

The Horrors and Absurdities of Religion

Mankind is growing out of religion
as out of its childhood
clothes.



Arthur Schopenhauer

Religion may be an excellent means of
taming and training the perverse,
obtuse and wicked biped race: but in
the eyes of the friend of truth every
fraud, however pious, is still a fraud.
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A fascinating examination of ethics, religion and psychology, this selection of Schopenhauer's works contains scathing attack on the nature and logic of religion, and an essay on ethics that ranges from the American slavery debate to the vices of Buddhism.

Throughout history, some books have changed the world. They have transformed the way we see ourselves - and each other. They have inspired debate, dissent, war and revolution. They have enlightened, outraged, provoked and comforted. They have enriched lives - and destroyed them. Now Penguin brings you the works of the great thinkers, pioneers, radicals and visionaries whose ideas shook civilization and helped make us who we are.

The Horrors and Absurdities of Religion Details

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From Reader Review The Horrors and Absurdities of Religion for online ebook

Tammam Aloudat says

The book is good, and here, I am reviewing the book rather than Schopenhauer as the book does very little to reflect the philosophical ideals and ideas, but I don't think it was meant to give an idea of what one of the biggest philosophers of the nineteenth century. However, my little issue with it, despite being a good quotable book, is that the book doesn't give a view of how much of a pessimist he was.

Anyhow, I am not sure what to do with a book like that beyond appreciate the composition of some little quotes out of context and idea. If you have read some of Schopenhauer, it won't add much, if you haven't, it won't be much of an idea.

Not sure how to think, I have the "Aphorisms of Love and Hate" of Nietzsche lining up!!

Katia Guezi says

Pour moi ce livre est avant tout un fort plaidoyer pour la protection des animaux contre toute forme d'horreur et de souffrance!

J'ai savouré le dialogue entre Démophèle (qui est pour la religion) et Philalète (qui est contre la religion)... C'était très enrichissant.

Après cette lecture j'ai juste envie de me plonger un peu plus dans le monde de la philosophie....

Jason Mills says

This is a pocket-book collection of five essays, translated by R J Hollingdale in 1970. Penguin lazily provide no background information whatsoever, not even dates, let alone context, so I have no idea whether these were spread across decades of Schopenhauer's career or written all at one go.

The first essay, "On Religion: A Dialogue", is the best, being a fair and shrewd discussion of the utility of religion. The next, "On Ethics", is perhaps the worst, packed with spurious claims and special pleading that would require a much longer work to justify. There's also a startling pomposity in its pronouncements, particularly this one:

After my prize essay on moral freedom no thinking person can remain in any doubt that moral freedom is never to be sought in nature but only outside of nature.

No thinking person can doubt..? Is this a joke, or the arrogance of youth, or was the author an insufferable prig?

The remaining three essays are "On Psychology", "On Religion" and "On Various Subjects". All the essays, bar the dialogue, are in choppy bite-size pieces, which makes for easy reading. Schopenhauer does make some arresting observations, aspiring to aphorisms:

If you want to know how you really feel about someone take note of the impression an unexpected letter from him makes on you when you first see it on the doormat.

I enjoyed his dissection of the particular problems faced by christian theologians in attempting to reconcile their scriptures, and there is much in here that is striking. Equally, however, much is simply asserted without philosophical rigour, and the essays make little effort to develop substantial arguments. This is not, then (I would guess), a representative summation of his philosophy, but simply a spicy taster.

João Fernandes says

"It is not all the evil but all the good things of the world which Pandora had in her box (...) When Epimetheus rashly opened the it the good things flew out and away: Hope alone was saved and still remains with us."

The main treaty of this book ("On Religion: A Dialogue") is that most sacred form of philosophy, the Socratic dialogue, where two epitomes of philosophical arguments arrogantly disagree with each other with huge leaps of logic until the one the author dislikes surrenders in shame. As much as I love Plato's work, it can get quite biased.

The missing star comes from that same bias. I have to preface that I agree with almost all of the arguments made by Schopenhauer. But to have Philatethes, the champion of reason, call for the end of religious freedom, is hypocrisy at his finest. And the reason? Religion is the proxy truth for the unwashed masses, to be extinguished with the rise of intellectualism.

Historically, atrocities have been committed in the name of religion, and indeed scientific and social progress was often slumped by persecution from one religion or the other. But to simply state that religion only has a place as the 'opium of the masses' is shortsighted.

If philosophy is indeed the quest for truth and knowledge, then it must accommodate all possibilities, as we strive to do in science and in the arts, and keep an open mind. If someone can find consensus between truth and their beliefs, they should be welcome to - they may not be antagonistic, and they may even be complimentary. Although this is not my personal experience, this work does a lousy job at attempting to bridge the two; and in failing to do so, it becomes incredibly one sided.

Other than that, it is a very good read in terms of the history and philosophical basis for many different religions, and has some interesting treatises on psychology and on Greek mythology.

Joe says

This volume opens with 'On Religion: A Dialogue' which discusses, alternately, the utility of religion and how it endangers rational thought. Although the points made on either side will be largely familiar to most readers, this constitutes the best portion of the book and is still an entertaining read that occasionally gives pause for thought with relevance to the modern world :-

"Even if a real true philosophy had taken the place of religion, nine-tenths of mankind at the

very least would receive it on authority, so that it too would be a matter of belief."

The latter essays 'On Ethics', 'On Psychology', 'On Religion' and 'On Various Subjects' are each split into ordinally sub-headed chunks. The main insight that can be drawn from reading these is, unfortunately, not a philosophical one but only that Schopenhauer was wildly misanthropic and illiberal, and that he held himself in far greater esteem than he did the hoi-polloi.

There are many attempts made to coin aphorisms throughout, so much so that I began to suspect that Schopenhauer's aims lay more in crafting them and having them be quoted than it did in properly and clearly communicating his ideas. It is unfortunate that though several of these would-be aphorisms hit the mark (and the best of them has already been quoted in a review by Jason Mills), the majority lack that necessary ring of truth.

I think that Schoenhauer's distaste for the masses and his desire for validation from his peers (the two principles pervading this volume) is well borne-out by what he states in 'On Various Subjects' 5B:

"The great misfortune for intellectual merit is that it has to wait until the good is praised by those who produce only the bad; indeed, the misfortune already lies in the general fact that it has to receive its crown from the hands of human judgement, a quality of which most people possess about as much as a castrate possesses of the power to beget children."

Roisin says

Small but mighty! Often amusing and enlightening, this is a fabulous series of short writings against religion and examines ethics too. Schopenhauer uses the words, ideas and beliefs of Kant, Herodotus, Ancient Greece, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam, among others to make short and to the point comments about religious ideas and concepts that don't make sense or have been borrowed, or influenced by other religions.

In some of the writings further on he considers belief and what leads individuals to trust in such ideas, the devil, sin, hypocrisy, human behaviour using the treatment of slaves in American slave owning states for example. Well thought, well argued. Wonderful stuff!

Frank Sloth Aaskov says

It was an okay read. To be honest, I was rather disappointed with the book, as I thought it would deliver a short and precise argument against religion, which it does the first 10 pages, but sadly fails to do for the remaining 90+ pages. Often it just discussed the philosophy of enlightenment, instead of the absurdity and

horrors of religions. Unless you have read extensively on the topic and need a new/other angle, then I would not recommend that you read this book. Instead, start with Dawkins' *The God Delusion* or Russell's *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, as they are far better reads and are more precise in their argumentation.

Doug Newdick says

This short collection of Schopenhauer's writings focusses on religion, but in a way that may be unfamiliar. Schopenhauer argues that religion is an allegory that cannot reveal it is an allegory. That somehow it uses falsehood to tell greater truths. He seems ambivalent towards religion, especially Christianity. Alternatively he defends it and condemns it. He appears to be too much a creature of his time to understand the full implications of his reasoning.

Peter McLoughlin says

Schopenhauer outtakes. Won't get much other than stuff said in "The World as Will and Representation." I recommend reading that.

Chris says

Not really a page-turner, or even very compelling. Not much to disagree with, however. Of interest to students of the Enlightenment, or those who have suffered (even if only psychologically), at the hands of dogmatic religions and their adherents. I'm interested in philosophy, but often, works by philosophers, such as this, are merely the collections of their random, unedited, and unstructured thoughts.

Tim says

Some good thoughts from a man who learned from the ancients (and was an early student of Buddhism and Indian religions) but thought for himself.

Random example, from a dialogue on religion - and I pick this one just because it's short, while some of his aphorisms are a little wordy: "in the eyes of the friend of truth every fraud, however pious, is still a fraud. A pack of lies would be a strange means of inducing virtue."

Recommended.

James Millen says

A fantastic collection, the first philosophy book I've fully enjoyed. Devastatingly enlightening, particularly the bits NOT about religion!

Fred says

the funniest, and most negative, philosopher. makes nietzsche look like the dalai lama.

he says reading alot makes one lose the capacity to think - "this is the case with many learned persons: they have read themselves stupid"

Femi says

One hundred six pages of mental torture. I was not prepared for this. An extreme discussion on religion, ethics, psychology, and philosophy.

Peter says

An interesting first encounter with Schopenhauer and in conclusion, another reading of this or a more complete work is needed.

A deep and meaningful read that cannot be digested in one sitting.

Looking forward to it!
