

Critique. That said, Zammito appropriately cites Hinske (1998) in identifying his own approach as viewing the Kantian corpus as consisting in a set of ‘mutually nuancing materials’ (p. 15), that is, the published texts, Kant’s own notes, the student lecture notes. What makes this volume especially impressive is how virtually every author models this approach in their contributions.

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Note

1 I flag for the reader <https://users.manchester.edu/FacStaff/SSNaragon/Kant/Home/index.htm>, the excellent website maintained by Steve Naragon (‘Kant in the Classroom’), which provides extensive details on Kant’s lecture activity.

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Sandra Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics: Hope, Compassion, and Animal Welfare*

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Nietzsche’s assessment of Schopenhauer has been accepted as fact. To him, Schopenhauer was the Dürer knight (after the 1513 painting *Knight, Death and the Devil* by Albrecht Dürer), an arch-pessimist who teaches us how life is hell, suffering abounds and the only way out is resignation. Much of this was prepared by John Oxenford’s famous review of Schopenhauer’s

philosophy, 'Iconoclasm in German Philosophy' (1851), where he dubbed Schopenhauer the misanthropic sage of Frankfurt. There is no use in denying the strong threads of pessimism that pervade Schopenhauer's philosophy, yet in her recent monograph, Sandra Shapshay makes a daring case for considering a 'second Schopenhauer' who, in contrast with the more generally recognizable pessimistic Schopenhauer, is not a knight of despair but one of hope.

The innovation of this monograph is threefold. First, it argues that Schopenhauer's thoughts on compassion, hope and progress are not dialectically inferior to the highest good of resignation, but that they provide the basis for a self-standing and more appealing ethical theory. As Shapshay puts it, 'this book aims to complicate and challenge the predominant picture of Schopenhauer's ethical thought, and argues that while the resignationist Schopenhauer ... represents one side of this thinker, there is another side ... and this aspect of his ethical thought is in direct tension with the resignationist one' (p. 2). Second, it argues that Schopenhauer not only remains broadly speaking within the confines of Kantian transcendental idealism in his metaphysics, but also that his ethical thought remains partly Kantian. Finally, it makes a strong and compelling case for a significant evolution in Schopenhauer's general philosophy because of his confrontation with proto-Darwinian thought. Any one of these points on their own would suffice to pique the interest of any philosopher interested in Schopenhauer and in the broader tradition of post-Kantian German philosophy.

Not only is Shapshay's book bold and engaging, the writing is crystal clear at every juncture and she helpfully reminds the reader of the main points and trajectory of the argument. One immediately recognizes that an authority on Schopenhauer is speaking here, one who is thoroughly familiar with the text and its reception. The Schopenhauer community has long awaited this book, a charitable reconstruction of Schopenhauerian ethics that offers a staunch defence of Schopenhauer as an ethical thinker with contemporary relevance and, what's more, presents Schopenhauer's ethical theory as superior to Kant's more widely celebrated theory, given that Schopenhauer allows us to take up animals more directly as worthy of moral consideration and provides an initial, though hesitant, step towards an ecologically minded ethics.

Let us consider Shapshay's point that there are two Schopenhauers. She concedes that Schopenhauer himself might not have been aware of this. Schopenhauer did indeed not enjoy being called a pessimist but would have rather considered himself a realist who sees life as not improving or degenerating in any significant way, but only endlessly revolving around itself. Shapshay, however, makes a bold claim, namely that for Schopenhauer 'things could be improved to such an extent that life could be a *good* thing, not just a less bad thing' (p. 20). Part of this is motivated by textual evidence

(e.g. Schopenhauer 2010: 396 and 400–1), but one can easily locate many passages that directly contradict this. Schopenhauer furthermore consistently and unendingly emphasizes that his system constitutes an organic whole and is entirely free from contradictions (see here as well Neeley 2003), though of course we should not simply take Schopenhauer at his own word. Shapshay contends that Schopenhauer might have aspired to a unitary view of ethics, but that there are just too many different things going on in his ethics to allow for such a thing. This argument is based mostly upon how Schopenhauer's two ethical ideals, compassion and resignation, appear contradictory. Both of these seem to be, so argues Shapshay, conflicting ethical ideals in their own right: compassion removes suffering while resignation requires suffering; compassion helps others while resignation is indifferent to others.

This is a nice point, though I wonder if Schopenhauer did not solve this seeming contradiction himself. To him, moral ideals such as compassion are a stepping stone towards resignation (e.g. Schopenhauer 2018: 696). This means that compassion is an ersatz ideal that involves some level of insight into the ultimate unity of all being, but that falls short of complete de-individualization. Compassion gets stuck, as it were, on the way. One could perhaps even argue that resignation is the ultimate act of compassion, given that the transition into saintly nothingness allows you to serve as a model for emulation to those who have not reached that high degree of metaphysical insight. As such, resignation seems to be a higher, more potent expression of the moral imperative to de-individualize and alleviate suffering – and it does so in a far better way than compassion. Schopenhauer makes a point of this sort near the end of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*: ‘The most important and most significant appearance that the world can show us is not someone who conquers the world, but rather someone who overcomes it’ (Schopenhauer 2010: 456).

Shapshay's argument to include a more hopeful Schopenhauer seems largely based upon her assumption that Schopenhauer's *Prize-Essay on the Basis of Morality* is his primary ethical text and is therefore as authoritative in presenting Schopenhauer's views as *The World as Will and Representation*. To me, this seems unlikely: the former was written under certain constraints of the Royal Danish Academy in such a way that Schopenhauer was, for instance, forced to present his morality in an analytic rather than synthetic fashion. Shapshay can, however, strengthen her point by reference to the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation* and the two volumes of the *Parerga and Paralipomena* as some of the shorter essays in these volumes do seem to move Schopenhauer away from his initial rigorism. This matter could and should be explored further and Shapshay supplies a solid foundation for following a different approach to Schopenhauer.

Shapshay's point that Schopenhauer's thought changed considerably through his exposure to proto-Darwinian thought is highly convincing. One stumbling block to reading Schopenhauer in a Darwinian vein is the Platonic ideas, which are for Schopenhauer both the objects of artistic intuition as well as the eternal prototypes by which the will manifests in reality. Shapshay elegantly shows how Schopenhauer jettisons their latter function, while retaining the former, due to his reading of evolutionary theory. This change proves rather consequential for Schopenhauer's pessimism, as Shapshay elegantly points out. For Schopenhauer can only make the case that (human) life is *a priori* mired in suffering if (human) nature is fundamentally unalterable; but if in his later works he comes to allow for substantial change to (human) nature, then it could allow for progress in such a substantial sense that life could be deemed to be good. Given the immanent premises of his philosophy, namely that he would start from experience rather than metaphysics, Shapshay suggests that Schopenhauer was wrong – on his own premises – to make such a strong declaration on the necessary badness of all life.

Shapshay's final innovation is to show that Schopenhauer's understanding of ethics and freedom are still to an extent Kantian. Based on a reading of Schopenhauer's *Prize-Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, Shapshay argues against the view that Schopenhauer is a hard determinist, claiming instead that Schopenhauer remained allied to a Kantian sense of autonomy. In Shapshay's view, aesthetic experience and resignation seem to happen via a deliberate act of the intellect. In my view, aesthetic experience and resignation are rather things that befall the human agent rather than a deliberate choice. To choose deliberately in favour of resignation, that is, to will not to will, seems contradictory. Shapshay's strongest argument for this is based on Schopenhauer's closing remarks in this essay, namely that we have a feeling of responsibility for our character. In her view, such a feeling of responsibility would not make sense if we did not have the freedom to alter our character. In my view, Schopenhauer's point is more metaphysical (and somewhat Schellingian), namely that we have to see our innate character as an expression of freedom (Schelling: 'Our being is freedom'). Without admitting to having an overt choice in this, we cannot help but think that we could have been someone very different and therefore could have acted differently.

The last two chapters are concerned with reconstructing Schopenhauer's ethical theory as a hybrid between Kantian moral realism and moral sentimentalism. Shapshay calls this compassionate moral realism. Broadly speaking, Shapshay sees Schopenhauer as following upon Kant, correcting his errors and devising a more coherent ethical theory. But this is hard to reconcile with the fact that Schopenhauer jettisons the imperatival form of ethics, the notion of duty, the Kantian idea of the highest good, the postulation of

the immortality of the soul and the existence of God, the view of history as a teleological process, and the idea of a rational religion as a means towards moral education, leaving little it would seem of Kant's practical philosophy. Yet Shapshay points to two elements that make up the Kantian inspiration of Schopenhauer's ethics: first, Schopenhauer is a realist in that compassion is based upon a real insight to which we have access (the moral law for Kant, the indistinctness of individuals for Schopenhauer); second, Schopenhauer takes over Kant's notion of inherent value (Kantian dignity), but sees this as a gradual rather than an absolute matter. Human beings, because they suffer more, are esteemed higher than animals, but animals are not without inherent moral worth and consideration. Yet, I wonder if these two elements can really be traced back to a Kantian inspiration, as they could be Schopenhauer's own insight, or a matter of Buddhist, Hindu or even Christian inspiration.

Shapshay's argument is at its strongest when reconstructing Schopenhauer's view of compassion on the basis of the *Prize-Essay on the Basis of Morality*. There are two general problems with compassion as a ground for morality. First, compassion is generally blind and unreflective, as it might move us to remove suffering in such a way that ultimately suffering is increased (e.g. buying an alcoholic another drink); second, in some circumstances, compassion can be an obstacle to impartial justice (e.g. compassion for a criminal might infringe upon justice). Shapshay does away with these objections by finding a place for reason in Schopenhauer's ethics. Indeed, Schopenhauer did believe that the world could be made a better place through three processes: a more reasonable arrangement of society (politics), individual moral education (acquired character) and intellectuals helping to formulate cogent moral principles. When we transcend the brute fact of compassion, and seek for what could be called a higher, more intelligent compassion, then the above objections are avoided. There is one problem with this solution that Shapshay does not address, namely that Schopenhauer – like Kant – holds that only intentions can be qualified morally (see Schopenhauer 2009: 202–3). If this is so, then there does not seem to be an avenue to differentiate between higher and lower compassion – or intelligent and unenlightened compassion – since the motive of compassion is what ultimately matters.

That said, this book is one of a kind. I am sure it will become a vigorously discussed landmark in Schopenhauer studies. I could even see it splitting the field between those who like their Schopenhauer dark, murky and pessimistic and those who do not mind a glimmer of hope, care and progress. Throughout my reading, I was often reminded of the first time that I read Christine Korsgaard's *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (1996), which offered a more humane perspective on Kantian ethics. Korsgaard's influence on Kantian ethics in the last two decades has been tremendous, and I would

not be surprised to see Shapshay, with her exciting new take on Schopenhauer's ethical thought, exercising a similar influence upon Schopenhauer studies.

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