

## SCHOPENHAUER: A BIOGRAPHY

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) was one of the most original and provocative thinkers of the nineteenth century. He spent a lifetime striving to understand the meaning of living in a world where suffering and death are ubiquitous. In his quest to solve “the ever-disquieting riddle of existence,” Schopenhauer explored almost every dimension of human existence, developing a darkly compelling worldview that found deep resonance in contemporary literature, music, philosophy, and psychology.

This is the first comprehensive biography of Schopenhauer written in English. Placing him in his historical and philosophical contexts, David E. Cartwright tells the story of Schopenhauer’s life to convey the full range of his philosophy. He offers a fully documented portrait in which he explores Schopenhauer’s fractured family life, his early formative influences, his critical loyalty to Kant, his personal interactions with Fichte and Goethe, his ambivalent relationship with Schelling, his contempt for Hegel, his struggle to make his philosophy known, and his reaction to his late-arriving fame. The Schopenhauer who emerges in this biography is the complex author of a philosophy that had a significant influence on figures as diverse as Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, Emile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, Thomas Hardy, Thomas Mann, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

David E. Cartwright is professor of philosophy and religious studies at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater. He has published numerous articles on Schopenhauer and nineteenth-century German philosophy, translated and edited several of Schopenhauer’s books, and is the author of the *Historical Dictionary of Schopenhauer’s Philosophy*.

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# Schopenhauer A Biography

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*Was man in der Jugend wünscht,  
hat man im Alter die Fülle.*  
Goethe, Dichtung und Wahrheit

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## Preface

Arthur Schopenhauer continues to be one of the most widely read philosophers outside of academe, and it is only a slight exaggeration to say that academics have paid him more attention in the last thirty years than they have in any period following the publication of his philosophical masterpiece, *The World as Will and Representation*, which appeared in December 1818. This remark, however, is not an exaggeration at all if it is restricted to Anglo-American scholars. Schopenhauer's broad popularity is relatively easy to understand, as is the resurgence of interest among scholars. In addition to addressing traditional topics in aesthetics, epistemology, ethics, logic, and metaphysics in the rigorous and specialized forms favored by philosophers, his fifty-year quest to discover and explain the meaning of the totality of experience led him to investigate almost every significant aspect of human experience. Ever the perennialist, he dealt with universal themes concerning the human condition, such as love, sex, suffering, death, the meaning and value of life, and redemption. He also explored phenomena neglected by many philosophers, including colors, genius, homosexuality, humor, madness, the metaphysics of music, the moral status of animals, mysticism, paranormal phenomena, and weeping. Always committed to the truth, he trailed its spurs wherever its track steered. Seldom worrying about writing to please, he stated the truth as he saw it. His voracious curiosity and cosmopolitan sensibilities made him the first major Western philosopher to seriously consider Eastern thought. In addition to his stressing commonalities between Eastern and Western perspectives, Hinduism and Buddhism helped shape his philosophy, and he recognized ways in which Eastern thought transcended that of the West.

Yet it is not simply his vast array of topics that draw readers to Schopenhauer. He loathed obscurantism of any kind, and he viewed the torturous

styles of many of his contemporaries as displaying a poverty of thought that they attempted to conceal by incomprehensible jargon wrapped in ponderous sentence structures. Compared to his contemporaries and compared to most philosophers, he wrote wonderfully and clearly. He philosophized from the heart, from a genuine astonishment about the world, and not simply from a puzzlement about what other philosophers had said. He wrote with wit, irony, and sarcasm; polemically and provocatively; with grace and beauty. At times, reading Schopenhauer is an aesthetic experience of the first order. His works abound with personal observations based on his travels, his experiences of great works of art, and his keen attention to human behavior. He was as likely to quote from Goethe as he was from Kant. To illustrate a point, or to clarify an idea, he would draw from world literature and religion, from poetry and philosophy, and from the natural sciences.

Schopenhauer's original and darkly compelling worldview, with its expressive and inviting style and its emphasis on instinctive drives and nonrational forces directing not only human behavior, but everything in the world, has had a remarkable history of influence. Some scholars have detected the imprint of his thought in the work of figures as diverse as Jacob Burckhardt, Paul Deussen, Emile Durkheim, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Erwin Schrödinger, Swami Vivekānanda, and Wilhelm Wundt. Others have heard him in the music of Johannes Brahms, Antonín Dvořák, Gustav Mahler, Arnold Schönberg, and Richard Wagner. Still others have read him in Charles Baudelaire, Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, Joseph Conrad, Afanasij Fet, Gustav Flaubert, Theodor Fontane, André Gide, George Gissing, Thomas Hardy, Friedrich Hebbel, Hermann Hesse, Henrik Ibsen, Thomas Mann, William Somerset Maugham, Guy de Maupassant, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Marcel Proust, Wilhelm Raabe, August Strindberg, Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev, Virginia Woolf, and Emile Zola. Moreover, there are those who have noted his mark on the philosophies of Henri Bergson, Eduard von Hartmann, Max Horkheimer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Marcuse, Max Scheller, Richard Taylor, Hans Vaihinger, and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

The resurgence of interest in Schopenhauer by scholars has been driven, in part, by his rich *Wirkungsgeschichte*. He claimed that we have learned some things from him that we will never forget. And, although this is true, it is as if scholars are recovering the memory of the author of those things. For decades, Schopenhauer had been viewed by Anglo-American

analytic philosophers as a source for pointedly poignant observations on human life and as a figure of literary and not philosophical interest. But the tide has changed. Kant scholars, at first interested in Schopenhauer's critique of the Kantian philosophy, have also come to appreciate the philosophical power of his thought. Philosophers first drawn to him in order to understand Schopenhauer's formative influence on Nietzsche and Wittgenstein have also come to appreciate the rigor and power of his work. Now even a dyed-in-the-wool, hardline analytical philosopher has come to appreciate the explanatory power of his philosophy. But what about the thinker himself, about whom it was once said that students knew more about him than about his philosophy?

Although Schopenhauer has been called an arch-pessimist, misanthrope, misogynist, cynic, irrationalist; a friendless, godless philosopher of will; unloved, loveless, arrogant, mother-despising, an academic failure; a fierce advocate of a contradictory worldview; even a seamstress-beating, Hegel-hating hurler of ad hominem – although Schopenhauer has been called all these, many of which are true, few know more about him. For Schopenhauer was also a master of German prose, a poodle-loving, flute-playing Rossini devotee, a polyglot, an Upanishads-reading Buddhist, and a Plato-esteeming, Kant-admiring, Goethe-revering, mission-driven philosopher of the body, of sexual love, of art, of tranquility, of compassion, and of redemption. In fact, Arthur Schopenhauer was, in many senses, a singular philosopher. But what is the thing in itself behind these many appearances?



## Acknowledgments

With a deep sense of gratitude, I offer my thanks to those who have either directly or indirectly enabled me to write this book. I have benefitted substantially from the work of earlier biographers, especially from studies by Patrick Bridgwater, Wilhelm Gwinner, Arthur Hübscher, and Rüdiger Safranski. Ulrike Bergmann's biography of Johanna Schopenhauer and Gabriele Büch's biography of Adele Schopenhauer considerably aided my understanding of Schopenhauer's relationships with his mother and sister. My interpretation of Schopenhauer's philosophy has been informed by the writings of Urs App, John E. Atwell, Arati Barua, Douglas Berger, Dieter Birnbacher, Patrick Gardiner, George Goedert, D. W. Hamlyn, Dale Jacquette, Christopher Janaway, Yauso Kamata, Matthias Koßler, P. F. H. Lauterman, Ludger Lütkehaus, Bryan Magee, Rudolf Malter, G. Steven Neeley, Moria Nicholls, Alfred Schmidt, Ivan Soll, Volker Spierling, F. C. White, Robert Wicks, Julian Young, and Günter Zöller. These scholars and their works have been an immense help in my understanding of Schopenhauer's life and philosophy.

I would be remiss if I were not to mention the support provided to me by my colleagues at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater. In particular, I must thank Edward E. Erdmann for many satisfying conversations as we labored through our translations of Schopenhauer, *nämlich, hingegen*, and *eben* aside. My colleagues in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Richard Brooks, Wade Dazey, Crista Lebens, Ann Luther, and David Simmons, willingly discussed Schopenhauer with me without resignation, often displaying the patience of a saint as I spoke almost ad nauseum about the philosopher. The University of Wisconsin – Whitewater generously supported my research for this book through a sabbatical during the spring semester of 2006. The Steven Shelton Schopenhauer Collect, housed in my department's library, provided immediate access

to valuable primary and secondary literature. For helping me understand Schopenhauer's disposition toward amateur botanizing and for aiding me with plant identification, I owe a debt to my friend, Richard Larson of The Dawes Arboretum

This book would not have seen the light of day without the careful work of Vickie Schmidt. She transformed my messy, hardscrabble, handwritten heap of pages into a readable text, improving my work in countless ways. Elyse Smithback and Carol Lohry Cartwright also played a crucial in this transformation. Eden Lohry Smithback was almost along for the ride.

I must also acknowledge Dover Publications for permission to use E. F. J. Payne's translation of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, Berg Publishers for the use of Payne's translation of *Arthur Schopenhauer: Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, and Oxford University Press for the use of extracts from Payne's translation of Schopenhauer's *Parerga and Paralipomena*.

The late Terence Moore invited me to engage in this project, something that I would never have considered on my own. Without his encouragement, this book would not have been written. I must also thank Beatrice Rehl for her guidance and patience.

I dedicate this book to my loving wife, Carol Lohry Cartwright.

## Notes on the Text

The goals of this book are to tell the story of Arthur Schopenhauer's life, to describe how he came to his philosophy, and to provide a general account of his philosophical thought. I have composed this work, however, to serve readers with diverse interests. I assume that all readers are interested in Schopenhauer's life. After all, why else would one read a biography about Schopenhauer? Moreover, since Schopenhauer lived for philosophy, as he repeatedly asserted, a major theme of his life also involves how he came to his philosophy, and to understand his life, it is important to understand the genesis of his philosophy. Nevertheless, some readers are likely to be more interested in his life than in particular areas of his philosophy. To accommodate readers with different interests, I have kept biographical materials as distinct as possible from accounts of his particular books, so that readers may ignore discussions of particular books without loss of the narrative of Schopenhauer's life, and so that readers may also focus on specific areas of his philosophy. Consequently, discussions of Schopenhauer's books occur under chapter sections titled by the name of the particular book; when appropriate, I use subsections to denote particular topics in that book. Then I either continue the chapter with a new section that continues biographical materials, or conclude the chapter. For example, in Chap. 5, I discuss under the section "On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason" Schopenhauer's dissertation, including the significant revisions that it received thirty-four years later in its second edition, and then I continue the story of his life in the following section, "Weimar." I conclude Chap. 7 with a discussion of his principal work under the section "The World as Will and Representation," which includes the subsections "Epistemology," "Metaphysics of Nature," "Metaphysics of Art," and "Metaphysics of Morals," which correspond to the four major divisions of this book.

This book is liberally peppered with superscript numbers, perhaps to the point of distraction, and perhaps due to my own frustrations with authors who do not document their sources. These superscript numbers can be ignored by readers who find footnotes distracting and/or obtrusive. These notes to the text are primarily to provide sources for quotations and references and for materials that would be of interest for Schopenhauer scholars. I recommend not allowing the notes to intrude on the text and, unless you must know immediately the source for a quotation, consulting the notes for a chapter at the conclusion of your reading of a chapter. I would also recommend that you look at the notes to see whether one of the more informative notes addresses your interests.

Those who consult the notes will find that I provide dual citations for Schopenhauer's books and for his literary remains or *Nachlaß*. The first reference is to an English translation by E. F. J. Payne, who translated all of Schopenhauer's books and most of his *Nachlaß*. The second reference is to the corresponding marginal pagination found in – and virtually identical to – the page numbers in Arthur Hübscher's historical-critical edition of *Arthur Schopenhauer: Sämtliche Werke* or to the corresponding page number of Hübscher's edition of *Arthur Schopenhauer: Der handschriftliche Nachlaß*. I use this method of citation for two reasons. First, it allows readers to consult Schopenhauer's original German using the standard German texts for scholarly citations. Second, new English translations of some of Schopenhauer's books have appeared and the first English collected edition of Schopenhauer's books, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Schopenhauer*, is forthcoming. Because these new translations include the marginal pagination found in Hübscher, readers will be able to use these new translations by following the citations from the Hübscher edition. I have also followed the standard practice of citing Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* after its first and second editions ("A" and "B," respectively) and his other works by the pagination found in *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences ("AK," followed by page number). This method of citing Kant will enable readers to consult any modern English translation of his works. Full citations for all of the books mentioned here can be found in the list of Works Cited.

Although I quote from Payne's translations of Schopenhauer, sometimes with minor stylistic changes, I have deviated systematically from his translations concerning the following terms. Payne rendered *Anschauung*

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as “perception” and I have replaced it with “intuition,” using “perception” for *Wahrnehmung*. Payne used “knowledge” for *Erkenntnis* and I have substituted “cognition.” Last, I used “appearance” in place of Payne’s “phenomenon” for *Erscheinung*. Unless otherwise noted, I am responsible for the translations of German sources.

# Chronology of Schopenhauer's Life and Works

- 1788 February 22:** Arthur Schopenhauer born in Danzig to the patrician merchant Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer and Johanna Schopenhauer (born Trosiener), later a popular writer and novelist.
- 1793 March:** The Schopenhauers move to Hamburg, to avoid the Prussian annexation of Danzig.
- 1797 June 12:** Schopenhauer's only sibling, Louise Adelaide (Adele), is born.
- July:** Travels to France with his father, remaining in Le Havre for two years with the family of a business associate of his father.
- 1799 August:** Returns from France and enrolls in Dr. Runge's private school, an institution designed to educate future merchants.
- 1800 July:** Accompanies his parents on a three-month trip to Hannover, Karlsbad, Prague, and Dresden.
- 1803 May:** The Schopenhauers, minus Adele, begin a tour of Holland, England, France, Switzerland, Austria, Silesia, and Prussia; the tour is Schopenhauer's reward for agreeing to continue his training as a merchant and for foregoing preparation for attendance at a university.
- June 30:** Attends the Reverend Lancaster's school in Wimbledon for twelve weeks.
- 1804 August:** Conclusion of European tour; Schopenhauer receives confirmation in Danzig.
- September–December:** Serves as an apprentice to a Danzig merchant.
- 1805 January:** Begins apprenticeship with a Hamburg merchant.

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**April 20:** Heinrich Floris dies; his wife and son believe that his death is a suicide.

**1806 September:** After liquidating the family business, Johanna moves to Weimar with Adele. Schopenhauer remains as an apprentice in Hamburg.

**1807 May:** With his mother's encouragement, Schopenhauer ends his apprenticeship.

**June:** Attends a gymnasium at Gotha.

**December:** Terminates his studies at Gotha, after being rebuked for writing a lampoon of an instructor; relocates to Weimar, but lives separately from his family.

**1808** To prepare for the university, takes private studies in Latin and Greek and studies mathematics and history on his own.

**1809 February:** Upon reaching the age of majority, receives his inheritance, one-third of his father's estate.

**October:** Matriculates as a medical student at the University of Göttingen.

**1810 Winter semester:** Studies philosophy with Gottlob Ernst Schulze, whose recommended reading of Plato and Kant introduces Schopenhauer to his two favorite philosophers; begins reading Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling.

**1811 September:** Enrolls in the University of Berlin to study philosophy.

**Winter semester:** Attends Johann Gottlieb Fichte's lectures, becoming increasingly disenchanted with Fichte's philosophy. He continues studying Schelling and continues reading Fichte.

**1812 Spring–Summer:** Concludes private studies of Fichte and Schelling; continues private study of Kant and Plato; and reads Francis Bacon and John Locke.

**Summer semester:** Attends Friedrich Ernst Schleiermacher's lectures.

**Winter:** Regularly observes psychiatric patients at the Berlin Charité.

**1813 May:** Fearing military conscription and an attack by Napoleon, Schopenhauer leaves Berlin for a short stay at Weimar.

**June:** Retires to Rudolstadt to write his dissertation.

- October:** *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* earns Schopenhauer a doctorate in philosophy, in absentia, from the University of Jena; his dissertation is published.
- November:** Returns to Weimar; Goethe, who received a dedicated copy of Schopenhauer's dissertation, interests the young philosopher in color theory, a subject they will discuss periodically for the next few months.
- December:** Begins to borrow volumes of the *Asiatisches Magazin* from the ducal library in Weimar.
- 1814 March:** Schopenhauer borrows a Latin translation of the *Upanishads* from the ducal library in Weimar; this Latin translation, the *Oupnek'hat*, would become his "Bible."
- May:** After a series of vicious quarrels with his mother, Schopenhauer moves to Dresden; the philosopher will never see his mother again, either dead or alive.
- 1816 May:** The fruit of Schopenhauer's work with Goethe on color theory, *On Vision and Colors*, is published.
- 1818 March:** Schopenhauer completes his principal work, *The World as Will and Representation*.
- September:** First trip to Italy.
- December:** Appearance of his principal work, which bears a publication date of 1819.
- 1819 Spring:** While Schopenhauer is in Italy, his daughter is born in Dresden; the child dies late that summer.
- July:** Returns to Germany to address a family financial crisis caused by the failure of the banking house of Muhl.
- December:** Applies to the University of Berlin to qualify as a *Privatdozent*, an unsalaried lecturer; expresses his desire to teach at the same time as Hegel's principal lectures.
- 1820 March:** Schopenhauer receives a passing grade on his test lecture, during which he and Hegel engage in a minor dispute.
- Summer semester:** Offers and convenes lectures for the first and only time and does not complete the course; Schopenhauer's lectures are listed in Berlin's prospectus of lectures in 1820–22 and in 1826–31.



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**1821** Begins an on-and-off, decade-long affair with Caroline Richter, later "Medon."

**August:** Schopenhauer allegedly assaults the seamstress Caroline Marquet, an event that would lead to a series of lawsuits, lasting for more than five years.

**Fall:** Inquires about an academic position at Gießen.

**1822** **May:** Second Italian tour.

**1823** **May:** Schopenhauer returns to Germany; overwinters in Munich, suffering through various illnesses and depression.

**1824** Schopenhauer lives in Gastein (Switzerland), Mannheim, and Dresden.

**November:** Attempts to secure contracts to translate David Hume's *Natural History of Religion* and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* into German, and Giordano Bruno's *della Causa, principio ed Uno* into Latin.

**1825** **January:** Attempts to secure a contract to translate Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* into German.

**May:** Returns to Berlin and begins to study Spanish.

**1826** Discovers the first edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

**1827** **May:** Final, negative, judgment against Schopenhauer in the Marquet case.

**September:** Inquires about an academic position at Würzburg.

**1828** **February:** Inquires about an academic position at Heidelberg.

**1829** **May:** Attempts to secure a contract to translate Gracián's *Oráculo manual arte de prudencia* into German.

**December:** Attempts to secure a contract to translate Kant's principal works into English.

**1830** **June:** Schopenhauer's Latin revision of his color theory, "*Commentatio undecima exponens Theoriam Colorum Physiologcam eandemque primariam*" is published in *Scriptores Ophthalmologici minores*.

**1831** **August:** Schopenhauer flees from Berlin to Frankfurt am Main, due to the cholera epidemic.

- 1832 Beginning of the year:** A depressed Schopenhauer isolates himself in his rooms for two months.
- April:** Completes his Gracián translation and once more attempts to have it published; the translation is published posthumously in 1862.
- July:** Moves to Mannheim.
- 1833 July:** Permanently moves to Frankfurt, where he will live for the remainder of his life.
- 1835** It is likely that a second daughter, who dies in infancy, is born in Frankfurt.
- 1836 March:** *On the Will in Nature* is published.
- 1837 August:** Schopenhauer begins a letter exchange with the editors of Kant's collected works and convinces them to publish the first edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and to relegate the changes in its second edition to an appendix.
- 1838 April 17:** Johanna Schopenhauer dies in Bonn; Schopenhauer does not attend his mother's funeral.
- 1839 January:** Schopenhauer's prize-essay "On the Freedom of the Human Will" receives the gold medal from the Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences in Trondheim; a Norwegian translation is published the next year.
- 1840 January:** Despite being the only entry, the prize-essay "On the Foundation of Morality" is refused the crown by the Royal Danish Society of Sciences in Copenhagen.
- September:** Schopenhauer's two prize-essays are published as *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics* (bearing a publication date of 1841); he includes a lengthy preface in which he berates the Royal Danish Society and Hegel.
- 1841 Spring:** Unsuccessfully tries to persuade Charles Lock Eastlake, the translator of Goethe's color theory, to translate *On Vision and Colors* into English.
- 1842** Caroline Marquet dies.
- Summer:** Meets with his sister Adele in Frankfurt, their first personal meeting in twenty years.
- 1844 March:** The second edition of *The World as Will and Representation* appears in two volumes.

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**July:** Beginning of letter exchange with Johann August Becker.

**1845 Summer:** Begins work on *Parerga and Paralipomena*.

**1846 July:** First personal meeting with Julius Frauenstädt.

**1847 December:** A significantly revised second edition of *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* appears.

**1848 March:** Street fighting in Frankfurt disrupts Schopenhauer's life.

**1849 March:** Last meeting with his sister.

**April 25:** Death of Adele Schopenhauer in Bonn; Schopenhauer does not attend the funeral.

**December:** Laments the loss of his white poodle Atma; soon thereafter acquires a brown poodle, also called Atma.

**1851 November:** *Parerga and Paralipomena* appears.

**1853 April:** An anonymous review (by John Oxenford) "Iconoclasm in German Philosophy," appears in the *Westminster Review*.

**May:** The *Vossische Zeitung* publishes a German translation of Oxenford's review.

**1854 September:** Second edition of *On the Will in Nature*.

**December:** Second edition of *On Vision and Colors*; Richard Wagner sends Schopenhauer a dedicated copy of *The Nibelung's Ring*.

**1855 October:** The philosophy faculty at the University of Leipzig sponsors an essay contest for the exposition and criticism of the Schopenhauerian philosophy.

**1857** First lectures on Schopenhauer are delivered at the universities in Bonn and Breslau.

**1859 November:** The third edition of *The World as Will and Representation* appears.

**1860 September:** The second edition of *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics* appears.

**September 21:** Arthur Schopenhauer dies in Frankfurt am Main.