

Schopenhauer's Pessimism (& Arguments)

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Schopenhauer's Pessimism

According to Schopenhauer, True Happiness is unattainable. Life involves continual longing; as soon as you have satisfied one longing, you are confronted with another. "Life swings like a pendulum back and forward between pain and boredom."

True Happiness = a state of permanent contentment.

SCHOPENHAUER'S ARGUMENT THAT LIFE IS AWFUL

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| <p>P1 To live is to will.</p> <p>P2 To will is to pursue a goal.</p> <p>P3 Either you achieve your goal, or you fail to achieve your goal.</p> <p>P4 If you fail to achieve your goal, then you suffer frustration (and thus suffer).</p> <p>P5 If you achieve your goal, then you suffer boredom (and thus suffer).</p> <hr/> <p>C To live is to suffer.</p> |
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Premises **P1** and **P2**, together, say that living involves striving after goals.

Premises **P3**, **P4**, and **P5** say that striving leads to suffering.

Is there any hope?

1. **Art.** We can momentarily avoid suffering by becoming immersed in an aesthetic experience. But these moments are fleeting.
2. **Asceticism.** The less you desire, the less you will suffer. But striving after things is necessary and unavoidable part of life. (The goal of ridding yourself of your desires is, itself, a goal). There is struggle here too.

Philosophical Arguments

Philosophers and others use *arguments* to establish their claims. What are arguments? And what makes some arguments better than others?

1. **Arguments: what are they?** An *argument* is a list of claims all but the last of which are called "premises" and the last of which is called a "conclusion".

Here are some examples:

This is a technical definition. Obviously, we often use the word 'argument' much more loosely in everyday life.

- (a) **P1** Scientist say that human activity is contributing to climate change.
P2 It is unlikely that scientist are wrong on a point like this.

C It is likely that human activity is contributing to climate change.
- (b) **P1** Polar bears are white.

C It is likely that human activity is contributing to climate change.

These are all arguments. They are not, however, all *good* arguments. What makes an argument good?

2. **Validity.** An argument is *valid* if and only if it is impossible for all its premises to be true and its conclusion false.

Here's an example of a valid argument:

- (a) **P1** Donald Trump is the President of the United States of America.
P2 If Donald Trump is the President of the United States of America, then life is meaningless.

C Life is meaningless.

Two things to note. First, validity is a matter of how the premises relate to the conclusion. The premises need *in fact* be true in order for the argument to be valid. Second, if an argument is invalid, we should be able to find a *counterexample*: a possible situation according to which all the premises are true but the conclusion is false. If you want to show that an argument is invalid, you should give a counterexample.

3. **Soundness.** An argument is *sound* if and only if it is valid and all its premises are true.

Exactly one of the two following arguments is sound:

- (a) **P1** God exists

C God exists.
- (b) **P1** God does not exist.

C God does not exist.

The conclusion of a sound argument *must* be true. Why? Because if the argument is sound, then it is valid. So it is impossible for all its premises to be true and its conclusion false. Furthermore, because the argument is sound, all its premises are in fact true, so its conclusion must be true too.

Sound arguments are powerful. If we are disagreeing about some claim *C* — you think it is true, and I don't — then if you give me a valid argument for *C* I must either come to agree with you about *C* or challenge the truth of one of the premises of your argument.