead will reveal – can also be appreciated as representing a combination of hard-headed realism, artistic appreciation, and religious mysticism.

Schopenhauer entered the world surrounded by social prestige and privilege, having been born into a successful mercantile trading family in the free city of Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland) whose roots traced back to the Netherlands. His Anglophile father, Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer (1747–1805), planned that Arthur would follow in his footsteps to manage the family business and establish himself as the head of a patrician, ship-owning family. Young Arthur was educated accordingly with a strong dose of European travel at an early age, which combined later with an enrolment at an exclusive school in Hamburg whose curriculum helped train young teenagers for success in international business.

Danzig was a free trading city when Schopenhauer was born, but it was in Prussia's hands by the time Arthur had reached the age of 5. This forced the family to move to Hamburg – another free trading port where his anti-Prussian father could conduct business more comfortably.

Arthur's mother, Johanna Henriette Trosiener Schopenhauer (1766–1838), was nineteen years younger than her husband, and her relationship with Heinrich Floris expressed this distance in age. Immediately after Arthur was born, the 22-year-old Johanna lived on the family's suburban estate outside of Danzig while Heinrich Floris spent most of the weekdays in the city on business, returning on the weekends to visit his young wife and son. Johanna's own family, although it was less affluent than her husband's, was also well-placed in Danzig society. Her father was one of the city's senators, and the marriage to Heinrich Floris solidified upper-class social relationships. Johanna herself loved to entertain people in the high society of her time, abhorred boredom and being alone, and later displayed an impressive talent for writing fiction and travelogues. Her collected works were published in 24 volumes in 1831. Arthur would later use the same Leipzig publisher, Friedrich August Brockhaus, for his own writings.

Schopenhauer appears to have had a relatively lonely childhood, sometimes distraught by fears of abandonment. According to his own reports, the occasion upon which he felt consistently the happiest and most at home was neither in the company of his parents nor in Germany, but in France, from the ages of 9 to 11, when he stayed at the house of one of his father's business associates whose surname was Grégoires de Blésimaire. In Le Havre, he developed a friendship with the family's young son, Anthime Grégoires, and learned to speak French so fluently and naturally, that upon his return to Hamburg, he could hardly remember how to communicate in German.

Arthur witnessed for the next few years the large parties thrown by his parents for the Hamburg elite. He does not appear to have been inspired by these get-togethers and he showed increasingly less interest in becoming a member of this prestigious social group as time went on. This was unlike some of his schoolmates who grew up to assume respectable and powerful places in the Hamburg mercantile community. Arthur was more reflective and academically-inclined, much to his father's disappointment.

As Schopenhauer matured into his teenage years and the decision for embarking on a specific course in life became more pressing, his father agreed that Arthur could develop his interest in academics only if he would agree to miss out on yet another, more grand opportunity to travel extensively throughout Europe. The price of travel, however, was to include not only the abandonment of his academic pursuits but also the commitment to commencing an apprenticeship in the mercantile

trading business immediately upon return. Setting his academic dispositions aside, Arthur chose the attractive European travel and in 1803 at age 15, he journeyed with his parents through the Netherlands, Belgium, England, France, Switzerland, and Austria, returning for a brief time to Le Havre, of which he had fond memories. While in England, he was briefly enrolled in a boarding school in Wimbledon (June 30 to September 20, 1803) while his parents traveled in Great Britain. Some of Johanna Schopenhauer's published travelogues vividly describe the cities and towns she and her husband visited in England and Scotland during this trip.

These European adventures conveyed a more mature meaning for Schopenhauer, for he became impressed painfully with the wretched circumstances in which he saw many people living. The memories never left him and he later wrote about how, at age 17, he had gravitated into perceiving human life, as had Buddha, with its unceasing suffering and pain. The belief in God became impossible for him, as he found it inconceivable that this physical world could be the product of an all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing deity. Despite this, and although his cosmopolitan experiences helped transform him into an atheist, it did not undermine his sense of duty and respect, for Schopenhauer kept his promise to his father upon returning from his travels and began his business apprenticeship in earnest.

From his father, Schopenhauer believed, he had inherited a tendency towards anxiety, and he probably had sufficient reason to interpret his own personality in this way. Whether his father suffered from anxiety is uncertain, but Schopenhauer's duty to his father was put to the test by Heinrich Floris's death on April 20, 1805 at age 58; Arthur himself had turned 17 two months before, almost to the day.

Heinrich Floris's body was discovered in a canal behind the Schopenhauer's house in Hamburg, whose rear constituted the warehouse for the family business. He had apparently fallen from one of the upper floors. The situation was ambiguous; the death was considered officially to have been an accident, although it could well have been a suicide. Heinrich Floris had been ill in the months preceding, he had displayed memory losses, and his business had not been faring well. Arthur later blamed his mother for his father's suicide, believing that she had seriously neglected her husband when he was ill and depressed. In light of this tragic event, Arthur's negative view of the world only deepened, and although he and his father did not seem to be close, Arthur suffered emotionally from his father's absence.

Johanna sold the family business within a few months and moved to Weimar with Adele, Arthur's younger sister (Luise Adelaide Lavinia Schopenhauer, 1797–1849), a year later. In the meantime, Arthur continued in his business apprenticeship for two further years, then, with