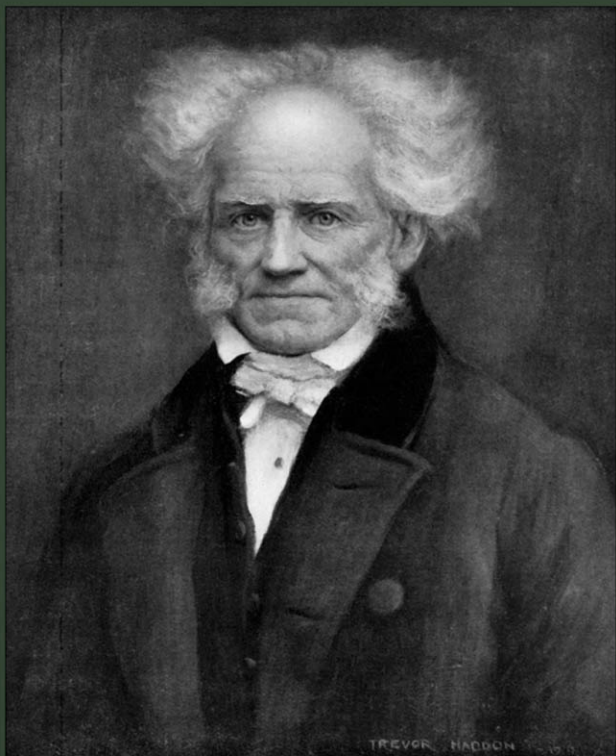


The Riddle *of the* World

A RECONSIDERATION OF SCHOPENHAUER'S PHILOSOPHY



BARBARA HANNAN

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*A Reconsideration of Schopenhauer's
Philosophy*

Barbara Hannan

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For my parents,

William S. Hannan and Nancy B. Hannan,
with all my love and gratitude.

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[A]nything true that a man conceives, and anything obscure that he elucidates, will at some time or other be grasped by another thinking mind, and impress, delight, and console it. To such a man we speak, just as those like us have spoken to us, and have been our consolation in this wilderness of life.

—Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*

Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.

(*What we cannot speak about must be consigned to silence.*)

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

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PREFACE

This book is an introduction to the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, written in a personal style. I aim to connect Schopenhauer's ideas with ongoing debates in philosophy and to invite readers to tackle Schopenhauer's work on their own. Another aim is to increase general appreciation of Schopenhauer's subliminal influence on other much-studied thinkers. For example, I see many scholars nowadays working on Wittgenstein. While these scholars may be dimly aware that Schopenhauer was an influence on their subject, most of them seem never to have actually *read* Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer is also insufficiently appreciated as one of the fathers of psychoanalysis and existentialism. To some extent, I would like to remedy this situation and get Schopenhauer more of the credit he deserves.

Schopenhauer speaks to me primarily because my personality is similar in many respects to his. Schopenhauer was an introvert who loved animals more than he loved people. So am I. He loved and respected empirical science (while appreciating its limitations), hated empty verbiage and intellectual pretension, and cared above all about the pursuit of truth. I do as well. He was pessimistic. So am I.

I agree with Schopenhauer that personality, rather than reasoning, is the primary source of philosophical views. In the ways my personality resembles Schopenhauer's, my philosophical instincts resemble his, too. I am constitutionally inclined to see the world much the same way Schopenhauer did. When I began to read

Schopenhauer seriously, I had the delightful experience of finding many of my own thoughts and conclusions expressed by one of the great philosophers of the past.¹ Schopenhauer's animism or pansychism (his intuitive conviction that the inner nature of all things is the active mental force we experience in ourselves as *will*) appeals to me, as does his thesis that the metaphysical basis of ethics is empathy rather than reason. I am also irresistibly drawn to his idea that works of art, particularly music, somehow reveal truth—the way things are in themselves, behind the appearances. Schopenhauer's pessimism also appeals to my temperament.

The feature of Schopenhauer's thought that *least* appeals to me is his quasi-Kantian transcendental idealism. I reject pure anti-realism as incoherent: anti-realism about something, *x*, necessarily presupposes realism about something else, *y*. Schopenhauer saw himself as purifying Kant's transcendental idealism by returning it to the purer form defended by Berkeley. According to Berkeley, ordinary physical objects are unreal, but minds and their ideas are real. I believe that both Kant and Schopenhauer (not to mention Berkeley) would have been better off accepting ordinary physical objects as real (mind-independent). Fortunately, there are many elements in Schopenhauer's thought that pull in this commonsense direction.

One central thesis of this book is that Schopenhauer was half-consciously struggling to break with Kant and idealism altogether. The parts of Schopenhauer's philosophy with the most enduring value are the ones contrary to Kant. Schopenhauer's epistemology is simultaneously more empiricist and more rationalist than Kant's. His metaphysical ideas concerning the nature of the thing-in-itself

1. I should mention that my initial impression of Schopenhauer was not so positive. Many years ago when I was an undergraduate at Randolph-Macon Woman's College, I was introduced to Schopenhauer by reading his notorious essay "On Women." That essay is a revolting misogynist diatribe, entirely unworthy of Schopenhauer. Reading it turned me off to such an extent that I did not try to read anything by Schopenhauer again for twenty years. I am glad I eventually read his more respectable work. Still, his unjustified contempt for women remains a problem. Rudiger Safranski, author of a fine biography of Schopenhauer, may have discovered the real cause of Schopenhauer's misogyny—the bitterness of a rejected lover. Over and over again, Schopenhauer fell in love with women who did not want him. "As for women," Schopenhauer admitted late in life, "I was very fond of them, if only they would have had me." See Safranski, *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy*, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 66–67.

undermine transcendental idealism. He gives a thorough and devastating critique of Kantian ethics.

Schopenhauer instructed his future readers to read everything he wrote, and to read it *twice*, in order to grasp the “single thought” at the heart of his philosophical system.² These days, few people have the patience or the luxury of time. Having the privilege of being a tenured professor, I have done as Schopenhauer instructed. This book contains a great deal of exposition of Schopenhauer’s ideas and arguments. Some readers may find this tedious, asking, “Why should I read Hannan’s book, when I could just read Schopenhauer himself?” Fair enough, but I believe there is value in what I have done in the expository sections, namely, to draw together in a concise and readable way the central thoughts of a great philosopher whose work has been unjustly neglected of late. There is some merit in being a *faithful* expositor. Anyone who reads this book will get a fair idea of what Schopenhauer really said, along with my criticisms and my own ideas.

During the years of working on this book, I have been engaged in a long conversation with Schopenhauer, a long-dead kindred spirit who still speaks to me through his work. This conversation has been a privilege and an education. Through clarifying in my own mind what Schopenhauer thought, along with where and why I agree and disagree with it, I have come to know myself and the world better. My hope is that others will find that Schopenhauer speaks for them as he does for me.

2. See *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, vol. 1 (New York: Dover, 1969), preface to the first edition.

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Peter Ohlin, philosophy editor at Oxford University Press, has been helpful and supportive of the project from the beginning. Trish Watson, copy editor at Oxford, did a thorough and meticulous job on my manuscript and has my warmest thanks.

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Abraham "Brom" Anderson, a former colleague at the University of New Mexico, taught me much about Descartes and Spinoza, and

thereby contributed to chapter 2. Conversations with Brom were instrumental in my development of the reading of the ontological argument defended in the same chapter.

Robert Watson wrote a beautiful MA thesis at the University of New Mexico a few years ago, using Schopenhauer's metaphysics as grounding for an environmental ethic. While I was on Robert's thesis committee, we had many conversations that eventually contributed to this book. Robert also sent me a copy of Schopenhauer's *On the Will in Nature* from France, at a time when I was having trouble obtaining a copy in the United States.

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