



## Essays and Aphorisms

*Arthur Schopenhauer, R.J. Hollingdale (Translator, Introduction)*

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# Essays and Aphorisms

*Arthur Schopenhauer , R.J. Hollingdale (Translator, Introduction)*

## **Essays and Aphorisms** Arthur Schopenhauer , R.J. Hollingdale (Translator, Introduction)

One of the greatest philosophers of the nineteenth century, Schopenhauer believed that human action is determined not by reason but by 'will' - the blind and irrational desire for physical existence. This selection of his writings on religion, ethics, politics, women and many other themes is taken from Schopenhauer's last work, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, which he published in 1851. He depicts humanity as locked in a struggle beyond good and evil, each individual absolutely free within a Godless world in which art, morality and self-awareness are our only salvation. This innovative and pessimistic view proved powerfully influential upon philosophy and art, affecting the work of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein among others.

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## **Sadra Aliabadi says**

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Amir says

## Saleh MoonWalker says

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### **peiman-mir5 rezakhani says**

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### **Mohammad Hanifeh says**

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**Maryam says**

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## Ahmad Sharabiani says

?Aphorismen zur Lebensweisheit = The Wisdom of Life, Arthur Schopenhauer

The Wisdom of Life represents part of Schopenhauer's work originally titled *Aphorismen zur Lebensweisheit* and translated by T. B. Saunders. The other part of the original has been translated under the name *Counsels and Maxims*. However both parts deal with a single treatise, with the being no such division in the original.

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## **Mohamad Yoosofi says**

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## Glenn Russell says

Arthur Schopenhauer wrote his essays and aphorisms in the financial hub city of Frankford, Germany during the mid-nineteenth century, a world where business owners and financiers ruthlessly competed against one another to amass fortunes, clerks chained to their desks toiled twelve hours a day, uneducated day laborers ground themselves down into faceless, mindless cogs of the urban wheel, and upper class ladies strolled the streets with parasols as they chattered incessantly over petty concerns - but, no matter what one's station in life - ruthless financial baron, toiling clerk, chattering lady or manual drudge - the monotonous hum of this bustling society gave few people encouragement or mental space to think independently or reflect philosophically. But no hustle and bustle for Arthur. Inheriting the family fortune and thus freed from any obligation to work for a living, Schopenhauer became a life-long bachelor and independent scholar, keeping his distance from other people as if they were a colony of doltish, novel-reading lepers.

And, thus, after rousing in the morning and before playing the flute, partaking of lunch, and going for his two hour walk with his pet poodle, Schopenhauer sat at his desk, completely dedicating his time to writing. And this collection is Schopenhauer at his hyper-arrogant best, as self-appointed genius and highbrow aesthete, shooting verbal barbs and passing harsh judgment on everyone and everything in sight - would-be philosophers, journalists, bookworms, scholars, literati, historians, women, among numerous others.

This book is great literature as well as original philosophy, the writing is so incredibly clear, crystal clear, actually - a straightforward, easy-to-follow, elegant prose. What a switch from hopelessly dry, turgid, stale academic philosophy with its endless references, footnotes and qualifications.

On the topic of books and writing, here is a quote which is vintage Schopenhauer: "The thoughts a man is capable of always express themselves in clear, comprehensible and unambiguous words. Those who put together difficult, obscure, involved, ambiguous discourses do not really know what they want to say: they have no more than a vague consciousness of it which is only struggling towards a thought; often, however, they also want to conceal from themselves and others that they actually have nothing to say." Keep this in mind the next time you read an incomprehensible piece of writing - in truth, the burden is on the writer to make their thoughts clear, no matter how impressive the author's credentials.

Among the topics address is aesthetics. As always, Schopenhauer never dances around an issue but goes right to the heart of the matter and tells it like it is. Here is what he has to say on opera: "Strictly speaking one could call opera an unmusical invention for the benefit of unmusical minds." For anybody with a keen

interest in listening to music, these words have a very honest ring.

Here is a quote that is especially appropriate to our current age of information: "Students and learned men of every kind and every age go as a rule in search of information, not insight. They make it a point of honor to have information about everything . . . When I see how much these well-informed people know, I sometimes say to myself: Oh, how little such a one must have had to think about, since he has had so much time for reading!" The truth of this statement is compounded with the omnipresence of the internet.

One more quote, this one capsulizing Schopenhauer's famous pessimistic view of life: "No rose without a thorn. But many a thorn without a rose." Even if you don't agree, you have to admire a brilliant, memorable metaphor.

If you are new to Schopenhauer or philosophy, R. J. Hollindale provides an introduction which includes a mini-history of philosophy leading up to Schopenhauer, the cultural, literary and social context of Germany in the nineteenth century, as well as a mini-biography of Schopenhauer. This is all you will need to have a rich appreciation for one of the most lucid and influential philosophers in the Western tradition.

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## Foad says

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### **Delara Emami says**

This is the first book I have read from Schopenhauer and I have to say, honestly each paragraph embraces wisdom in every sense of the word. There is not a single word or line that is not a quotable. I have not read his pessimistic views, but I can tell you this book does not instill pessimism the least bit, but peace, understanding, and self-reliance, and inner richness. I did not reach the last chapter on Fame, as it did not interest me but the rest of the book was well worth the read. If you're looking for a non-traditional self-help book, honestly I believe the foundations of self-books rests in this book, and in his ideas, in Nietzsche, and in Kant. Enjoy!

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### **Zahra Dashti says**

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### **baQer (BFZ) says**

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### **Ali Feghhi says**

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### **Florencia says**

*Each individual misfortune, to be sure, seems an exceptional occurrence; but misfortune in general is the rule.*

Arthur Schopenhauer, "On the Suffering of the World"

We are here to shatter your warm and fuzzy world inhabited by unicorns and puppies that eat cupcakes every

time it rains. You may have the feeling of never leaving that world. And that's a valid choice, we all have our particular ways of dealing with our existence. If you do, avoid Schopenhauer's work. If you feel you can take it, proceed to read this book.

In 2005, I bought a little book called *Schopenhauer para Principiantes*. I was quite young and I'm not sure where I found his name (I do remember the year because every time I buy a book, I write the date on them; a little quirk). I think it was during some period when I was obsessed with Hinduism and Buddhism and other aspects of the Eastern philosophy and religion. Schopenhauer was heavily influenced by the Upanishads. Anyway, I felt so close to his points of view. I always thought I'd enjoy reading his books. And I did. I enjoyed reading this one, most of the times.

I decided to mention what I didn't like, first. And then, his other thoughts that truly emanate intelligence and creativity. That should be the last thing to be read.

Let's start with those simple-minded creatures whose only job is to have children and were born to be nurses and teachers. Yes, women.

One needs only to see the way she is built to realize that woman is not intended for great mental or for great physical labour. She expiates the guilt of life not through activity but through suffering, through the pains of childbirth, caring for the child and subjection to the man, to whom she should be a patient and cheering companion. (49)

After reading that, Schop certainly wasn't my favorite person in the world. And that is just the beginning. Do you think his misogynistic capabilities end there?

[they] are childish, silly and short-sighted, in a word big children... The nobler and more perfect a thing is, the later and more slowly does it mature. The man attains the maturity of his reasoning powers and spiritual faculties hardly before his twenty-eighth year; the woman with her eighteenth. And even then it is only reasoning power of a sort: a very limited sort. (50)

Yes, ignoble and imperfect ladies. Women are portrayed as little human beings that make babies and never mature, and have to hold on to their beauty and charm in order to get successful businessmen to support them (okay, I know a couple of those, but do not generalize, I beg you. Just like all men aren't noble and perfect, for god's sake). It has been said that, in his last years, he had a more favorable opinion about women. Well, I haven't seen the page. No redemption for you on that subject, my friend.

Next topic: freedom of the press. Or the permit to sell poison, whatever you want to call it.

For what cannot be put into the heads of the ignorant and credulous masses? – especially if you hold before them the prospect of gain and advantages. And of what misdeeds is man not capable once something has been put into his head? I very much fear, therefore, that the dangers of press freedom outweigh its usefulness, especially where there are legal remedies available for all grievances. In any event, however, freedom of the press should be conditional upon the strictest prohibition of any kind of anonymity. (89)

And then he focused on what he considered the perfect form of government... Yeah. I wasn't particularly fond of all his views developed in the essay "On law and politics".

Moving on to the things I enjoyed reading. First, Hollingdale's introduction. Thoroughly researched and well-written. He shared many facts of Schopenhauer's life and work and he managed to keep me interested. He chose several essays and aphorisms from the second volume of *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1851) to shed some light on his amazing work and form an idea of his philosophy.

Schopenhauer described brilliant ideas without using an extremely complicated language that only scholars would be able to understand. The complexity of his thoughts and the way they are written... simply outstanding. It reminded me of my experience with Bertrand Russell, while reading *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*. They have similar writing styles: straightforward and kind of humorous at times. Just the writing, though. Russell didn't think about S. with great enthusiasm since he considered him, basically, a hypocrite because he didn't live according to what he preached... I wouldn't know.

The first essay is about a main characteristic of Schopenhauer's philosophy. Suffering. We seem to be doomed to suffer. And even if we wouldn't suffer, we would long for it.

Not the least of the torments which plague our existence is the constant pressure of time, which never lets us so much as draw breath but pursues us all like a taskmaster with a whip.  
And yet if every desire were satisfied as soon as it arose how would men occupy their lives, how would they pass the time? (25)

If we wouldn't have misery in our world, we would create it, just to have something to worry about, apparently. (There's a funny Utopia reference, the land of More.) So, he recommended us to see the world not as the perfect work of a superior being because first, the world is full of misery; second, we live in it. Humans are considered highly developed beings but, in fact, they are not. However, think about it. It couldn't be otherwise since we are here thanks to a punishment for a forbidden desire (insert "story of the Fall" here). All in all, once you have accepted suffering, you'll see it as something ordinary, you won't be surprised because you will think of it as something normal. Considering we have such a tragic origin and we are doomed to suffer, we should conduct ourselves with some indulgence. We must treat each other with tolerance, patience, forbearance and charity. Everything has its silver lining.

The following chapter is about the vanity of existence, which I found brilliant.

Every moment of our life belongs to the present only for a moment; then it belongs for ever to the past. (31)

When I was younger, I used to be haunted by that thought. What is the present? What is now, this instant? Merely a second. Then it is all safe in the past. The past is not last year; it is already when I wrote "The past is not last year". That hopeless feeling of needing more time is universal.

He then continued squeezing and kicking my soul with his thoughts on the human life and our needs that are impossible to satisfy.

As things are, we take no pleasure in existence except when we are striving after something – in which case distance and difficulties make our goal look as if it would satisfy us (an illusion which fades when we reach it) – or when engaged in purely intellectual activity, in which case we are really stepping out of life so as to regard it from outside, like spectators at a play... Whenever we are not involved in one or other of these things but directed back to existence itself we are overtaken by its worthlessness and vanity and this is the sensation called boredom.

(32)

There are other essays and aphorisms about religion, philosophy, ethics, books and writing (that ooze arrogance from time to time) and introspection that are written with the same accessible language and express impressive—sometimes provocative—ideas. We may not agree with a couple of them but we have to admit that this man was an endless source of creativity. He expressed his ideas and backed them up with his own arguments and created a representation of the world that influenced many people. He wasn't afraid of showing what he really thought about several subjects, no matter how miserable and disturbing it all might be.

So, here we are. I am full of contradictions, like any other person. I loved him and disliked him with the same intensity, at the same time.

Kant's fan, Hegel's foe and one of the greatest, most interesting and provocative philosophers I have read so far.

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Actual rating: 3.5 4 stars.

\* Also on my blog.