

*The second (August 2022) draft for the forthcoming Spinoza Cambridge Lexicon.
Please do not quote, but comments are welcome.*

SCHOPENHAUER

Valtteri Viljanen

There are two major ways in which Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788–1860) works and thoughts are related to those of Spinoza. First, despite being the self-proclaimed primary torch-bearer of the Kantian legacy, Schopenhauer develops a metaphysics of the thing-in-itself in some notable ways not unlike that of Spinoza. Second, by the nineteenth century Spinoza's fortunes had been effectually reversed; accordingly, Schopenhauer discusses his ideas relatively neutrally, as part of the philosophical tradition.

To begin with the first topic, Schopenhauer emphasizes that despite the manifold of finite things in which the will (which for Schopenhauer plays the role of the Kantian thing-in-itself) manifests itself in the phenomenal world, "it is everywhere one and the same" (W1 I.23); here even his language echoes that of Spinoza's (E3pref). In the final analysis, only the monistic will exists, grounding everything else. This is in line with the fact that, since the Pantheism Controversy, Spinoza's monism was enthusiastically endorsed by numerous German thinkers. Moreover, Schopenhauer emphasizes that the nature of both the will in itself and its manifestations is an endless and blind striving (cf. E1p34, E3p6). Schopenhauer stays rather silent about these similarities, only once in his published works admitting that Spinoza understood that "the inner essence in all things is absolutely one and the same" and that "for me as for Spinoza, the world exists as a result of its own inner force and through itself" (W2 IV.50). However, Spinozistic strivers are fundamentally intelligible, while the finite manifestations of the Schopenhauerian will reflect the inscrutability of their source—which is in line with the fact that Schopenhauer has little patience, and ample scorn, for his predecessor's trust in the rational order of the universe.

As for the second major way in which the nineteenth-century luminary relates to Spinoza, Schopenhauer presents his own, often rather critical, views on Spinoza's philosophy.

Although his arguments can rarely if ever be considered careful, he definitely shows strong first-hand command of a wide array of Spinoza's works. We can discern four main themes. First, Schopenhauer lambasts Spinoza's methodology in ontology: he accuses Spinoza of attempting to derive things from randomly chosen and even idiosyncratic abstract concepts. As Schopenhauer understands Spinoza's method here, it is at odds with Schopenhauer's own preferred *experiential* way of arriving at philosophical insight—including the key one that the inner nature of the world is to be identified with the will. Second, Schopenhauer is fascinated by Spinoza's elimination of free will (E1App; E2p48). Schopenhauer famously quips that "Spinoza says (Ep. 62) that if a stone thrown flying through the air were conscious it would think it was flying of its own will. I only add that the stone would be right" (W1 I.24). Here the idea (which Schopenhauer sympathizes) is that just as natural forces are determined by efficient causes, a conscious will is determined by motives; the difference between conscious and unconscious actions does not cut deep enough to make them fundamentally different. Third, Schopenhauer has a rather low opinion of Spinoza's practical philosophy: he declares that Spinoza disingenuously derives commonly accepted ethical norms from the egoistic conatus principle. He also complains that Spinoza's form of pantheism is essentially optimism, for if everything is divine, things are just as they should be and thus as well as they could possibly be. Finally, in his ethics strongly influenced by the Eastern traditions of thought, the goal is to become what Schopenhauer calls a pure and timeless subject of cognition, which, he insists, "is also what Spinoza had in mind when he wrote: 'the mind is eternal to the extent that it conceives things under the form of eternity'" (W1 II.34).

Secondary literature

- Barua, Arati (ed.). 2017. *Schopenhauer on Self, World and Morality: Vedantic and Non-Vedantic Perspectives*. Singapore: Springer.
- Berman, David. 1982. "Spinoza's Spiders, Schopenhauer's Dogs." *Philosophical Studies (Dublin)* 29: 202–9.

Brann, Henry W. 1972. "Schopenhauer and Spinoza." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 10 (2): 181–96

Segev, Mor. 2021. "Schopenhauer's Critique of Spinoza's Pantheism, Optimism, and Egoism." – *A Companion to Spinoza*, edited by Yitzhak Y. Melamed, 557–67. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Viljanen, Valtteri. 2009. "Schopenhauer's Twofold Dynamism." – *The World as Active Power*, edited by Juhani Pietarinen and Valtteri Viljanen, 305–30. Leiden: Brill.

Related entries

Desire; eternity of mind; geometrical method; Kant, Immanuel; Nietzsche, Friedrich; Pantheism Controversy; striving.