

# \*Ye Olde Plum News\*

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## PLUM, SCHOPENHAUER, SPINOZA AND NIETZSCHE

### ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

Wodehouse often refers to Schopenhauer and to his ideas. Schopenhauer for instance wrote:

*"Life swings like a pendulum backward and forward between pain and boredom."*

*"They tell us that suicide is the greatest piece of cowardice; that only a madman could be guilty of it; and other insipidities of the same kind; or else they make the nonsensical remark that suicide is wrong; when it is quite obvious that there is nothing in the world to which every man has a more unassailable title than to his own life and person."*

*"We are like lambs in a field, disporting themselves under the eye of the butcher, who chooses out first one and then another for his prey."*

*"The fundamental defect of the female character is a lack of a sense of justice. This originates first and foremost in their want of rationality and capacity for reflexion but it is strengthened by the fact that, as the weaker sex, they are driven to rely not on force but on cunning..."*

Millicent Threepwood gives a short summary of Schopenhauer's ideas, talking to Sue Brown, both with love troubles: "Ever read Schopenhauer?" she asked after a silence. 'No.' 'You should. Great stuff.' ... 'Schopenhauer says that all the suffering in the world can't be mere chance. Must be meant. He says life's a mixture of suffering and boredom. You've got to have one or the other. His stuff's full of snappy cracks like that. You'd enjoy it. Well, I'm going for a walk. You coming?' 'I don't think I will, thanks.' 'Just as you like. Schopenhauer says suicide's absolutely O. K. He says Hindoos do it instead of going to church. They bung themselves into the Ganges and get eaten by crocodiles and call it a well-spent day.' 'What a lot you seem to know about Schopenhauer.' 'I've been reading him up lately. Found a copy in the library. Schopenhauer says we are like lambs in a field, disporting ourselves under the eye of the butcher, who chooses first one and then another for his prey.' "

"Yes," said Millicent, rather in a tone of voice which Schopenhauer would have used when announcing the discovery of a caterpillar in his salad."

"Ah!" said Hugo, his eye falling on Pilbeam. He stiffened. He stood looking at the detective like Schopenhauer's butcher at the selected lamb." (all three quotes from Summer Lightning, 1929)

"The whole trouble with women, Jeeves," he (Bill Rowcester) said, and the philosopher Schopenhauer would have slapped him on the back and told him that he knew just how he felt, 'is that practically all of them are dotty.' (Ring for Jeeves, 1953)

"Several writers, notably the philosophist Schopenhauer, have said some derogatory things about the female sex, but none of them had felt more strongly on the subject of woman's defects than he (Horace Appleby) did. If Schopenhauer had come into the pantry at this moment, he would have slapped him on the back and assured him that he was on the right lines." (Do Butlers burgle Banks, 1968)

"... his jaw had fallen, and he was looking at his visitor rather in the manner of the lamb mentioned by the philosopher Schopenhauer when closeted with the butcher," (Pigs Have Wings, 1952)

Bream Mortimer proposed to Billie Bennet but she turned him down. "He says he intends to spend his evening in bed, reading Schopenhauer." (The Girl on the Boat, 1922)

Miss Trimble pretends to be a parlour-maid, but is a detective in disguise. She's clear about her opinions: "Sogelist! No use for idle rich. ... Hate 'em (men)! Suffgist!". She keeps her teeth clenched when speaking. Her choice of literature is Schopenhauer: "A face rose reluctantly from behind Schopenhauer. ... 'Huh!' said the new parlour-maid briefly, and resumed her Schopenhauer. Decidedly hers was not a winning personality." (Piccadilly Jim, 1918)

Bertie Wooster: "Who was that lad they used to try to make me read at Oxford? Ship - Shop - Schopenhauer. That's the name. A grouch of the most pronounced description." ... Aunt Dahlia is "a bit on the Schopenhauer side" when she can't rejoice over that her husband Thomas will enjoy good cooking while away from home, but complains over future sufferings when he is coming back to their own 'steak-incinerator.'" (Clustering Round Young Bingo, Carry On, Jeeves, 1935)

"He had just put in about two minutes' intense thought of a kind which would have made the meditations of Schopenhauer on one of his bad mornings seem like day-dreams of Polyanna." (Portrait of a Disciplinarian, Meet Mr Mulliner, 1927)

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### BARUCH SPINOZA

Spinoza wrote a book on Ethics. Plum didn't mention his philosophical ideas but Jeeves thinks of him favourably, cf. Nietzsche.

"Any little gift you would like, I mean?" 'It is extremely kind of you, sir.' 'Not at all, Jeeves. The sky is the limit, State your desire.' 'Well, sir, there has recently been published a new and authoritatively annotated edition of the works of the philosopher Spinoza. Since you are so generous, I would appreciate that very much.' 'You shall have it. It shall be delivered at your door in a plain van without delay. Your'e sure you've got the name right? Spinoza?' 'Yes, sir.' 'It doesn't sound probable, but no doubt you know best. Spinoza, eh? Is he the Book Society's Choice of the Month?' 'I believe not, sir.' "

"A book sir?" he (the 'bird' in the bookshop) said with ill-concealed astonishment. 'Spinoza,' I replied, specifying. This had him rocking back on his heels. 'Did you say Spinoza, sir?' 'Spinoza was what I said.' He seemed to be feeling that if we talked this thing out long enough as man to man, we might eventually hit upon a formula. 'You do not mean 'The Spinning Wheel'? 'No.' 'It would not be 'The Poisoned Pin'?' 'It would not.' 'Or 'With Gun and Camera in Little

Known Borneo'?" he queried, trying a long shot. 'Spinoza,' I repeated firmly. That was my story and I intended to stick to it. He sighed a bit, like one who feels that the situation has got beyond him. 'I will go and see if we have it in stock, sir.' ...

"It was at this point, as if he had entered on a cue, that the motheaten bird returned and said they had not got old Pop Spinoza, but could get him for me. He seemed rather depressed about it all, but Florence's eye lit up as if somebody had pressed a switch. 'Berti! This is amazing! Do you really read Spinoza?' ... 'Oh rather,' I said, with an intellectual flick of the umbrella. 'When I have a leisure moment, you will generally find me curled up with Spinoza's latest.'" (All three quotes from Joy in the Morning, 1947)

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Jeeves," I said. 'Hope you weren't bored?' 'Oh no, sir, thank you. I was quite happy with my Spinoza.' 'Eh?' 'The copy of Spinoza's *Ethics* which you kindly gave me some time ago.' 'Oh, ah, yes, I remember. Good stuff?' 'Extremely, sir.' 'I suppose it turns out in the end that the butler did it.' "

"Are you doing anything for the next half hour or so?" 'No, sir.' 'Not planning to curl up in some shady nook with a cigarette and Spinoza?' " (Both quotes from Jeeves in the offing, 1960)

"Jeeves, for instance is never happier than when curled up with his Spinoza or his Shakespeare."

"Jeeves was in a deck chair outside the back door, reading Spinoza with the cat Augustus on his lap. I had given him the Spinoza at Christmas and he was constantly immersed in it."

"I am sorry to butt in when you are absorbed in your Spinoza and have probably just got to the part when the second corpse is discovered, but what I have to say is of great pith and moment, so listen attentively." "

(All three quotes from Much Obligated, Jeeves, 1971)

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### FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

The only one of his ideas mentioned by Wodehouse that of the 'übermensch'. Jeeves gives Nietzsche a clear verdict.

"Those who knew her (Mrs. Oakley, former miss Jane Scobell) then speak of her as a tall, handsome girl, hard and intensely ambitious. From contemporary accounts she seems to have out-Nietzsched Nietzsche. Nietzsche's vision stopped short at the superman. Jane Scobell was a superwoman. She had all the titanic selfishness and indifference to the comfort of others which marks the superman" (The Prince and Betty, 1912)".

Jeeves told Bertram: "And I have it from her ladyship's (Florence Craye's) own maid... that it is her intention to start you almost immediately upon Nietzsche. You would not enjoy Nietzsche, sir, He is fundamentally unsound." (Carry On, Jeeves, 1925)

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