

# Philosophical Pessimism!

**“Philosophical pessimism is a family of philosophical views that assign a negative value to life or existence. Philosophical pessimists commonly argue that the world contains an empirical prevalence of pains over pleasures, that existence is ontologically or metaphysically adverse to living beings, and that life is fundamentally meaningless or without purpose. Their responses to this condition, however, are widely varied and can be life-affirming.**

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Arthur Schopenhauer

The first presentation of philosophical pessimism in a systematic manner, with an entire structure of metaphysics underlying it, was introduced by German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer in the 19th century. Schopenhauer's pessimism came from his analysis of life being the product of an insatiable and incessant cosmic Will. He considered the Will to be the ultimate metaphysical animating noumenon, describing it as an aimless, restless and unquenchable striving, encompassing both the inorganic and organic realm, and whose most intuitive and direct apprehension can be attained by man through an observation of his own body and desires:

‘In nature-without-knowledge her inner being [is] a constant striving without aim and without rest, and this stands out much more distinctly when we consider the animal or man. Willing and striving are its whole essence, and can be fully compared to an unquenchable thirst. **The basis of all willing, however, is need, lack, and hence pain, and by its very nature and origin it is therefore destined to pain.** If, on the other hand, it lacks objects of willing, because it is at once deprived of them again by too easy a satisfaction, a fearful emptiness and boredom come over it; in other words, its being and its existence itself become an intolerable burden for it. Hence its life swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom, and these two are in fact its ultimate constituents.’ – Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*

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He also asserted that pleasure and pain were asymmetrical: pleasure has a negative nature, while pain is positive. By this Schopenhauer meant that pleasure does not come to us originally and of itself, that is, pleasure is only able to exist as a removal of a pre-existing pain or want, while pain directly and immediately proclaims itself to our perception:

‘All satisfaction, or what is commonly called happiness, is really and essentially always negative only, and never positive. It is not a gratification which comes to us originally and of itself, but it must always be the satisfaction of a wish. **For desire, that is to say, want, is the precedent condition of every pleasure; but with the satisfaction, the desire and therefore the pleasure cease; and so the satisfaction or gratification can never be more**

**than deliverance from a pain, from a want.** ... What is immediately given to us is always only the want, i.e., the pain. The satisfaction and pleasure can be known only indirectly by remembering the preceding suffering and privation that ceased on their entry' – Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*

”– Wikipedia, Philosophical pessimism

“We need to understand the nature of existence. Every creature that exists has an utterly unquenchable thirst for existence. It wants to continue in its life. That applies as much to an ant as it does to a human being. If you threaten an ant, it will scurry away in an attempt to avoid danger and possible death. Same thing with human beings. This will to life, as Schopenhauer called it, is the primary drive in all creatures, including man, and we will do almost anything to ensure that we continue in our survival at an individual level and also at a group level, and that's why we have wars between nations. This will to life was well understood by Spinoza too. He said **the very essence of man is desire - the desire to persist in his existence. That is the essence of what you and I are. You might try and put all kinds of fancy wrapping around it, but when it comes down to it, we may do some unspeakable things if it means that we continue with our existence.** This desire for survival is not a passive kind of thing. It says that people are desperate for more experience, they want more of life, they want to visit more places, acquire more stuff, more money, they want more power because all these things enhance their potential in life and that is what most of us are after.”

– Martin Butler (2019), *The Corporeal Fantasy*

“Just consider for a moment the life of most people. Because they are driven by the survival drive their attention and interests are almost wholly focused on money, acquisition of resources such as shelter, transport, food, a partner, and so on. There is very little appetite for gaining an understanding of the world or themselves. As such most people fear death, exhaust themselves pursuing futile ambitions, are subject to the vagaries of fortune, and live the life of a dog waiting for scraps from the table. The life of the unthinking majority is one of hidden unhappiness and suffering while putting on a smile for Facebook. ...

The reassuring stories that many people tell themselves have no place in the investigation into our nature and that of the world. **Reality is frightening and without refuge. The fact there is no absolute morality, justice, beauty, truth, purpose, meaning, or reality, is too much for most to bear, which is why they seek refuge in dogma and ignorance.** This is not a judgmental statement; we all have a limit to what we can bear.”

– Martin Butler (2022), *A Minority Interest*