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Philosophy of Death

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Schopenhauer presents an argument for the claim that existence itself has no positive value.

Explain his argument in detail and develop an objection to it

### Multi-Dimensional Philosophy

Many of the philosophies we've studied this semester have presented insightful reasoning as to how to live a good life, a life free of suffering, and a fulfilling life. Yet, schools of thought such as epicureanism and stoicism fail to address why we should live a certain way if we are going to die in the end. There being value in existence is taken for granted, they believe that it is of course valuable to live so we should focus on how to do that well. In his essay *The Vanity of Existence* Schopenhauer doesn't take this for granted, he argues that if you strip away the motion of life the onset of boredom reveals that our daily existence is not itself fulfilling and therefore the present moment has no positive value.

The motion of life is the focus when talking about the pessimistic viewpoints set forward by Schopenhauer. We see Schopenhauer's concept of motion as it applies to human existence when we hand in papers for Omar to read because we are students who go to school, school to earn a degree, and a degree gets you a job, and a Job provides you a salary, and a salary allows you to... and this unfinished business continues until death. Motion is the next goal becoming the stepping stone for another endeavor.

Schopenhauer breaks down this motion pointing out its cyclical nature. As with any cycle, the starting point becomes the finish line, so let us hop into the loop with what sets humans in motion: wants and needs. Humans have desires that they seek to satiate. They act upon these desires and work to achieve them. Once we achieve them we derive some form of satisfaction. However, satisfaction is fleeting and quickly we rebaseline to a set state. Boredom spurs new desires or goals to work towards. Suddenly we are back to where we started.

As humans mature into a position in society, a steady job and the responsibilities of parenthood plateau any overarching life progression. Twenty years can go by working the same job every week to pay the bills to continue working. Here the loop is obvious and the lack of meaning floods the corvette market with 45 year old men. Furthermore, Schopenhauer argues that even if a person hasn't plateaued, they are moving up in their career or have a flourishing personal life, the achievements of today only lay the groundwork for the goals of tomorrow. The ambitious and successful young businessperson, lawyer, or academic is in the same meaningless loop that plays over and over again as a person working the same blue collar job for their entire life. The illusion of meaning and success is propagated by the change of situation that the socially successful person continues to strive for. Despite all their accomplishments, no achievement has ever come along that makes them stop striving for more.

The idea of boredom is fundamental to Schopenhauer's outlook. Many philosophies, such as epicureanism and stoicism, preach living in the moment. Suggesting that by living in the moment we focus on life, embrace the loop, and allow for life to be an end unto itself. Schopenhauer disagrees, pointing out one's attention must be held on an endeavor or academic interest, otherwise, the tide of boredom rises. Trying to step out of the loop and cultivate satisfaction from mere existence leads to boredom rather than fulfillment. Boredom happens

when we peek behind the curtain of motion to see the true nature of existence. Schopenhauer sees human life as a show, ungrounded in any substantial meaning, completely performative. If life had intrinsic value we would happily live in the moment completely satisfied, but boredom sets in and we set off on our next goal, thus existence itself has no value.

I am a physics major- I have been surprised how Schopenhauer's pessimistic thoughts have spurred physics contemplation, mostly I have thought about dimensions. In many ways, pessimism has shared the honesty about the universe that physics preaches. The most important idea that Schopenhauer presents here is the idea of motion. There is a huge amount of societal and personal insight to be gained from this idea. However, Schopenhauer inappropriately analyzes the idea of continual motion. I think Schopenhauer's ideas stray from reality when he fails to acknowledge the fourth dimension of time in his argument. Not only do humans take up space, but we are objects that propagate through time. Schopenhauer does this when he references the continual motion of life but analyzes existence as a three-dimensional idea

To believe that a human could continually exist in the moment and be completely satisfied would demonstrate a misunderstanding of the nature of human life. Life continually fights to maintain a distinct structure of atoms (the physical body) in a universe that is constantly dissolving into chaos as entropy infinitely increases. Humans are no more than an intricate structure of atoms held together by physical forces. The cyclical processes demanded by the human body: eating, drinking, and sleeping are what maintain the design of atoms. From a physics perspective, these somatic cycles are human life. If a person existed completely satisfied by existence the person would be frozen in a moment in time unadorned by the endless physical needs of the body, if there is no time there is no past, there is no future, there is no boredom, there is also no life. The moment time begins to tick again, hunger and thirst begin to grow, and

existence begins. Schopenhauer separates existence and the motion of living in loops, but when it comes to the demands of maintaining a physical body the two are one and the same.

Because human life is this cyclical nature, we see that existence is tied to each moment in time and not something that exists in three dimensions, existence varies with time as well. When Schopenhauer uses boredom in a singular moment, to analyze human existence that continues through time, the dimensions are mismatched. If in some moments of existence a human is bored then those moments hold no positive value. However, these moments do not define existence, moments of pleasure and beauty, satisfaction and accomplishment are moments of life that have positive value. Yet again these positive moments don't define the value of existence, because moments of suffering and pain will be moments where existence has a negative value. Like the stock market or the climate, the value of existence fluctuates with time, you don't use a single day to define a lifetime.

Schopenhauer's argument would serve more accurately as a critique of societal structure. Society in its most basic form was created to organize the fulfillment of the basic human cycles of hunger, thirst, and shelter. However, greed and ostentation have perverted the cycles of fulfilling bodily needs into ungrounded and unending desires for power, control, and wealth. Working to provide food for yourself and your family has turned into working to buy a table at a club surrounded by bottle service. In this case, existence, concerned with man-made priorities, is shallower and lacking that fourth dimension of time. Such a vain existence is an object not beholden by time because any point in time is defined by the same desire for more. Getting bored on your quest to own a Mercedes, shows you there is no positive value in subjecting yourself to spiraling upward in society.

How nice it is to be able to finish off the year by tying it back to the beginning.

Epicureanism preaches the moderation of desires and needs. Originally studying Epicureanism, I was frustrated with the lack of discussion on deriving meaning from moderating expectations.

Yet if utilizing Schopenhauer's pessimistic ideas we see that moments in life can have a positive value if desires are moderated to reflect the physical reality of life. Choosing “natural” desires maintain adherence to loops of life grounded in the physical world. If this moderation can be maintained then every moment of life has a value, and just maybe we'll have a few positive moments.