

structive side of his thought by examining the range of his ideas and arguments regarding the nature of beauty and art.

The last two chapters scrutinize the most controversial part of Dostoevsky's intellectual outlook: his social and political thought. Scanlan states that for Dostoevsky, an ideal society is the Christian community of brotherhood and mutual love. Dostoevsky thinks that even though today's societies, in which egoism prevails over altruism and love, are far from the ideal, societies will eventually evolve toward it through a dialectical movement. This, however, can only be realized by the leadership of Russian society, which is superior to other societies in being closer to the ideal Christian community. Scanlan here suggests that Dostoevsky, disregarding much historical evidence showing contradictions within Russian society, argues for Russia's mission to teach Christian values to the rest and unify all other nations and all humanity under itself, without sufficiently explaining what produces the superior Russian character. Scanlan thinks that Dostoevsky's nationalism is flawed; nevertheless, he notes, it is not inconsistent with Dostoevsky's Christian ideal. For although mutual love and brotherhood are paramount traits of the ideal society, they do not exclude hierarchy, meritocracy and social stratification. In fact, Dostoevsky regards autocracy as the ideal form of government in which mutual love between the monarch and the citizens will replace a pre-established constitution. Scanlan also examines Dostoevsky's critique of socialism and his anti-revolutionary arguments, and concludes that despite the strong tone of patriotism and chauvinism present in Dostoevsky's social-political thought, this does not invalidate the rest of his philosophy.

Scanlan's book situates different aspects of Dostoevsky's thought in a larger context and provides a wider perspective for interpreting certain themes and ideas in Dostoevsky's works. Perhaps the greatest weakness of the book is that Scanlan spends considerably less time critically examining Dostoevsky's arguments than explicating them and presenting textual evidence from his literary works. Scanlan does, however, successfully integrate Dostoevsky's particular arguments into a coherent theory, and displays a legitimate reading of his oeuvre. Individual chapters of the book are interwoven skillfully, with ideas introduced in the earlier chapters developed and elaborated in subsequent ones; readers are left with a sense of the close connections between various concepts, ideas and themes in Dostoevsky's corpus.

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Irving Singer

Feeling and Imagination:

The Vibrant Flux of Our Existence.

Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 2001.

Pp. 240.

US\$35.00. ISBN 0-7425-1234-7.

Irving Singer

Explorations in Love and Sex.

Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 2001.

Pp. xiii + 239.

US\$29.95. ISBN 0-7425-1238-X).

In *Feeling and Imagination: The Vibrant Flux of Our Existence* (FI), Singer attempts to 'show how we create our world, in part, through what we call our "feelings" ' (ix). In so doing, he constructs a general theory of affect that supplies his *Explorations in Love and Sex* (ELS) with broad metaphysical footing. Singer's central thesis in FI is that 'affective attachments' continually alter personal and public attitudes about everything from art to science, testifying to the individual's capacity to instill 'meaning' into life and world. ELS is essentially an extension of this perspective with particular emphasis on the reciprocal nature of romantic and erotic attachments in which each of us faces the problem of according the pursuit of love with the pursuit of being loved. While each work stands alone, both illuminate each other, conveying the comprehensive theoretical vision of an accomplished philosopher at the height of his powers. Singer's refined yet effortless prose is meant to engage the curious neophyte as well as the seasoned expert. Unfortunately, this approach may lead the more critical reader into frustration with a style often comprised of elusive literary-historical nuance in lieu of thoroughgoing argumentative precision.

FI begins by laying out the metaphysical role imagination is held to play. Hostile to scientific reductionism, Singer's main and most provocative thesis is that imagination allows the will to affectively 'bestow' value above and beyond the initially 'appraised' value of any person, object, or ideal. This primordial human activity is thus taken to testify both to the existence of individual free will as well as to the 'vibrant flux' of our collective cultural experience. Throughout the rest of the book, Singer offers a psychological theory of how this is done through the processes of 'idealization', 'consummation' and 'affective failure and renewal', devoting a fully chapter to each aspect. There is also a chapter on 'the aesthetic', which addresses how this affective continuum operates on the greater cultural and artistic levels, as opposed to the more interpersonal level on which Singer spends most of his time in other chapters. Once the main thesis of the role of imagination is elaborated in Chapter One, the rest of the book develops a plausible account of the affective life according to which imagination creatively constructs idealized goals that, hopefully, become 'consummated' by a harmony between

self, other, and world. But along the way, there is bound to be 'affective failure and renewal' which provides an opportunity for the will to discover new 'meaning', by essentially overcoming disappointment and / or disillusionment. Singer's speculative explorations paint an attractive theoretical picture complimented by many insightful illustrations culled from his broad humanistic background. He makes deft use of countless thought experiments while aptly drawing-in the ideas of such literary and philosophical giants as Plato, Proust, Nietzsche, Mann, Schopenhauer, Freud, Hume, Kant, Bentham, Mill and Santayana.

However, what is perhaps most disappointing about this work is that the underlying thesis — nothing less than a bold attempt at reviving romanticism — is ultimately supported by very little argument. And the arguments that are provided refer chiefly to the rather antiquated psychological paradigms of Plato, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Freud. Indeed, so much space is dedicated to arguing where these thinkers went wrong that the work often reads like an introductory level historical survey course in affective studies. This would not be a problem were Singer not attempting to advance an original theory very much directed against contemporary reductive trends. It thus seems awkward that he almost never discusses the relevant contemporary literature that might best challenge his overarching metaphysical position. And though he is clearly in good company among such noteworthy twentieth-century thinkers as Williams, Wollheim, Goodman, Dreyfus and especially Wittgenstein, whom he cites as a major influence, specific references to any of these are conspicuously absent. It seems Singer wants most to argue, as do these philosophers, against those rationalists who 'neglect the service imagination provides' (FI, 31). According to him, imagination is the only thing impelling us for example, to 'pounce on the absence of contradiction in a tautology' and the *manner* in which this is done is taken to be this supplemental faculty without which reason cannot be articulated (FI, 29). But apart from offering a few cryptic allusions such as this one, Singer never actually demonstrates why reason alone cannot, say, distinguish universals from particulars as well or better than any imaginative faculty. In fact, nowhere is there any explanation of precisely how we are even to differentiate between 'reason' and 'imagination'.

In short, Singer's project will make most sense to those who already accept some version of Hume's view that 'reason is the slave of the passions.' Once this is accepted (or bracketed) his psychological explorations into the interrelation of affect and free agency proceeds insightfully in a style at once pleasant and sure-footed. A particularly valuable section on this subject is the ELS chapter on the nature and pursuit of love in which Singer replies to numerous 'critics and friendly commentators'. The article is taken from a 1991 conference centered on his philosophy of love, the proceedings of which previously appeared in *The Nature and Pursuit of Love: The Philosophy of Irving Singer* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus 1995). This passage is a rare and invaluable instance in which Singer defends his views against the thoughts of contemporary philosophers. At the center of these debates is Singer's

notion that the will is to a certain degree free to choose to value any person, object, or ideal. One of his critics on this point, Paul Gooch, argues that Singer's view therefore makes love and friendship into undeserved gifts (115-16). Singer adroitly turns this criticism on its head by simply embracing the undeserved gift thesis. This move seems actually more consistent with even Gooch's account since, as Singer also shows in FI, 14-15, undeserved gifts are precisely what make authentic personal commitments possible, as profoundly 'meaningful' acts of genuine freedom. Singer thereby seeks to solve an important Aristotelian problem, arguing that the 'imaginative response' is not merely the product of entirely predictable successions of desire-based appraisals. Although this account seems intuitively much more appealing than the determinist alternative, no evidence is given that our intuitions really do represent the facts. Indeed, the dissenting view is after all never directly addressed.

Most of the rest of ELS consists of critical assessments of various canonical philosophers' thoughts on love and sex from the vantage point of Singer's 'sexual pluralism'. Throughout, he shows convincingly how the two are intertwined, spending most of his time distinguishing his thoughts from those of Plato, Kant, Schopenhauer, Freud, Hume, and Ortega y Gasset. There is also some discussion of compassion including a revealing chapter on Bergson's 'sympathetic intuition', providing a fruitful perspective from which to re-explore the ideas of FI.

In sum, these latest books constitute a revealing updated account of Singer's general philosophy. They are at once accessible to those unacquainted with his thought and to philosophy in general, while offering a great deal of new material that even those most familiar with his work will certainly not want to miss. Still, one yearns to see more discussion of contemporary thinkers. And those with limited interest in metaphysical speculation will have to bracket certain passages if they are to profit from the considerable psychological insight and breadth of philosophical history Singer's writing affords.

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