



On Human Nature

Arthur Schopenhauer

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Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was a German philosopher best known for his work *The World as Will and Representation*. He responded to and expanded upon Immanuel Kant's philosophy concerning the way in which we experience the world. His critique of Kant, his creative solutions to the problems of human experience and his explication of the limits of human knowledge are among his most important achievements. His metaphysical theory is the foundation of his influential writings on psychology, aesthetics, ethics, and politics which influenced Friedrich Nietzsche, Wagner, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Sigmund Freud and others. He said he was influenced by the Upanishads, Immanuel Kant, and Plato. References to Eastern philosophy and religion appear frequently in his writing. He appreciated the teachings of the Buddha and even called himself a Buddhist. He said that his philosophy could not have been conceived before these teachings were available. He called himself a Kantian. He formulated a pessimistic philosophy that gained importance and support after the failure of the German and Austrian revolutions of 1848.

On Human Nature Details

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Mehmet says

Orijinal dilinde okusam daha fazla anlardım herhalde. Çeviri başka ne kadar kötü olabilirdi acaba? Yarım bırakmak istemediğim için tamamladım ama kitaba yazık oldu.

Teresa K says

While I don't necessarily agree with all of Schopenhauer's ideas (though with most of them, I do), his capacity to dissect human motives and character is astounding. I have to give it 5 stars for the "food-for-thought" factor alone.

Ian McHugh says

This made my head hurt. Schopenhauer has a very pessimistic view of human nature so this jarred with the place I was reading it - an idyllic view of the Mekong in Southern Laos/North-East Thailand. That said, my copy was a 1958 edition that had been used frequently in the USAF Library at Ubon Ratchathani during the late-1960s and early-1970s. Given that the men of the US airforce were, at that time, launching huge bombing raids on North Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh Trail and conducting a 'secret war' in Laos, I couldn't help but wonder what those guys would've made of quotes like this: "Even the best, nay the noblest, character will sometimes surprise us by isolated traits of depravity; as though it were to acknowledge his kinship with the human race, in which villainy--nay, cruelty--is to be found in that degree." I read this book and frequently found myself secretly nodding along in agreement with. His concepts of physical and intellectual freedom leading to moral freedom - the idea that an rational understanding of an action has to be gained, via the use of one's own emotions and passions - resonated with a great deal of what I've read on ethical giving in the past year. I'll be deploying the most provocative bits of this book in TOK class. I wonder what the students will make of the idea that motivation comes from causality...

arg/machine says

Classic Schopenhauer. In the public domain, with a free electronic copy [here](#).

Mark says

Always entertaining, but really a sour bull-shit artist. A dog-lover though.

James Tolson says

Reading this book makes it abundantly clear how Schopenhauer earned the nickname the great pessimist.

("We have been taking a look at the depravity of man , and it is a sight which may well fill us with horror. But now we must cast our sight on the misery of his existence; and then when we have done so and are horrified by that too, we must look back again at his depravity. We may then find that they hold the balance to each other. We shall perceive the eternal justice of things; for we shall recognize that the world itself is the final judgement on it, and we shall begin to understand why it is that everything that lives must pay the penalty of its existence. First in living then in dying. And thus the evil of the penalty accords with the evil of the sin")

Like Hobbes he favors monarchy and the ideal of a platonic republics over democracy's leveling effects , he sees human beings as monsters of egoism who are more brutish than animals and openly detests the masses. Moreover he doesn't subscribe to any utopian ideas in change or progress, and holds a deterministic view in regards to the question of free will. Towards things that irritate him he sacrifices philosophical rigor and any standard of objectivity by being unrelentingly and comically scathing in his rants , see his essay "On woman" for further proof. Though he should be given credit as stubbornness is something he admits to and owns , as he dismisses competing ideas and asserts that " My standard is truth"

Life is central for Schopenhauer " i am no professor of philosophy" and his reflections and observations on it are both stylish and stimulating. as they tend to spark explosions of thoughts ala nietzsche. i will not comment so much on my interpretations though the allusions and the influence is obvious as Schopenhauer expounds a theory that all things outwardly are the manifestation and objectification of an apriori will. Such a will is the thing in itself and the unconscious and primordial guiding force behind all our actions and explanations. Also one can't end talking about Schopenhauer without allotting him due credit for being one of the first western philosophers to navigate and integrate eastern hindu and buddhist ideas into his writings.

Chris says

Schopenhauer's super smart and all, but man, what a grump.

Philip Cartwright says

OK, I didn't actually finish this one. Gave up half-way through the opening essay on morality. Frankly, it all seemed a bit smug and commonplace. I dare say there's more to Schopenhauer than this. I certainly hope so.

Patrick says

I like his essays more.

Troy says

If you have a significant other that's into Philosophy, and you're thinking of charming them with your interest in their love of philosophy by picking up this book and reading it... don't. This was a rather dense read. I can't say I agree with all of Schopenhauer's ideas, but I do like what he has to say about human character and how he phrases his ideas. The 5th essay in this book isn't an essay, but a series of quotes, which are pretty funny if you're in the right mood.

...

For those of you who read philosophy, this is a good thought provoking book. He brings up some interesting ideas on free will and character protruding through our actions, and tells stories to illustrate his examples.

This book is nothing like Plato, which I had just finished reading prior to, so it was a bit of a shock adjusting to the format of Schopenhauer's writing.

Onyango Makagutu says

Loved the book!

Hossein says

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ZaRi says

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Danielle says

The thread tying together all of the essays in this little volume is that the whole of humanity is contained in any one of its parts, so much so that if all men were killed but one, all of what constitutes humanity will survive so long as he does. This notion is the foundation on which his whole analysis rests and it is a lovely thought.

Ben says

"Man is at bottom a savage, horrible beast. We know it, if only in the business of taming and restraining him which we call civilisation. Hence it is that we are terrified if now and then his nature breaks out. Wherever and whenever the locks and chains of law and order fall off and give place to anarchy, he shows himself for what he is. But it is unnecessary to wait for anarchy in order to gain enlightenment on this subject. A hundred records, old and new, produce the conviction that in his unrelenting cruelty man is in no way inferior to the tiger and the hyaena."

"No animal ever torments another for the mere purpose of tormenting, but man does it, and it is this that constitutes the diabolical feature in his character which is so much worse than the merely animal."

"We have been taking a look at the depravity of man, and it is a sight which may well fill us with horror. But now we must cast our eyes on the misery of his existence; and when we have done so, and are horrified by that too, we must look back again at his depravity. We shall then find that they hold the balance to each other. We shall perceive the eternal justice of things; for we shall recognise that the world is itself the Last Judgment on it, and we shall begin to understand why it is that everything that lives must pay the penalty of its existence, first in living and then in dying. Thus the evil of the penalty accords with the evil of the sin."

"When physical pleasures seduce a man from the right path, it is his sensual nature--the animal part of him--which is at fault. He is carried away by its attractions, and, overcome by the impression of the moment, he acts without thinking of the consequences. When, on the other hand, he is brought by age to bodily weakness to the condition in which the vices that he could never abandon end by abandoning him, and his capacity for physical pleasure dies--if he turns to Avarice, the intellectual desire survives the sensual. Money, which represents all the good things of this world, and is these good things in the abstract, now become the dry trunk overgrown with all the dead lusts of flesh, which are egoism in the abstract. They come to life again in the love of Mammon. The transient pleasure of the senses has become a deliberate and calculated lust of money, which, like that to which it is directed, is symbolical in its nature, and, like it, indestructible."
