



Studies in Pessimism: The Essays

Arthur Schopenhauer , Thomas Bailey Saunders (Translator)

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But all this contributes to increase the measures of suffering in human life out of all proportion to its pleasures; and the pains of life are made much worse for man by the fact that death is something very real to him. The brute flies from death instinctively without really knowing what it is, and therefore without ever contemplating it in the way natural to a man, who has this prospect always before his eyes. So that even if only a few brutes die a natural death, and most of them live only just long enough to transmit their species, and then, if not earlier, become the prey of some other animal.

Studies in Pessimism: The Essays Details

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Logan says

Knocked a couple stars for the offensive and immensely wrong "Of Women" section, which can't help but shed doubt on the true quality of this philosopher's insights and ideas in general.

Caleb says

Only by ignoring the essay "on women," which is disgustingly sexist, did I arrive at a 4-star rating. The other essays (except perhaps "on noise") are quite good.

Jeff M says

The original cranky old man. This book is at least amusing with all of his rants and raves. The message however can easily be summed up as: "Life sucks and than you die." "Women are only good for one thing, and we all know what that is." Than finally, "people make too much damn noise."

Now get off my lawn, and no you can't have your football back!

Marcus Lira says

As long as you ignore Schopenhauer's chauvinism in his essay "On Women", this is a really good book.

Noah Goats says

If the title of this collection doesn't let you know what you're in for, then the first line of the first essay will: "Unless suffering is the direct and immediate object of life, our existence must entirely fail of its aim." And then it goes downhill from there.

I enjoyed reading these essays for two reasons 1) they contain flashes of genuine wisdom, and 2) they contain a lot of hilariously over-the-top pieces of ridiculous pessimism. Schopenhauer's aim is to show us the unvarnished truth, but sometimes he goes so far with his relentless negativity that he overshoots his mark and becomes unintentionally comic.

Ultimately, it's hard to take his philosophy seriously when he is clearly wrong about so many things that are key to his ideas. His statement that all happiness is negative in it's character, that it is just "freedom from pain," is palpably incorrect. And his misogyny, which was virulent even by the standards of its day, also makes him look like a bitter old idiot who has never known a woman in his entire miserable existence. His

philosophy tells us more about Schopenhauer than it does about life in general.

Sam says

it was a lofty one. But such a wise philosopher disappointed me on his description on "women." he regards them with sheer contempt and considers them always secondary in humankind. probably the best quote on it is, "with people of only moderate ability, modesty is mere honesty; but with those who possess great talent, it is hypocrisy."

Roy Lotz says

Schopenhauer is the hunched-over, cranky old man who resides in all of us. I think even the most resolutely cheerful person would identify with some of what he says, if only because Schopenhauer articulates his views in such a lucid, entertaining way. And, really, it's fun to be cranky—yelling at the neighborhood kids making a racket, snubbing your nose at chattering women, and looking down at the general imbecility of mankind (all this can be found in the essay).

What is amazing about Schopenhauer is that he manages to take surliness and form it into a legitimate, compelling philosophical system. His ideas touch on metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, and nearly every aspect of life. In fact, Schopenhauer proposes an entirely new meaning to life, and a way to achieve it. That's more than any broom-wielding old men I know can say.

berthamason says

This book in a nutshell: suicide is great, women are awful.

?????. says

Skip the nonsense of "On Women" Chapter, and the book will be interesting.

Ragavendra Natarajan says

Ah Schopenhauer! The grand old grumpy man of Philosophy - equal parts hilarious, soothing, and endearing!

This book is a series of essays by Schopenhauer on various topics ranging from his central philosophical thesis on how the "will to live" dictates every aspect of human existence, to his views on the effect that the noise of carriage whips in the streets have on thinking minds (an essay hilarious in its grumpiness).

The most interesting essays ("On the sufferings of the world", "The vanity of existence", & "On suicide") talk about Schopenhauer's idea of how a "will to live" dictates existence and the suffering it thereby entails. He argues that suffering is the "positive" ever present, with pleasure being the mere absence of suffering; and that if reason alone would dictate human behavior there would be no cause for the continued existence of the human race - an existence which is an endless cycle of seeking pleasures which once attained only begin the next cycle. The influence of similar eastern philosophies is apparent.

Philosophical pessimism, which on the surface can appear a bleak and depressing way of looking at the world, can be particularly kind and liberating. It liberates one from the enormous burden of assigning a meaning to existence. It inculcates kindness by making one realize that every person is fighting a battle by merely existing. These two quotes sum it up well.

"In the first place, a man is never happy, but spends his whole life striving after something which he thinks will make him so; he seldom attains his goal, and when he does, it is only to be disappointed; he is mostly shipwrecked in the end, and comes into harbour with masts and rigging gone. And then, it is all one whether he has been happy or miserable; for his life was never anything more than a present moment always vanishing; and now it is over"

"In fact, the conviction that the world and man is something that had better not have been, is of a kind to fill us with indulgence towards one another. Nay, from this point of view, we might as well consider the proper form of address to be not, Monsieur, Sir, mein Herr, but my fellow-sufferer! This may perhaps sound strange, but it is in keeping with the facts; it puts others in the right light; and it reminds us of that which is after all the most necessary thing in life - the tolerance, patience, regard, and love of neighbour, of which everyone stands in need, and which, therefore, every man owes to his fellow"

Luke says

With the exception of the chapter "On Women", which reflects the sex-based bigotry of a typical 19th century man, the essays found in this collection provide great illumination on life. Humans experience much dissatisfaction because, unlike other animals, we can look forward and backwards, hope, dream, etc.; we have concerns that transcend the present. Here is a parable of Schopenhauer's which I enjoyed:

A number of porcupines huddled together for warmth on a cold day in winter; but, as they began to prick one another with their quills, they were obliged to disperse. However the cold drove them together again, when just the same thing happened. At last, after many turns of huddling and dispersing, they discovered that they would be best off by remaining at a little distance from one another. In the same way the need of society drives the human porcupines together, only to be mutually repelled by the many prickly and disagreeable qualities of their nature. The moderate distance which they at last discover to be the only tolerable condition of intercourse, is the code of politeness and fine manners; and those who transgress it are roughly told -- in this English phrase -- to keep their distance. By this arrangement the mutual need of warmth is only very moderately satisfied; but then people do not get pricked. A man who has some heat in himself prefers to remain outside, where he will neither prick other people nor get pricked himself (Schopenhauer 142).

Steven Walle says

I have always enjoyed this philosopher's writings. I recommend everyone takes their time when going through this volume and study each paragraph carefully, and then reread it after you have put it away for a while.

Enjoy and Be Blessed!

Diamond

Belhor says

I didn't like "On noise", "On education" and "On women".

Nick says

Read it while in a depressive mood for the full effect. I picked this one up for the obvious reason that Schopenhauer's pessimism is one of his most famous and unique philosophical trends. Influences from India are obvious to those familiar with the concepts of "ta?h?" (thirst/desire) "maya" (illusion) or "dukkha" (suffering).

On the Sufferings of the World was the most concise expression of his pessimism. Reason is inferior to Will. Will is insatiable. An unsatiated will makes for an unhappy person. Therefore either happiness is impossible, or one must (somehow) get the Will under control. It's a pretty depressing take on the human condition, esp as regards human intimacy. The strong appeal it has for me is disconcerting.

The essay on suicide is great. Not that I'm into suicide personally, but that there are good arguments for why some people should do it, and why its taboo nature is unjustified. This is the kind of thing I'd like to prank call a suicide hotline with.

"On Noise" seemed bizarre and unnecessarily crotchety, especially out of his historical context (he was very upset about people cracking whips on the street). I like to think deeply about things, and noise doesn't tend to bother me very much unless it's both loud and persistent. Maybe Ol' Schopy wasn't very good at meditating.

The essay on women was pretty misogynistic, yet it did have a legitimate point in claiming that male and female brains are fundamentally different. From my limited reading of brain science, it seems like his portrayal of this difference is obsolete.

Essay on education was also great. Education teaches us to construct abstract conceptual frameworks, and then fit our facts and everyday experiences into this framework. This is an unnatural and flawed mode of learning. Abstract frameworks should come from the wisdom garnered by empirical experience. The result is that we worship abstract "fixed ideas" learned in childhood and eschew experience or evidence which contradicts them. Makes me want to give a more thorough reading of Stirner's essay on education, which I did not do justice.

The parables were OK, but I'm not really one for aphorisms, so I dock thee one star.

Biggest takeaways: That human intimacy is a very difficult and risky endeavor. That the Will is the tyrant behind the eyes who must somehow be usurped, or made peace with.

He is quite a good writer (or the translator is good). Its all cogent and easily readable without much backtracking. Easier than either Nietzsche or Stirner imo. That said, this was defiantly a beginner text.

Neil Jenkins says

Why does his pessimism uplift me? I think because he points out our psychological weaknesses, it allows you to step outside the box to see yourself, which always feels great.
