



The Paradox Of Human Existence: Pessimism, Meaning And The Limits Of Progress

Rajeev Lochan Tripathi

Research Scholar (PhD)

Department of Philosophy and Religion

Banaras Hindu University

Abstract

The human experience moves continuously between personal success and philosophical hopelessness which philosophers including Arthur Schopenhauer along with Albert Camus, David Benatar, John Gray and Thomas Ligotti have emphasized upon in their writings. The analysis in this paper will be about their evaluations of optimistic beliefs as well as the concepts of human advancement and search for values in life. According to Schopenhauer suffering dominates life but Camus explains that defiance or revolt allows people to discover meaning beyond absurdism. Benatar and Ligotti present contrary arguments because they choose anti-natalism alongside their belief that consciousness is a horror. For Ligotti and Benatar, Consciousness is something which should not have been as it causes more harm than good. Research has not yet explored how pessimists build their psychological strength and why seemingly pleasant art, and intellectual activities might reduce existential fear. The systematic study of psychology enables this paper to demonstrate that understanding life's absurd nature enables a thoughtful approach to existence, instead into making an individual to into a cycle of misery.

Keywords: Pessimism; Absurdity; Anti-natalism; Existential Horror; Consciousness

Introduction

Since humans gained self-awareness, they have spent their existence suffering from the burden of meaning.

¹ Human beings suffer from a fatal condition because they possess the unique ability to analyse both mortality

¹ As soon as we as individuals become self-conscious, the perspectives start to arise in our minds as to what is the object about which we are conscious about. The perspectives which we form about the objects and ourselves have some meaning loaded to it. When the meaning that we impart to the objects we are conscious of and the consciousness of ourselves is in dissonance, then we suffer existentially because then there starts to be a conflict of meaning that the object provides to us and the meaning that we ourselves give to ourselves.

and their own suffering even though animals exist through instinct.² Philosophers continue to discuss whether humans have this reflective ability by nature or if it evolved unwittingly. According to Arthur Schopenhauer (1851/2004) people experience inevitable suffering through life which he sees as pleasure existing only as a temporary absence of painful conditions before achieving everlasting contentment proves unattainable. For Schopenhauer, life is either pain or boredom and nothing in between because even the short pleasures of life are not permanent, when we are having those pleasures, then also we are afraid of losing it. According to Albert Camus (1942/1991) the absurdity of life remains purposeless, but people can construct their own meaning through defying this absurdity.³ The pessimistic views of thinkers David Benatar (2006) and Thomas Ligotti (2010) cross beyond these limits by asserting that existence causes fundamental harm and would better be succeeded by nonexistence. An evaluation of these philosophers' works detects original contradictions within their theoretical frameworks. Despite their exposure of progress and meaning illusions these authors present unanswered questions regarding how people should deal with these harsh truths. Does unreserved understanding of pessimistic principles match an existence of value? The awareness to which Ligotti refers may result in despair according to his warning. If life offers no meaning and persists in its suffering state, then why do people seek peace through art and philosophy and similar intellectual activities? This paper examines these fundamental questions to improve the discussion about human life by creating a connection between philosophical theories and modern psychological understandings.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative and integrative philosophical approach:

The research uses *On the Suffering of the World* (Schopenhauer, 1851/2004), *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Camus, 1942/1991)³, *Better Never to Have Been* (Benatar, 2006), *Straw Dogs* (Gray, 2002) and *The Conspiracy*

² Animals have not got an advanced brain like us that can predict the future and take the past into consideration and that is why they don't have that amount of conflict as we humans have. For an animal, the instincts are one- directional and so there is no confusion, but as the human mind has got an evolved mind, multiple decisions can run through the mind of an individual at one instance of time which leads to existential confusion and anxiety as to which is the correct option. Freedom is not about having many options, but about having less options, or in other words freedom is about having one frame of action available in moment of time and space, rather than infinite number of frames of action that can be executed in a moment of space and time. A human being will always stay dissatisfied as an infinite number of actions cannot be executed in a limited span of space and time.

³ Albert Camus presents three ways of dealing with this Absurdity: The first one is physical suicide, where we intentionally kill ourselves and this option Camus rejects as instead of dealing with the Absurdity of existence, suicide is like putting the sword down even before fighting, the second option is Philosophical Suicide according to people find that the meaning of life is not to be found in this world, so they stick their

Against the Human Race (Ligotti, 2010) along with their corresponding year of publishing. Also books such as *The Book of Disquiet* by Fernando Pessoa have also been considered while writing the article. A thematic study examines these texts through the analytical framework that consists of four significant themes which include consciousness, suffering, meaning and the critique of progress. This section points out essential unanswered issues which include understanding how art experiences help diminish existential anguish. This paper uses modern psychological research to explain how pessimism affects mental wellness. The paper organizes its content through significant existential subjects to provide thorough examinations of every issue. *The Burden of Consciousness and the Tragedy of Self-Awareness*

All three authors Schopenhauer, Ligotti and Benatar agree that human consciousness acts more as a burden than as a benefit. In his analysis Schopenhauer (1851/2004) maintains suffering exists as the essential part of human existence yet reflective thinking deepens the experienced anguish. According to him negative happiness⁴ refers to nothing more than the temporary relief from agony thus making sustained contentment extremely difficult to achieve in life. The writer Ligotti (2010) views consciousness as an unwanted condition which causes painful experiences and anticipates an existence that becomes intolerable. According to Ligotti most humans remain in an illusion of life being precious when perceptiveness of the truth reveals existence's horrific nature. Ligotti disagrees with Camus about the value of defiance and revolt against absurdity because he views such defiance as a delusion.⁵ Using horror fiction, he establishes that it is an authentic form of art

minds to concepts of philosophy, dogmas and rituals, this option is also rejected by Camus. Camus accepts the third way of dealing with the Absurd in which an individual which he calls the Absurd Hero revolts against this meaningless of life and tries to enjoy the struggle of it all. Embracing the Absurd neglects both Physical Suicide and Philosophical Suicide as methods of dealing with the absurd. Embracing the Absurd means to throw the question of So What? To the answer of the universe that "nothing matters". "Nothing matters", but so what I still can enjoy my ice-cream. I can still immerse myself in the depths of the experiences of life and embrace them for what they are as Camus himself says that we will never find happiness, if we continue to look for it and we will also not find any meaning if we continue to look for meaning. We acquire the habit of living before the habit thinking.

⁴ For Schopenhauer, happiness is negative as for him happiness is not something which is a pleasurable experience, but rather it is just the end of suffering and pain. This conception of happiness given by Schopenhauer is pretty much like Buddhist conception of nirvana according to Nirvana means simply to "blow out" which doesn't result in a blissful state, but rather only results in a peaceful and calm non-state (because its not a state) which is free of psychological suffering.

⁵ For Ligotti, life is fundamentally meaningless and the suffering in life outweighs the pain in life, so for him the revolt against the Absurdity of existence is of no use because the revolt will not change the fact that life is fundamentally suffering. But I would like to argue that even in this state of fact that life is fundamentally suffering, even in this situation a Revolt can happen against this Suffering because as it's said that pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional. According to the parable of two arrows in Buddhism, the first arrow

that reveals the meaningless nature of human existence. The philosopher Benatar (2006) employs his philosophical work *Better Never to Have Been* to propose anti-natalism which claims that bringing human life into the world is morally wrong because suffering inevitably results during human life. Based on his asymmetry argument life becomes a negative experience because suffering is inevitable for existing beings even though nonexistence protects people from both pain and pleasure. The hypothesis that consciousness is an unfortunate error prompts a fundamental debate because people those who continue to seek significance through cultural expressions and philosophical contemplation. The interpretation of moral pessimism depends on whether we accept pessimism as ultimate truth or view it as an artificial perception of reality.⁶

The Illusion of Progress and the Limits of Humanism

John Gray conducts a harsh assessment against modern progressive faith in his book *Straw Dogs* (2002). According to his analysis human history follows a pattern of recurring mistakes caused by animal instincts throughout time. Gray disagrees with Enlightenment thinkers who believed reason would create a better future because he identifies this rationalistic hope and talked about how religious thinking secularized religion. According to his analysis science and technology have provided humanity with superior weapons for destroying ourselves instead of freeing us from subjugation. Likewise, to Schopenhauer Gray contends that human needs are endless, and technology brings no relief from fundamental life problems. According to Gray he disagrees with Ligotti and Benatar because he claims there exists no definitive evidence that existence is worse than non-existence though humans err in perceiving themselves as important in the bigger scheme of things.⁷

Absurdity and the Possibility of Rebellion

In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942/1991) Camus takes on the direct challenge to determine if existence has any value. The philosopher claims that the “one truly serious philosophical problem exists in suicide” while

which strikes an individual (which is the suffering of the world) is inevitable, but the second arrow (the anguish around the second arrow) that we generate on top of that is avoidable. So, we cannot revolt against the pain of existence, but we can revolt and embrace the suffering if it arises and cut it at its root.

⁶ Here, I want to argue about the point that perspective and our way of looking at things can drastically affect how we view things. Like for example, look at the conception of pessimism – if someone looks at it from the perspective that it’s all meaningless and we are all going to die and nothing good can happen, the same individual can shift his perspective as well and the reality for him will start to look the other way. He or she can say that though everything is objectively meaningless, but still, that gives me a freedom to choose my own meaning and start to live by that subjective value and further the statement “nothing good can happen?” can be challenged by asking questions such as what is objective goodness? Am I as a free and unique individual on this planet not free to decide what good means to me?

understanding that knowledge about life's absurdity leads people towards despair. The author opposes resignation and instead promotes accepting absurdity as our purpose to continue living beyond any possibility of ultimate meaning. Camus views consciousness as a source of defiance and revolt rather than the universal panic that Ligotti attributes to it.⁸ Sisyphus represents human survival according to Camus through a metaphor where he describes the mythical character constantly pushing a boulder uphill in an everlasting punishment. According to Camus people find triumph through their adamant refusal to submit to a state of despair when encountering meaninglessness. According to Camus, an individual must not succumb to the state of despair but rather revolt against it and embrace it head on by seeing the limits of reason and the faculty of emotions as well. Camus also mentions that the Absurd is nothing but "the lucid reason, noting it's limits."⁹

Living With (or Against) Pessimism

The paper analyses three philosophical viewpoints about human existence which include Schopenhauer's acceptance of suffering and Camus' rejection of absurdity along with Ligotti's observation of life as an inimical error. Through his anti-natalist position Benatar advocates for society's greatest ethical path by stopping new life production to eliminate future pain. An important set of questions remains unanswered after analysing these points of view. So many individuals still grant value to their life despite existing in a world of suffering. Since consciousness is allegedly an evolutionary flaw how do human beings continue to engage with creative activities and intellectual work? The persistence of most people toward progress remains unexplained because some would say progress is an illusion. Awareness of fundamental questions about life connects us to something beyond optimism and the destruction of pessimism to reveal deeper conceptual realities about human existence.

Technological Pessimism: Progress or Illusion?

Philosophical pessimism dedicates most of its analysis to examining human circumstances, yet it also extends its critique to evaluate different aspects of technology and progress. Throughout the era following the Enlightenment people have understood technological progress as an avenue toward liberated humanity. Scholars Segal (1994) and Marx (1994) maintain that public confidence in technology is facing growing doubts because contemporary innovations fail to rectify current social inequality patterns rather than addressing them (Segal, 1994). The analysis offered by Scruton (2010) focuses on skeptical optimism that exists especially regarding technological planning and political reform. Rationalized futuristic societies which use scientific and technological advancement as justification usually disregard both the complexities of natural human behaviour alongside the difficulties of actual reality. He demonstrates the major limitation of

⁹ When an individual makes his reason lucid and notes its limits, then that individual becomes the Absurd Hero. A Hero which knows that the leap of meaning cannot be done through reason as reason is limited as an instrument to achieve this feat and knowing the limitation of reason itself is what gives the Absurd Hero the courage to revolt without the clutches of reasoning instrument.

planning fallacy where ambitious reforms have blind spots regarding future circumstances (Scruton, 2010). According to Gray (2002) secularized versions of religious belief about the end times have evolved into human faith in technical salvation which substitutes divine promise with technological redemption (Gray, 2002). Schopenhauer (2004/1851) predicted these arguments by demonstrating that inherent human suffering pervades all existence without change from technological development (Schopenhauer, 2004). Technical optimists employ this belief system as a psychological tool which resembles some of the self-deceptions Ligotti (2010) describes in his work on existential horror (Ligotti, 2010). The main research inquiry consists of determining how much technical advancement is successful and the extent to which it can be successful to reduce genuine human suffering against its creation of additional social dissatisfaction. Research should explore both psychological aspects and ethical concerns of techno-pessimism because they relate to significant existential threats from artificial intelligence along with environmental deterioration and biotechnological alterations.

Schopenhauer's Radical Pessimism

In his philosophical argument Schopenhauer presents radical pessimism while showing hope serves no purpose. Schopenhauer develops his belief about the fundamental struggle of life through the concept of an irrepressible will-to-live which results in continuous sufferings for all beings (Schopenhauer, 2004). According to his essay *On the Suffering of the World* he explains that pain stands as the core truth about existence with happiness serving only as an intermittent period without pain. He declares that our life lacks suffering as its fundamental goal, so existence seems contra-indicated for its meaning in the world based on purpose (Schopenhauer, 2004). Through his pessimistic viewpoint Schopenhauer develops a direct assault against hope. Unlike Camus who endorses defiantly accepting absurdity, Schopenhauer argues hope trickily connects individuals to their suffering during existence. According to Scruton (2010) false hope constitutes a stronger danger than despair since it drives people toward seeking unreachable utopias instead of embracing reality (Scruton, 2010).¹⁰ Schopenhauer conducts a direct assessment of human optimism which creates vital connections to Benatar's anti-natalist arguments. Due to suffering being inherent to life people should refrain from reproducing because it amounts to causing harm. Benatar (2015) develops this thought in *Debating Procreation* by showing that procreation violates ethical principles because it forces unwanted suffering upon defenceless beings (Benatar, 2015). The basic ethical challenge this argument creates is this: Should moral

¹⁰ False hope is much more dangerous than despair because it blinds us to the actual reality of existence. A false hope is like a defense mechanism which people use when they don't want to see and look at the inevitability of the impending doom. If the defense mechanism of false hope is dropped, then an individual would have to come face-to-face with reality which would involve a lot of mental resilience and toughness, rather than hiding behind the comforts of false hope. Even in day-to-day relationships, we see that we use this defense mechanism just to keep the toxic relationship going even though we know that the reality is that the relationship is deteriorating, but just to avoid looking at this grim reality, we use false hope as a shield to cover the toxicity of the relationship. To give up false hope would be painful for some days, but the effort to keep up the false hope would be much more painful in the long run.

responsibility force people to stop new births if suffering remains unavoidable? Additional research in pessimistic ethics could examine the validity of possible objections against the arguments presented by Schopenhauer and Benatar. Does the undeniable presence of suffering in life allow subjective experiences of joy and meaning to validate the existence of human being? Does the search for meaning hold any validity according to Schopenhauer's view about illusions?

The Politics of Pessimism: Can Societies Function Without Illusions?

Societies need illusions to function according to pessimistic political systems. Social cohesion depends heavily on illusions according to the main theme of pessimistic philosophy. Schopenhauer (2004) maintains that people typically maintain an erroneous belief they can achieve happiness although suffering represents the basic condition of life (Schopenhauer 2004). According to Gray (2018) in his book *Seven Types of Atheism* both secular and religious frameworks act as essential delusions which stabilize political structures (Gray, 2018).¹¹

Marx (1994) together with Segal (1994) examine this matter through technological advancement while pointing out how modern society's belief in rational government proves to be illusory (Segal, 1994). Scientific advances and technological advancements serve primarily to strengthen political control of people since they maintain existing power dynamics without delivering personal freedom. According to Scruton (2010) monumental political changes and large-scale social planning initiatives prove unproductive because they disregard essential human characteristics. According to Scruton political movements form utopian fallacies because they believe complete social engineering can transform human nature (Scruton, 2010).

The psychological reasons for why social illusions become necessary require deeper investigation. Does the societal need for coping mechanisms that use political and religious narratives imply that functioning societies must have such explanations? Maintaining social stability may require some degree of beneficial self-deceptive beliefs. Future investigations need to study historical cases to determine if pessimistic realist communities experience better outcomes than societies based on optimistic illusions.¹²

The Future of Pessimism in Philosophy and Psychology

The philosophical doctrine of pessimism opposes all fundamental human ideas regarding both happiness goals and societal advancement as well as the legitimacy of human reproduction. Schopenhauer and Benatar

¹¹ Illusions are a defense mechanism we use to cope up with the realities of life.

¹² Do pessimistic realistic communities experience better outcomes than societies based on optimistic illusions? I think, pessimistic realistic communities would experience better outcomes because they would be able to look at the correct, objective picture of what things are occurring in society whereas an optimistic illusionistic outlook would blind us to the objective picture of what is happening in society on ground level. It is only when we will look at the problems that our society is facing that we can do something about it, but if we just keep pushing away the problems of society through the garner of optimism, then the problems will multiply.

alongside Gray and Scruton identify multiple weaknesses within human optimism by challenging fundamental moral values. Pessimism presents advantages and drawbacks as two opposing sides that complement one another. Although it reveals suffering and illusion through clear eyes it generates doubts about applying knowledge in day-to-day life. Given that Schopenhauer and Ligotti claim meaning pursuit to be illusory are we able to defend intellectual along with creative activities? Pressing questions emerge from this strange situation where pessimism could potentially drive intellectual as well as cultural expression within the human community. Future Researchers need to study how people conduct themselves considering existential disillusionment without experiencing poor mental health outcomes. Humans face the major question of whether one can practice fulfilment when they acknowledge life's harshest realities.¹³

The Role of Aesthetic Experience in Mitigating Existential Horror

This fundamental aspect of existential pessimism creates a paradox because intellectual and aesthetic activities seem to contradict its core pessimistic doctrine. Given that Schopenhauer (1851/2004) shows life inherently creates suffering, then why do people take so much pleasure from artistic and musical creation alongside philosophical pursuit? Schopenhauer explains that the experience of aesthetics helps people escape from the will for brief moments thus allowing them to overcome their suffering. According to Schopenhauer artwork operates as a mechanism to turn away from the automatic forces which define human existence because he believes music reveals fundamental world truths thus delivering brief relief from existential agony (Schopenhauer, 1851/2004).¹⁴

Ligotti (2010) presents an extremely pessimistic standpoint compared to Schopenhauer. Ligotti grants that art as well as horror fiction displays existential truths but ultimately classifies art as misleading mental escapism from the burdensome reality. Ligotti believes that literary enjoyment exists only through brain manipulation which enables people to avoid confronting their basic condition of existence (Ligotti, 2010).¹⁵

Camus adopts a pro-artist position through his belief that creativity represents an act of rebellion. The Myth of Sisyphus presents his argument that despite life being absurd, human creativity lets people fight their existence against absolute emptiness. Camus considers art to be more than mere diversion because it

¹³ Acknowledging life's harshest realities such as impermanence, decay, disease and old age can make us even more humble, free and harmonious because if we know that everything in this universe is subject to birth, decay, impermanence, uncertainty and ambiguity, then we would drop the struggle to hold onto the things too tightly and get attached to them, we would not look for too much certainty and overthink everything because we know that the universe is ambiguous and arbitrary and will not cater to our fixed dogmas and way of how things should go,

¹⁴ Music turns off the mechanistic automated ways of being a human and activates the divine ways of being that's why we enjoy music so much.

¹⁵ In contrast to Schopenhauer, Ligotti argues that even literary enjoyment is a form of defense mechanism or a brain manipulation that we use to avoid facing the reality of life.

represents defiance which shapes chaotic reality through its systematic organization. The question emerges whether experiencing art acts as a connecting factor between realizing pessimistic views of life and finding its worth. When seriously exploring pessimism does it need to acknowledge human instinct to both produce and experience beauty as genuine?

Pessimism, Psychological Resilience and Mental Health

Intellectual discussions about pessimistic philosophy disregard the psychological elements which require attention. The adoption of Schopenhauer or the perspective of Benatar has the potential to cause existential resignation along with emotional distress or depression. Researchers looking into existential psychology emphasize that human mental health depends on how people handle feeling purposeless according to Yalom (1980). Extending understanding about how one can simultaneously face pessimistic existential views while maintaining psychological stability constitutes an ongoing research need.

Research in existential therapy indicates that people with nihilistic despair discover peace when they develop personal meaning according to Frankl (1946/1984). According to Camus (1942/1991) the rejection of absurdity generates psychological freedom, yet Ligotti (2010) considers all such defiance as simple self-delusion. Existential horror might represent the highest stage of human awareness, yet people need to develop strength against this state without creating self-deceptions.

Anti-natalism by Benatar (2006) creates one of the most complex mental barriers for individuals. As per his hypothesis that life brings only harm what sustains human beings to continue their lives with such knowledge? A crucial space exists within scholarly work because pessimistic philosophy does not adequately discuss the emotional impact that emerges from its own pessimistic findings. Research needs to determine if people can identify the gloominess of life and still function with purpose and fulfilment.

The Ethics of Nonexistence: Evaluating Anti-Natalism

According to David Benatar (2006) every new life faces moral issues because existence brings inevitable suffering to humanity. The asymmetry concept presented by him states that nonexistence frees people from pain without reducing their potential pleasure whereas existence often brings enduring suffering which makes life into a net negative outcome. Benatar rejects religious alongside secular reasons for human reproduction because he believes the birth of new life exacerbates human pain instead of resolving it.

However, critiques of anti-natalism highlight its psychological and practical implications. Does the label of existence as “harm” mean people must terminate their life? Benatar does not support suicide because existing human beings develop relationships and want that alter ethical considerations. The distinction between existence and nonexistence rests with him while he believes ongoing existence might be preferable than death depending on life conditions. According to John Gray (2002) anti-natalism successfully identifies genuine existential issues but fails to establish that humans should therefore reject existence. According to his view individuals should break away from their hope of advancement by grasping life as a purely biological occurrence devoid of universal meaning. In his writings Camus (1942/1991) identifies the absurd nature of existence then recommends people to accept their reality rather than giving into hopelessness. The division

between intellectual pessimism and practical resilience creates a core unanswered issue in the argument about anti-natalist ethics.

Existential Horror: The Psychological Toll of Seeing Too Clearly

In his work Thomas Ligotti (2010) demonstrates how Schopenhauer's pessimistic ideas apply to existential horror by showing that self-awareness functions as a fundamental mistake in the cosmic perspective. Ligotti bases his argument on Zapffe's Last Messiah theory to demonstrate that humans differ from other creatures due to their excessive consciousness which reveals their inevitable death¹⁶ and unimportant place in the universe and thus causes unbearable suffering. Human beings conceal their awareness of mortality by using self-deception and diversions or by adhering to social norms, but certain individuals suffer an acute revelation which causes existential panic. According to Camus' (1942/1991) examination in *The Myth of Sisyphus* he disagrees with Ligotti's interpretation of consciousness as horrific because to him it represents the chance to resist the absurdity of existence. The absence of any inherent meaning in life does not prevent humans from discovering personal value by purposefully fighting against the absurd. The disparity between the clear view of reality and acceptance of its invented nature prompts an essential inquiry about the link between factual vision and depressive emotions.

Studies of psychological sciences demonstrate that when people concentrate excessively on their fundamental existence, they might develop depression along with anxiety (Yalom, 1980). Psychological research demonstrates existential psychotherapy enables people to develop personal meaning through investigating meaninglessness directly (Frankl, 1946/1984). Although Ligotti presents an alluring view of cosmic horror its potential does not reflect the solitary solution for confronting existential knowledge.¹⁷

The Ethics of Nonexistence: Evaluating Anti-Natalism

David Benatar (2006) establishes that new life's creation through procreation is unethical because all life experiences persistent agony. According to his asymmetry argument he contends that the absence of nonexistence conserves people from experiencing discomfort without taking away their potential for happiness nevertheless existence inevitably exposes them to enduring pain resulting in life posing a negative overall effect. Through his challenge Benatar questions religious and secular reasons for reproduction by

¹⁶ Consciousness about our own death can instead of causing suffering, cause a sense of relief to us. Relief in the sense that I don't have unlimited time on this planet, so I would not have to bear the suffering of human existence for so long and the consciousness of death also can create a sense of free existence where we as individuals don't take things too seriously because we know that one day we are going to die, so why not enjoy and do the thing that inspires me the most during this short period of life that I have got on this planet as a human being.

¹⁷ Thomas Ligotti's view seems to be incomplete in the sense that the claim that life is meaningless doesn't deductively reach to the conclusion that we cannot form our own subjective meanings to exist and live in this universe. I think this is where Ligotti's view is somewhat mistaken.

asserting that human reproduction generates a permanent human condition instead of solving it.

However, critiques of anti-natalism highlight its psychological and practical implications. Does the reality of existence as a harm create an ethical complement to cease all life? Benatar prevents his argument from asserting suicide because he maintains people who live face new emotional and personal needs which create complexities in ethical decision-making. The process of becoming a new entity constitutes a perpetual harm yet staying alive should be preferred compared to death if one's current situation allows it.

According to John Gray (2002) existential issues highlighted by anti-natalism do not instantly lead to the conclusion that living should be rejected. The author recommends human beings should drop their progress aspirations by accepting their accidental biological nature and its cosmic insignificance. The absurdity of existence becomes apparent to both Camus (1942/1991) and him who writes this introduction yet the philosopher requests people to honour their chosen condition instead of spiralling into despair. The disagreement regarding intellectual pessimism versus practical resilience exists as an important unresolved topic in anti-natalist discussions.

Beyond Despair: Can Pessimism Be a Creative Force?

Despite its emphasis on human failure pessimistic thinking produces some of the most intricate works of philosophical and artistic creation. In Sartre's *Nausea* (1969) the author expresses existential dread through his narration about a meaningless world but writing transforms into an active form of opposition (Sartre, 1969). Ligotti (2010) believes horror fiction represents the most genuine genre because it validates the terrifying nature of being conscious according to his own work (Ligotti, 2010). Mainländer (2014) presents through his philosophical system that pessimism forms a productive force. Through the elimination of self-identity his system actively works to achieve salvation. Mainländer's perspective about ego being illusory aligns with some Buddhist beliefs yet his chosen path for redemption rejects the Buddhist principle of self-awakening and instead pursues death of the self (Mainländer, 2014). The presented views show that pessimism does not require passive behaviour. Pessimism builds bases for academic studies alongside creative activities and moral thinkings. Contemporary pessimistic thought needs to develop an approach for people to live honestly while facing an incomprehensible world. The goal remains to create purposeful existence for pessimists despite having discarded optimism as an illusion.

Schopenhauer (2004), Mainländer (2014), and Feltham (2017) among philosophers demonstrate that pessimism brings intellectual honesty instead of pessimistic views which society often views negatively. Through the method of pessimism¹⁸ people are compelled to face the harsh truths about pain alongside death as well as the absence of meaning according to Feltham (2017). Arthur Schopenhauer (2004) established as one of the earliest philosophers that life consists of suffering above all else according to his view while

¹⁸ Pessimism is not negative, but rather realistic. It's our way of dealing with reality that causes suffering and not the reality itself. If we are just sitting by a fire, we would not be directly harmed, but if we intentionally put our hand in fire, then the fire will burn us.

happiness proves to be an deceptive pursuit. According to Schopenhauer human beings experience non-stop desire that reinvents itself when a goal is met so people fall into an endless cycle of persistent dissatisfaction (Schopenhauer 2004). Modern psychology confirms the “hedonic treadmill” concept that blocks people from reaching permanent happiness according to Feltham (2017).

The Psychological Implications of Pessimism: Depressive Realism and Mental Health

The major psychological challenge of pessimistic thinking exists as a critical concern. An unhappy perspective allegedly drives individuals toward feelings of hopelessness and passive behavior as well as potential destructive acts. The concept of depressive realism according to Feltham (2017) implies pessimistic people achieve better reality understanding than optimistic individuals (Feltham, 2017). The concept of depressive realism which Alloy and Abramson (1979) introduced questions the common belief between reason and happiness. Studies demonstrate that people with mild depression tend to recognize actual control limitations in their life events better than individuals without depression (Feltham, 2017). Psychological benefits derive from pessimistic tendencies since they eliminate primitive predictions and baseless optimism. According to R. D. Laing in *The Divided Self* (1965) society imposes unrealistic happiness demands that make people split into different parts so they can adapt to societal standards (Laing, 1965). According to Mainländer (2014) social forces coerce people into suppressing their suffering which results in false self-perception (Mainländer, 2014).

Research seeks to understand if pessimism acceptance leads people to existential despair. In Sartre's (1969) *Nausea* the character learns through experiencing absurdity that freedom emerges from existential crisis although many might describe the situation as angst (Sartre, 1969). For those who acknowledge the absence of intrinsic value can create their personal version of authentic existence instead of depending on socially constructed beliefs.¹⁹ According to Philipp Mainländer (2014) we can understand existence as a mistaken illusion when analyzing Schopenhauer's pessimistic viewpoint to its end point. According to Mainländer in *The Philosophy of Redemption* the pinnacle of will power becomes self-elimination because life breeds unavoidable pain (Mainländer, 2014). By advancing anti-natalist beliefs David Benatar establishes that procreation leads to moral wrongdoing because suffering cannot be avoided by new life (Benatar, 2006). The significant question arises since pessimism seems to better represent reality so why does optimism

¹⁹ Absence of intrinsic values and meanings frees us from the bondages of societal constructions. When we take the constructions too seriously, then we are just acting inauthentically which doesn't bring out the best in us, but when we start to act according to our own subjective values which are aligned with our psyche, then something new and novel can emerge from our body and mind in the form of art, music, literature and so on and so forth. The societal construction of values and beliefs is like a fog on top of our genuine and expressive personality of authenticity which is a collection of our genuineness and naked innocence. Most people in society cling to the societal values because they don't want to face their naked innocence of authenticity.

prevail as the preferred social discourse? State-controlled optimism serves as Orwell presents in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) as a method for social control to monitor individuals who obey totalitarian rule (Orwell, 2003). According to this standpoint pessimism operates beyond individual worldview and functions as intellectual opposition that confronts the preconceived social and political theories.

Political Pessimism: The Rejection of Utopian Ideals

Pessimism creates major political effects which include the complete abstention from utopian thinking. In accordance with Roger Scruton (2010) utopian political ideologies become totalitarian when they try to shape human conduct to support their perfect vision of society (Scruton, 2010). The system of totalitarian optimism which Orwell (2009) criticized in his writing showcases how oppressive powers use fictional progress claims to preserve their dominion (Orwell, 2003).

Mainländer (2014) and Schopenhauer (2004) deny historical advancement because they believe suffering is essential to continue existing. Despite Enlightenment beliefs about scientific improvement of human life philosophical thinkers operate under opposite theories. Data reveals technological advancements result in more social disparity rather than achieving Feltham's (2017) realistic view on human history because of his depressive social assessment (Feltham, 2017).

Societies face a crucial challenge regarding how they should operate since progress seems to be nothing but an illusion. Mainländer (2014) proposes a gradual dissolution of humanity as his radical suggestion, but Schopenhauer (2004) bases his proposal on detachment and personal resignation. Orwell presents a narrative through which people can confront truth while abstaining from false hopes for a better future (Orwell, 2003).

Pessimistic Antidotes Have the Potential to Provide Freedom

Pessimism proves itself stronger than classed pessimistic as it functions as a disruptive force against optimistic attitudes and conformity and political power structures. Schopenhauer (2004), Mainländer (2014), Benatar (2006) and Feltham (2017) prove that pessimism functions both as existential and political resistance in addition to being an intellectual position. Research into depressive realism portrays pessimism as an approach that yields more accurate understanding of reality than what optimistic views can achieve (Feltham 2017). Is it necessary for societies to promote a world perspective that matches reality instead of being optimistic? Whether we can face darkness remains an important question together with how we create personal meaning during this process. Through different methods such as philosophical detachment (Schopenhauer), self-elimination (Mainländer) and existential opposition (Sartre and Orwell) pessimistic freedom comes from both dismissing comforting lies and practicing true engagement with the world.

Towards a Free Pessimism

The liberating aspect of pessimistic thought arises from its capability to destroy artificial perceptions thus compelling people to look reality in its raw form instead of their distorted version. The pessimistic approach provides both an analytical evaluation of human existence and social moral structures through scholarly works from Schopenhauer to Mainländer and from Benatar to Feltham. Most people view pessimism as an

intellectual trap since it negates human ability to act and destroys hopeful thinking. According to both Orwell (2003) and Sartre (1969) knowing the unfortunate reality of life does not prevent people from actively resisting (Orwell, 2003; Sartre, 1969). The reality pushes you toward an independent relationship with the world where you confront it without artificial comforting hopeful beliefs. Future exploration needs to study if pessimism creates opportunities to take moral action instead of just submitting to defeat. Primarily based social optimism acts as an obstruction that prevents people from confronting actual hardship which suggests pessimism emerges as the authentic ethical attitude to face existence honestly. What are the possibilities of embracing enigmatic reality to live with dignity alongside purposeful existence?

Beyond Pessimism: Toward a Philosophy of Lucid Resignation

As per Schopenhauer (2004) and Mainländer (2014) with Benatar (2006) traditional pessimism states existence carries irretrievable burdens yet the interpretation tends to trigger either resignation or nihilistic despair. A philosophy of lucid resignation²⁰ should be developed to recognize truth in suffering without calling for an active withdrawal or destruction while simultaneously encouraging meaningful existence. Pessimism as a philosophical perspective has existed in two primary contradictory approaches throughout history.

1. According to Active Negation (Mainländer, 2014; Benatar, 2006) people believe that all life needs to be rejected by following anti-natalism or by accepting death as a form of liberation through metaphysics.
2. According to Schopenhauer (2004) Passive Endurance shows that life consists only of suffering which people should accept without disturbing their desires by following an ascetic lifestyle.

These two responses assume that suffering along with meaninglessness eliminates all opportunities for connection. Lucid resignation provides a different approach through which people can face their condition. Lucid resignation does not ignore pain, yet it avoids pushing people toward retreat. Although meaning does not vanish completely it acknowledges that human beings create their own subjective meanings in a self-reliant manner. Utopian fantasies are absent from this approach which neither looks for perfect escape nor accept complete despair.

Orwell, Sartre and the Case for Resistance Without Illusion

George Orwell displayed in Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949) a dark future where officials manipulate deceptive optimism to maintain control by destroying all forms of opposition (Orwell, 2003). Winston Smith's story shows that believing in empty false hope causes more harm than losing out. In Nausea Sartre (1969) shows

²⁰ Lucid Resignation = (Living Meaningful Existence + Authenticity) – (Active Withdrawal + Destruction). Lucid Resignation doesn't mean a passive state of being where we don't do anything, where we just bow down to the harsh realities of life, but rather Lucid Resignation is a Resignation of Revolt and Embrace where we face the realities of life without trying to destroy them and without actively trying to withdraw from them.

how existential awareness produces horror yet he rejects any chance of escape because he discovers purpose through genuine confrontations with absurdity (Sartre, 1969). People adopting lucid resignation accept suffering but reject the attempt to find meaning through deceptive cognitive illusions. This existential approach enables people to resemble life's sad realities without allowing the darkness to paralyze their actions.

Depressive Realism: Is Pessimism a Dead End?

Depressive Realism (2017) by Colin Feltham maintains that realistic pessimists understand reality better than optimistic people do but face challenges in developing meaningful actions in life (Feltham, 2017). What causes depressive realists who demonstrate superior knowledge to remain inactive if they recognize the truth accurately?

1. You must recognize the presence of pain together with the lack of purpose (Schopenhauer, 2004 and Feltham, 2017).
2. One must reject both false optimism and despair according to Sartre (1969).
3. People should remain active and dedicated even without cosmic purpose (Orwell, 2003).

According to this analysis the issue with pessimistic perspectives is not their correct assessment of situations but their unsatisfactory directives. A philosophy based on depressive realism must lead people forward by transcending its critical function.

Pessoa as a Solution: Transforming Pessimism into a Poetic Mode of Living

Pessoa accepts pessimism as something that should be transformed into a form of existence that is bearable as well as beautiful. His literary works show that existential pain and empty meaning represent material to create aesthetic mental contemplation rather than interpreting as problems to resolve.²¹ Existential rebellion and anti-natalist views face a challenge through this contemplation. According to Benatar (2006) natural existence is always detrimental to human beings so they should not reproduce. Camus (1942/1991) declares that human beings need to rebel against unmeaningful situations. Pessoa presents an alternative perspective which consists of accepting things²² gently rather than denying or defying them according to (2002).

²¹ For Fernando Pessoa, Existential Pain, Suffering and Emptiness can be used as Vessels of Energy to actively participate in aesthetic mental contemplation. Existential Pain and Emptiness are not problems but are rather vessels of energy rather than problems to resolve.

²² Accepting things without clinging or resistance is the way to deal with unmeaningful situations in life according to Pessoa because it's only when we try to resist or cling to a particular paradigm of meaning that we feel suffering because that paradigm of meaning is bound to collapse and be challenged by other individuals those who exist like us.

Existence in pessimism provides peace instead of dissolution. The poetic vision accepts absurdity by releasing its resistance to suffering therefore making the experience poetic instead of tragic. Pessoa provides a therapeutic solution to desperate pessimists who want to exist without illusions as well as without losing hope. According to his work pessimism can be approached in peace by turning it into serene beauty which does not cause existential distress.²³ Through his work Pessoa provides solutions to attain peace with pessimistic thinking. Pessimism functions as a state that will not cause a person to stop moving. This attitude transforms into both poetic viewpoint and observant mode that one adopts towards life. Life without meaningful purpose should not be considered tragic since it frees us from impractical expectations.²⁴ People should experience the absurdity without fighting against it because this state requires silence and tranquil observation. Pessoa's work shifts pessimism from its previous state as an impasse into an active philosophical approach. As a poetic way of life, it becomes possible to exist without rejecting suffering or being submerged within it. At the end a gentle explanation emerges from his work to help the pessimist overcome their dilemma. Pessoa's thoughts can be summed up as follows:

"To accept suffering while protecting yourself from it taking control. Seeking meaning should not be our goal but neither should we feel bitterness because the lack of meaning seems to terrify us and make us feel as if we have no stable ground to rather stand on. Take in life as a floating fantasy which remains attractive despite its void nature." The pessimistic poetry of Pessoa demonstrates how one can experience disillusionment tolerably because it does not destroy individuals who accept its nature.

Reconciling Pessimism, Engagement, and Meaning

This document analysed pessimism as it examines philosophical critiques of existence by studying the basic dilemma of how to approach suffering while staying involved. Traditional pessimists including Schopenhauer (2004), Mainländer (2014) and Benatar (2006) maintain that life brings an indelible burden which people should try to escape from or learn to bear. Through existentialist thought Sartre (1969) and Camus (1942/1991) presented a conception of meaning which rises from rejection of absurdity. Despite their apparent disagreement these philosophical positions recognize that existence lacks an inherent reason for meaning.

Recognition of these truths between philosophers has resulted in persistent philosophical stalemates.

1. We should consider supporting anti-natalism given that existence involves continuous suffering. (Benatar, 2006).
2. Should we deny ourselves all forms of involvement when the concept of meaning loses its value?

²³ Pessimism can be approached in peace by turning it into serene beauty which does not cause existential distress.

²⁴ Life without meaningful purpose is free as it is not bound the limits of impractical expectations that society imposes on us and us ourselves impose on ourselves.

(Mainländer, 2014).

3. The inevitability of suffering raises a question about self-deceptive living. (Schopenhauer, 2004).

I have established Lucid Resignation through our analysing these important questions. The approach of Lucid Resignation combines acceptance of reality with practical solutions to live sustainably in the world.

Lucid Resignation: A Framework for Living with Pessimism

The practice of Lucid Resignation functions as both a form of recognizing meaninglessness and a way of life that does not need illusions along with despair. This approach takes a different direction than conventional despair since it does not urge people toward inactivity or withdrawal. Suffering exists as a reality which this approach accepts without embracing governance by fate. People who adopt Lucid Resignation approach life by actively participating without using fictional expectations to survive. Awareness of absurdity enables this framework to become a lasting method of existence. Through Lucid Resignation people can build intellectual Strength against dogmatic belief systems which function as tools of ideological control. Orwell illustrates through his work *Nineteen Eighty-Four* how produced happiness serves as an oppressive tool according to his narrative. Strong structures of power are concealed by demands for individuals to maintain happiness while being hopeful and productive. Through pessimism people develop intellectual resistance because they detect illusions and understand actual situations.

Overcoming the Paradoxes of Pessimism

Unbeknownst to conventional thinking pessimists continue their intellectual pursuits together with creative ventures even though they disavow optimism. Pessimism contains this paradox that shows how it does not make people inactive but drives them to analyse deeply while remaining immersed in artistic creation. Schopenhauer (2004) sought peace through enthusing himself with aesthetic contemplations. According to Camus (1942/1991), developing meaningful resistance against absurdity constitutes a purposeful action. According to Pessoa (2002) he embraced pessimism in its entirety by turning it into a type of poetic existence rather than attempting to escape it. A proper comprehension of pessimism reveals that it enhances life instead of obstructing it. The pessimist refuses to avoid life participation because they comprehend that everything exists as a fragile and impermanent experience. The method of living which pessimists choose stands apart from both Camus' heroic rebellion and Ligotti's nihilism because it demonstrates rationalistic restraint in dealing with reality.

Final Resolution: A Sustainable Pessimism

The philosophical problems caused by pessimistic belief remain real since they affect practical life. The fundamental life question extends beyond whether life has any value. The central question becomes how we should act given the understanding of life's valuelessness.

This paper demonstrates that Lucid Resignation functions as a practical solution against the following two problems concerned with the construction of illusory meaning and despair.

- The illusion of meaning (progress, utopian optimism).
- The paralysis of despair (nihilism, anti-natalism).

This method of being offers a realistic approach that delivers the following key principles:

While rejecting suffering the philosophy does not renounce its existence. The approach neither forces meanings onto life nor cuts off its potential interactions. Although this approach rejects deceptive hope it discovers authentic purpose in living. Through his writing Pessoa together with Camus and Orwell depict pessimism which does not lead to despair yet offers emancipating opportunities. Optimism drives us toward wrong beliefs whereas authentic pessimism functions as an agent of freedom. The practice of Lucid Resignation demonstrates that proper understanding of pessimism creates a sustainable lifestyle in the world. Clearness together with balance and personal freedom represent the primary objectives of this approach rather than seeking happiness or salvation or meaning. Lastly, it can be tentatively said that Pessimism emerges as the founding element of a philosophy that starts an original system of thinking.

References

- Benatar, D. (2006). *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence*. Oxford University Press.
- Camus, A. (1942/1991). *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (J. O'Brien, Trans.). Vintage International. (Original work published 1942)
- Frankl, V. E. (1946/1984). *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (I. Lasch, Trans.). Beacon Press. (Original work published 1946)
- Gray, J. (2002). *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Gray, J. (2018). *Seven Types of Atheism*. Penguin Books.
- Libet, B. (1985). Unconscious Cerebral Initiative and the Role of Conscious Will in Voluntary Action. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 8(4), 529–566. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X00044903>
- Ligotti, T. (2010). *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror*. Hippocampus Press.
- Schopenhauer, A. (1851/2004). *On the Suffering of the World* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.). Penguin Books. (Original work published 1851)
- Yalom, I. D. (1980). *Existential Psychotherapy*. Basic Books. Zapffe,
- P. W. (1933). *The Last Messiah*. Janus, 9(1), 85–95. Marx, L. (1994). *Technology, Pessimism, and Postmodernism*. In Y. Ezrahi, E. Mendelsohn, & H. Segal (Eds.), *Technology, Pessimism, and Postmodernism* (pp. 11–28). Springer Netherlands.

Segal, H. P. (1994). *Technology, Utopianism, and Pessimism: An Historiographical Perspective*.

Scruton, R. (2010). *The Uses of Pessimism and the Danger of False Hope*. Atlantic Books.

Schopenhauer, A. (2005). *Studies in Pessimism* (T. Bailey Saunders, Trans.). Kessinger Publishing.

Feltham, C. (2017). *Depressive realism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Routledge.

Laing, R. D. (1965). *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. Penguin Books.

Mainländer, P. (2014). *The Philosophy of Redemption* (Die Philosophie der Erlösung) (Vol. 1)

Morioka, *What is Antinatalism? And other essays: Philosophy of life in contemporary society*. Tokyo Philosophy Project.

Orwell, G. (1949/2003). *Nineteen eighty-four*. PlumeM. (2021).

Sartre, J. P. (1969). *Nausea*. New Directions

Pessoa, F. (2002). *The Book of Disquiet* (R. Zenith, Trans.). Penguin Classics.

