Report for Forum from Philosophy Group – January 2021

Schopenhauer (1788 -1860)

We found Schopenhauer difficult.

Most Philosophers are at heart optimists. Although they cannot prove the world has a purpose, they assume it has. They do not deny the evil, ugly and some apparently purposeless aspects of the world, but they think they count for a lot less than the more positive aspects. Schopenhauer took precisely the opposite point of view. According to him (and Sunderland supporters) life is painful and it would be better not to have been born

The World as Will and Representation was first published in 1818, but Schopenhauer kept working on it for years, producing a much longer version in 1844. He described the Will as a single, unified, directionless indifferent force behind everything that is. We can glimpse this World as Will through our own actions and also through our experience of the arts especially music.

Unlike most Western philosophers of his time, Schopenhauer had read widely in Eastern philosophy. He thought that if we could only recognize the true nature of reality, we would behave very differently and might avoid some of the bleaker features of the human condition. His message was very close to the Buddha's. The Buddha taught that all life involves suffering but that at a deep level there is no such thing as 'the self': if we recognize that, we can achieve enlightenment.

We tried to understand Schopenhauer by posing some questions for discussion

- Was Schopenhauer a Pessimist or a Realist?
- Did Schopenhauer 's (and then Nietzsche's) experiences with war affect their philosophy?
- It is said that Schopenhauer adopted the central idea of the ancient Greeks that the universe was driven by vast a blind will.
- How does Schopenhauer reconcile his pessimism with one of his underlying solutions of compassion?
- Both Schopenhauer (and Nietzsche) looked to the arts for some sort of connection with or compensation from The Will, Why would anyone want to connect to The Will as he describes it ?
- Schopenhauer was the first western philosopher to study Eastern philosophy. How does he connect this with The Will and his attempt to resolve his underlying assumption that the world has no purpose?

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