Zu Bryan Magees Schopenhauerbuch

(Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983. Pp. 408. $ 29.95, cloth).

Von David Cartwright (Madison, Wisconsin)

This is a book of many virtues and few vices. I should say two books, actually, instead of one. The first is a sympathetic and articulate introduction to Schopenhauer's philosophy; an exposition of those elements necessary to understand his philosophical system. The second consists of a number of appendices which detail Schopenhauer's relationship to his philosophical contemporaries, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel; his *Wirkungsgeschichte* concerning both philosophers and other creative thinkers and artists: namely, Wagner, Nietzsche, Hartmann, Vaihinger, Freud, Turgenev, Hardy, Wittgenstein, Conrad, Thomas Mann, and Dylan Thomas; his relationship to Buddhism; and a somewhat out-of-place, but interesting nonetheless, addendum on Schopenhauer's views on homosexuality. These appendices, plus Magee's third chapter, serve to locate Schopenhauer's thought within the western philosophical tradition since Descartes and, in a wider context, they make a significant contribution to cultural history. The book reads well. It deserves to be well read.

On the title page, Magee quotes the opening statement from Schopenhauer's appendix to the first volume of *The World as Will and Represention*, "Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy"; "It is far easier to point out the faults and errors in the work of a great mind than to give a clear and full exposition of its value." It is our good fortune that Magee took this remark more seriously than Schopenhauer, who, after stating it, proceeded to dwell more on Kant's errors and faults than his positive insights. Magee, on the other hand, succeeds in providing a thoughtful and penetrating exegesis of the major dimensions of Schopenhauer's philosophy. In particular, his presentation of transcendental idealism both captures its philosophical appeal and sensibility, while retaining an awareness of its philosophical limitations and difficulties. The same can be said of his analysis of Schopenhauer's ontology and his account of the relationship between bodies and wills.

Magee's exposition of Schopenhauer's philosophy proper follows both Schopenhauer's recommended study of his work and what is a natural presentation of his system. Beginning with an explanation of the major theses of Schopenhauer's *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, Magee's exposition follows the structure of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, elucidating each of the basic issues of the first four books — epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, and philosophical anthropology — and supplementing the core of Schopenhauer's philosophy with constant reference to Kant, the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, and Schopenhauer's minor writings, i. e., *Über den Willen in der Natur, Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik*, and *Parerga und Paralipomena*. Although there is scant reference to Schopenhauer's *Über das Sehn und Farben*, his letters, *Nachlass*, and secondary literature on Schopenhauer, Magee's book suffers little from these omissions. The first part of the work concludes with a critical overview of Schopenhauer's philosophy.

Magee's interpretation of Schopenhauer seldom goes awry. There are, however, occasional lapses and some problems. For example, in his discussion of Schopenhauer's analysis of the fundamental motives of human action, Magee notes that after discussing egoism (a desire for one's own well-being), malice (a desire for another's misery), and

compassion (a desire for another's well-being), logically he should have discussed a fourth motive, i. e., a desire for one's own detriment. Magee then argues that Schopenhauer did not explore this possibility because this motive "... is never in practice a motive for an action except with the neurotic or otherwise mentally ill, or in so far as such pathological elements as masochism enter into the motivation of the normal person" (197). Magee concludes that this lack of completeness is due to the fact that Schopenhauer is describing the kinds of motives that move sane individuals. Schopenhauer, however, in a note to the 48th chapter of the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, adds this fourth motive in the interests of systematic consistency. He remarks that he did not discuss it in the material analyzed by Magee because it was written to answer a prize-question stated in the spirit of the philosophical ethics prevailing in Protestant Europe — the implication being that his remarks would not be welcomed or understood. He also makes it clear that this motive provides an incentive for asceticism and the renunciation of the will-to-live. In a Schopenhauerian universe, these are actions of the most sane and knowledgeable individuals. A parallel problem emerges in Magee's account of an incompatibility between two of Schopenhauer's most characteristic ethical doctrines; that all morality is based on compassion and that the ethically most desirable state for any individual is the renunciation of all willing. Magee points out that Schopenhauer's two most important ethical doctrines cannot both be valid since resignation precludes compassionate involvement with others, and compassionate involvement precludes the renunciation of all willing. Schopenhauer, however, was sensitive to this tension. He attempts to resolve it by showing how the denial of the will-to-live may spring from the basis of morality (compassion) and still retain a deep concern for the misery of others. Although Schopenhauer's resolution fails — it introduces more problems than it solves — Magee's failure to note his attempt renders his discussion of the problem somewhat misleading.

The greatest virtue of this book, that which makes it surpass all current English language treatments of Schopenhauer, is Magee's appendices. Although Magee warns that these essays are not self-contained, because they take for granted his presentation of Schopenhauer, they can be read as self-contained essays by anyone having an adequate background in Schopenhauer's philosophy. For readers who lack this preparation, the first part of Magee's book provides this background. Two of the appendices are outstanding. The essay on Schopenhauer and Wagner, which runs over 50 pages, is probably the best treatment of this relationship to appear in English. Magee clearly illustrates the ways in which Wagner was "Schopenhauerian" prior to, and after, reading Schopenhauer, and it contains an insightful analysis of Wagner's aesthetic theories and operas from this perspective. The appendix on Schopenhauer's influence on Wittgenstein ties togethers what is becoming a significant literature on this subject and provides both a convincing explanation of Wittgenstein's failure to indicate his intellectual antecedents and the problems prevailing among philosophers who are interested in Wittgenstein, but ignorant about Schopenhauer. These two essays alone would make this an important work in the history of philosophy.

With the publication of a collection of essays edited by Michael Fox, *Schopenhauer: His Philosophical Achievement* (Brighton: Havester, 1980), D. W. Hamlyn's *Schopenhauer* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1980), and the reissue of Patrick Gardiner's excellent *Schopenhauer* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963), Magee's book is a continuation of what appears to be a renewed interest in Schopenhauer in the Anglo-Saxon philosophical community. It is hoped that this trend continues and that Magee's book marks a turning point in Schopenhauerian scholarship away from general, introductory works to more serious, critical treatments of his epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, and philosophical anthropology. In particular, Schopenhauer's rich and still timely ethical theory needs fuller treatment than has appeared in any of the literature.