Georgia State University

ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

Philosophy Theses   Department of Philosophy

8-13-2019

Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Religion and his Critique of German Idealism

Nicholas R. Linhares
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/philosophy_theses

Recommended Citation

SCHOPENHAUER'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND HIS CRITIQUE OF GERMAN

IDEALISM

by

NICHOLAS LINHARES

Under the Direction of Jessica Berry, PhD

ABSTRACT

A significant but easily overlooked metaphilosophical theme in Schopenhauer's corpus concerns the relationship between religion, philosophy, and "man's need for metaphysics" (*WWR II* 162). I discuss the importance of this theme, and its attendant methodological commitments, for how we should understand Schopenhauer's unique approach to global religious and mystical traditions. I demonstrate that explication of this theme provides a coherent, cogent way to identify and evaluate the substantive reasons, often unstated and which may otherwise appear to lack coherence or cogency, that underlie Schopenhauer's criticism of philosophers associated with the tradition of German Idealism.

INDEX WORDS: Arthur Schopenhauer, G.W.F. Hegel, Fredrich Schelling, German Idealism,
      Philosophy of Religion, Nineteenth Century Philosophy

SCHOPENHAUER'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND HIS CRITIQUE OF GERMAN

IDEALISM

by

NICHOLAS LINHARES

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2019

SCHOPENHAUER'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND HIS CRITIQUE OF GERMAN

IDEALISM

by

NICHOLAS LINHARES

Committee Chair: Jessica Berry

Committee: Sebastian Rand

Tim O'Keefe

Electronic Version Approved:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HN … Der Handschriftliche Nachlass (*Manuscript Remains*, with volume number)

SL … Science of Logic

WWR I … The World as Will and Representation, Vol. 1

WWR II … The World as Will and Representation, Vol. 2

1   INTRODUCTION

Immanuel Kant cast a long shadow over nineteenth-century German philosophy. Kant sought to identify the principles – including *a priori* conditions, such as time and space, and categories of understanding – that make conscious experience possible. His immediate followers – Johann Fichte, Fredrich Schelling, and G.W.F. Hegel – in an effort to complete Kantian Idealism and insulate it from skepticism, did not stop their inquiry at the principles Kant identified. Each posited, in addition, the existence of an unconditioned ground that precedes and unifies all such principles, which they thought of as the *absolute*.

Arthur Schopenhauer, who viewed himself as Kant's true intellectual successor, strongly disagreed with these philosophers' projects, especially the primacy they afforded to the notion of the absolute.[1] Schopenhauer takes philosophy to originate with "man's need for metaphysics" (*WWR II* 162) to make sense of the chaotic, insufferable nature of existence. Philosophy can satisfy this need only if it has recourse to a ground that is, in principle, universally accessible. Schopenhauer identifies this ground with what he takes to be the very antithesis of the Idealists' "absolute": subjective embodied experience.[2] I propose that we can best understand the reasons for the primacy Schopenhauer affords these commitments by turning to an influence evident throughout his corpus, which nonetheless may be easily overlooked: his comprehensive study of global religions and the philosophy of religion that grew out of that study.

Schopenhauer's approach to religion was radical for his time – he was perhaps the first modern European who attempted to charitably understand the teachings of all religious traditions without viewing them as precursors to Christianity.[3] He rejected the putative superiority of

---

[1] Schopenhauer himself studied under Fichte and Schelling while a doctoral student at the University of Weimar.

[2] Schopenhauer does not use this exact phrase, which I define in the following section.

[3] For a comprehensive discussion of the dominant contemporaneous attitude towards comparative religion, promoted by Herder and Schlegel, which called for scholarly investigation into Eastern religions as a source of primordial proto-

Christianity and therefore analyzed the validity of the metaphysical and ethical principles advanced by various religious traditions independently of each other. It is this unique, cosmopolitan perspective that underlies his disagreements with the preeminent German philosophers of the early nineteenth century.

That perspective led him to conclude that the metaphysical principles advanced by any given religion at any point in history could be characterized as either *pessimistic* or *optimistic*.[4] Pessimistic principles reflect the experiences of embodied subjects: that to exist is to suffer, that suffering is derived from willing, and so to cease suffering one must cease willing. A thoroughly pessimistic metaphysics delivers a system of ethics wherein compassion and self-denial are the highest virtues. Optimistic principles, on the other hand, are contradicted by the experiences of embodied subjects: they posit that the world and its creator are good, so humans should be grateful to exist. Schopenhauer argues that the greater the degree of optimism in a religion, the more abstract and convoluted the defenses of its metaphysical principles are bound to become. And if the degree of theological abstraction becomes so great that a religion's teachings become implausible to its followers, it will leave them without an ethical axis around which to orient their lives.

In the first section of this essay, I explain in further detail what Schopenhauer's metaphilosophical and methodological commitments entail, why he held them, and how we should understand the relationship between philosophy, religion, and what he calls "metaphysical need." I then turn in the second section to how these themes highlight, for Schopenhauer, problematic consequences of the positions advanced by philosophers associated with German Idealism. The

---

Christianity (and the influence of this attitude on Hegel), see chapter one of Christopher Ryan's *The Death of God and the Oriental Renaissance* (2010).
[4]This is Schopenhauer's coinage.

most important of these is an implicit denial of the reality of suffering to preserve the goodness of God. Schopenhauer recognized an optimistic current in Christian metaphysics so pervasive that it could be intellectually defended *only* by means of this radical denial of what he took to be the most self-evident fact of existence – a defense that German Idealism readily supplied. And he contends that if a religion's metaphysical system can be salvaged only by such a denial, its principles will eventually be found to be so contrary to the lived experience of the common people that they will be unable to maintain their faith in it. They will then be left without cogent, coherent reasons to be compassionate, selfless, and humane. For Schopenhauer, a person who would defend such a religion because they presuppose the truth of its principles has no right to be called a lover of wisdom.

2   PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION, AND METAPHYSICAL NEED

Schopenhauer argues that philosophy and religion have the same fundamental aim: to satisfy "man's need for metaphysics," which is a "strong and ineradicable" instinct to seek explanations for existence that arises from "the knowledge of death, and therewith the consideration of the suffering and misery of life" (*WWR I* 161). Every system of metaphysics is a response to this realization of one's finitude, and the function of those systems is to respond to that realization by letting individuals know their place in the universe, the purpose of their existence, and how they ought to act. All other philosophical principles (most importantly, ethics) follow from one's metaphysical system.

Both philosophers and theologians claim the authority to evaluate metaphysical principles, but the standards by which they conduct those evaluations are very different. Schopenhauer concludes that philosophers are ultimately in the position to critique principles that are advanced by theologians, not vice versa. He nonetheless recognizes that the metaphysical need of most people is satisfied by their religion. This is unsurprising because, he contends, the vast majority of people find existence "less puzzling and mysterious" than philosophers do, so they merely require a plausible explanation of their role in the universe that can be adopted "as a matter of course" (*WWR II* 162). In other words, most people require a metaphysical framework around which to orient their lives that is merely apparently true. Therefore, the theologian has no functional reason to determine what is actually true. By contrast, the philosopher is someone whose metaphysical need is not satisfied by merely apparent truths – he is intrinsically driven to seek out actual truths about the nature of the world. In his 1831 dialogue *Religion*, Schopenhauer has Demopheles put it thusly:

> Religion is the metaphysics of the people, which by all means they must keep … Just as there is popular poetry, popular wisdom in proverbs, so too there must be popular metaphysics; for mankind requires most certainly *an interpretation of life*, and it must be in keeping with its power of comprehension. (2, original emphasis)

This passage echoes an unpublished note, from Schopenhauer's time as a student of Fredrich Schleiermacher, rebuking his professor's claim that "no one can be a philosopher without being religious," with the retort "no one who is religious attains to philosophy; he does not need it. No one who really philosophises is religious; he walks without leading-strings, perilously but free" (*HN2* 243).[5]

To discover what is actually true about the world, one must first identify some ground of knowledge for "what is common to all, the objective phenomena lying before us all, and … the facts of self-consciousness as they are to be found in everyone" (*WWR II* 613). So this ground must originate "neither from the object nor from the subject" but "that which contains and presupposes them both" *(WWR I* 25). It must be, in principle, universal. The only such ground is what I term *subjective embodied experience.* A subject is "that which knows all things and is known by none" while an object or representation is a thing that appears within time and space, and can only be known by a subject (*WWR I* 5). Schopenhauer denies the possibility of a disembodied subject. To *be* is to be a finite thing. Thus, to the extent that one is a subject, one is necessarily also an object, that is, a physical body.

The body is therefore "that representation which forms the starting point of the subject's knowledge" (*WWR I* 19) and is an immediate objectification of the subject's *will*, "the inner nature of his own phenomenon, which manifests itself to him as representation both through his actions and through the permanent substratum of his body" (*WWR I* 109). Thus, all human experience, necessarily mediated by the body, consists in equal measure of will (subjective) and representation

---

[5]Cited in Ryan 2010: 65.

(objective). So, ontologically, Schopenhauer accepts the "compatibility of empirical reality with transcendental ideality" (*WWR I* 4). This compatibility is to be found in and only in the experiences of a subject that is also an object. He therefore rejects any purported ground of knowledge predicated on an ontological division between the subjective and objective as erroneous.

Schopenhauer notes early in *WWR I* that he takes this conclusion to align with the teachings of Vedanta Hinduism. Those teachings, according to an essay he references by the British orientalist William Jones, "consisted not in denying the existence of matter … but in correcting the popular notion of it, and in contending that it has no essence independent of mental perception; that essence and perceptibility are convertible terms" (*Asiatic Researches*, vol. IV, 164, cited in *WWR I* 4). Like Vedanta Hindus, Schopenhauer does not deny the existence of finite objects but contends that they cannot be understood as essentially separate from the subject that perceives them. If there were no subjects, there would be no objects, and vice versa.

This reference to Vedantism is one of many that Schopenhauer makes to Eastern religions. It can be tempting to read these references as appeals to authority, which would undermine Schopenhauer's claim that a philosopher never merely relies on religious authority. It can also be tempting take these references to suggest that Schopenhauer believes a metaphysical system modeled on Eastern religions should replace Christianity, as Christopher Ryan[6] has recently argued. Both temptations should be resisted.

Schopenhauer's position is not that all religious claims about the nature of reality are *per se* false. It is that prior to philosophical scrutiny, one cannot be sure that such claims are not, at best, just apparently true. Any metaphysical principle, religious or otherwise, can be validated only by appeal to a universal ground of knowledge, which Schopenhauer identifies with subjective

---

[6]In *Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Religion: The Death of God and the Oriental Renaissance* (2010).

embodied experience. To the extent that he sees himself as a real philosopher, then, Schopenhauer's reference to the claims of the Vedanta school amount to this: *On the basis of my unprejudiced investigations into the nature of reality, grounded in reflection upon experiences accessible to me and in principle all embodied subjects, I judge that the general metaphysical framework advanced by Vedanta Hinduism is accurate*. This does not necessitate the conclusion, for Schopenhauer, that other religions' metaphysical principles are inaccurate. It is certainly possible that other religions could conceive of the ontological relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in a way similar to the one that Schopenhauer attributes to Vedanta Hinduism. But unless philosophers are able and willing to set aside their preconceived notions about the superiority of their own religious traditions, they will be unable to notice such similarities, or question their implications, as Schopenhauer did. Those calling themselves philosophers thereby err in presupposing that only one religion is the one true faith, or by uncritically incorporating concepts that developed within a specific religious context in their purportedly philosophical work. It is this kind of admixture of religion and philosophy that Schopenhauer finds objectionable.

An important reason for this objection concerns the unique nature of religious texts and experiences. Schopenhauer argues that, because its function is to provide a system of metaphysics for the average person, who has a limited capacity to comprehend metaphysical truths, religion must be less direct when making its claims than philosophy. Religious teachings can be of "inestimable benefit" to the average person, but "with reference to the mental capacity of the great mass of people, they can only [present] an indirect, not a direct truth" (*WWR II* 168). This indirect truth is that which "has itself under the veil of allegory" (*WWR II* 169). Such allegories employ symbols, allusions, narrative tropes, figurative language, and cultural references from the time and place in which their author is writing to convey a deeper, more universal idea than one provided

by a literal reading of the text. Schopenhauer discovered that this approach to writing and interpreting religious texts was common to mystical traditions arising in vastly different civilizations. He remarks on the similarities, when read allegorically, found "in the *Oupnekhat*,[7] in the *Enneads* of Plotinus, in Scotus Erigena, in the passages of Jacob Bohme, and especially in the wonderful work of Madame de Guyon, *Les Torres*, and in Angelius Silesius, and finally also in the beautiful poems of the Sufis" (*WWR II* 612).

Schopenhauer approves of what he takes these texts to be communicating through the veil of allegory for the same reason that he endorses Vedanta metaphysics: their claims can be confirmed by reflection on the experience of embodied subjects. Such reflection, most importantly, reveals that to exist is to incessantly suffer. Pleasure arises from pain; the former is only the momentary diminishment of latter. Satiated hunger is quick to return; today's accomplishment or reward is soon forgotten, and the desire for another, more significant one takes its place. He identifies subjectivity with *will*: a blind, amoral, lusting, striving, desiring and hungering force that animates everything that exists. As embodied, one experiences this essentially unitary force, will, as individual and personal, but all finite things objectify and are animated by it.[8] Attempting to satiate the will is futile – like heads of the Lernaean Hydra, as one desire is eliminated, others immediately take its place, *ad infinitum*. Only individuals of extraordinarily rare character, who are able to fully deny the will by refusing the pursuit of any objects of pleasure and devoting

---

[7]This refers to an incomplete version of *The Upanishads* compiled in seventeenth century Persia that Anquetil Duperron translated into Latin in 1802. It was the first direct exposure that most Europeans had to primary source material expressing Hindu doctrines.

[8]Sandra Shapshay argues that Schopenhauer uses the term "will" as a *metonym* for the Kantian thing-in-itself. Schopenhauer acknowledges that, as a name, and thus a representation, "*will*" cannot be identical to that which it names and represents: "if this thing-in-itself (we will retain the Kantian expression as a standing formula)—which as such is never object ... is to be thought of objectively, then we must borrow its name and concept from an object, from something in some way objectively given, and therefore from one of its phenomena ... here of course we use only a *denominatio a potiori*, by which the concept of will therefore receives a greater extension than it has hitherto had ... anyone who is incapable of carrying out the required extension of the concept will remain involved in a permanent misunderstanding' (*WWR* I 110-11). *Denminatio a potiori* literally means "receiving its name from what is better, superior or greater." Thus, on Shapshay's reading, "By use of this metonymic device, the *denominatio a potiori*, naming the thing-in-itself 'Will,' he hopes that we will take away an insight that we could not have gotten in any other way than by feeling it, from the inside, so to speak" (218).

themselves entirely to acts of self-denial and sacrifice, are able to transcend the incessant states of pain that otherwise await all embodied subjects.

In all of the mystical literature he references, Schopenhauer sees allegorical attempts to convey the same fundamental truth that is consistent with the observations above. The ability to see through the veil of allegory results from subjecting mystical texts to sound philosophical scrutiny. That is what Schopenhauer did between November 1815 and May 1816, as he worked his way through the first ten volumes of *Asiatick Researches.*[9] He came to understand the Indian concept of *Maya*[10] and "Kant's 'phenomenon' as one and the same thing: this world in which we are living, we ourselves in so far as we belong to it" (*HN1* #564 trans. App 2014, 241).[11] One for whom "the veil of Maya has dropped from the eyes … recognizes himself in every being" (*HN1* #626 trans. App 2014, 242). This is the state he takes to be denoted by the term *nirvana*, whereby one is driven to extreme compassion and empathy out of the realization that "the sufferer and the one who causes suffering are one" (*HN1* #626 trans. App 2014, 243). The truth he sees conveyed allegorically is that we are painfully deceived by the apparent nature of phenomena, and overcoming this deception is concurrent with increased degrees of compassion, "the immediate *participation*, independent of all ulterior considerations, primarily in the *suffering* of another, and thus in the prevention or elimination of it" (*On the Basis of Morality* §16, original emphasis). Schopenhauer has Demopheles claim in *Religion* that "[s]uch an allegorical representation of truth is always and everywhere" (10). And, indeed, he identifies this same truth, allegorically veiled, at the heart of Western religious traditions as well as Eastern ones.

---

[9]At the time the preeminent journal devoted to the study of Indian philosophy and religion.

[10]Often translated as "illusion" or "deception" and traditionally depicted as a demon with authority over the material world.

[11]All citations to Urs App refer to his original translations of previously unpublished, archival material. This material was not available in English until the publication of *Schopenhauer's Compass* in 2014. I do not directly engage with any of the novel arguments or interpretative claims that App advances in that book here.

Schopenhauer characterizes this truth as *pessimistic*: the traditions he references describe the world in terms of suffering and contend that insofar as we continue to attempt to satiate the will, we are guilty of contributing to the sufferings of the world. Such teachings present the phenomenal world, and its insufferable nature, "as something which can be conceived only as the consequence of our guilt, and thus really ought not to be" (*WWR II* 170). In contrast, *optimistic* principles "present the existence of this world as justified by itself, and subsequently praise and commend it" (*WWR II* 170). Schopenhauer's real philosopher denies the veracity of optimistic accounts because they are thoroughly contradicted by the experiences of embodied subjects, which constitute the only criterion that can be universally appealed to in order to ground claims about the nature of the world. There is no *a priori* "experience" of the world. The only question for the philosopher is whether a given metaphysical claim is justified – confirmable by the experience of embodied subjects. To the extent that the claim is pessimistic, that question is answered in the affirmative; to the extent it is optimistic, it is answered in the negative.

A religion that contains a large proportion of pessimistic precepts – such as Buddhism – thus need appeal only to such reflection on embodied experience to justify them. Schopenhauer does not consider religions that ground their claims in this way to be theological. On Schopenhauer's view, the discipline of theology arose only to rationalize the spurious precepts of optimistic religions. Since the notion that the world is inherently good conflicts with the direct experience of embodied subjects, these optimistic precepts can only be defended with appeal to abstract "reasons" disconnected from subjective embodied experience. It is the purview of theology to provide such reasons. An organized religion that intermixes pessimistic and optimistic precepts – one that, for example, admonishes its adherents to "love not the world nor the things of the world" (1 John 2:15) while also maintaining that "God saw all that he had made, and it was

very good" (Genesis 1:31) – must develop a highly abstract conceptual framework to provide intellectual justification for the notion that both assertions can be true. A thoroughly pessimistic religion, however, doesn't need theologians to develop such a framework: there is no inconsistency between its claims and subjective embodied experience such that abstract intellectual justifications are necessary to convince adherents of their veracity.

It therefore should not be surprising that Schopenhauer understands the teachings of Gnosticism, in contrast to those of orthodox Christianity, as the purely pessimistic and thus more veridical expression of Jesus' teachings. As discussed in more detail below, Schopenhauer's study of Gnosticism led him to conclude that its organizing principle was *mythos*, as opposed to *logos*,[12] and that Gnostic texts were intended to be interpreted allegorically, without a singular, dogmatic interpretation enforced by a central authority.

Schopenhauer allegorically identifies will with the Gnostic demiurge (*WWR II* 620). The Gnostics held the phenomenal world to be inherently unjust and life filled with suffering, so they maintained that its creator, the demiurge, must be either evil or ignorant, and that both he and the world he created must have been cosmic mistakes. So, they held that above the demiurge resides a higher God, dwelling in the *pleroma*. The Valentinians, one of the largest Gnostic sects, describe how "30 *aeons* make up the Pleroma" and that the last of these *aeons* was *Sophia* (Wisdom), whose "'Desire' was separated from her and cast outside" the Pleroma (Minns 2010: 37). This separation is the origin of the demiurge and the phenomenal world. Since a true God has no desire, He has no will and thus does not act. However, as a result of this lack of intervention in the world, many people mistakenly take the demiurge to be the supreme entity.

---

[12]Although he doesn't explicitly put it in these terms himself.

The literal truth of the claims that the Gnostics make is not important for Schopenhauer; he does not believe that the demiurge or aeons exist. What *is* important is that the Gnostics themselves did not understand their texts to be conveying literally truths (unlike Christian theologians who purport that the canonical gospels are historically accurate accounts of Jesus' life). They derived their beliefs from what they called *gnosis*, which denotes "not primarily rational knowledge … we could translate it as 'insight'" into the true nature of the world (Pagels 1979: xviii-xix). Schopenhauer takes *gnosis* to denote the same type of experience described by Buddhist accounts of nirvana and similar concepts in other mystical traditions. Just as the attainment of nirvana corresponds to increased compassion, their *gnosis* led the Gnostics to "reject [the demiurge's] gifts" – all the objects of willful desire – for "they lamented the infinite misery of existence, and added that it is better to bring no children into such a world" (*WWR II* 622). He juxtaposes these teachings to those of Clement of Alexandria, who authored a text "vigorously censuring" them (*WWR II* 622). Yet Schopenhauer contends that "it is precisely this [pessimistic] spirit [of the New Testament] that the Gnostics grasped more profoundly and understood better than did our Church Father" (*WWR II* 622).

We can identify how the pessimistic spirit of these teachings corresponds to an allegorical approach to reading scripture by examining the Valentinian interpretation of Matthew 8:5-13. There, Jesus offers to go to the home of a Roman centurion to heal his paralyzed servant. The centurion replies, "Lord, I am not worthy to have You come under my roof. But only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me" (Mathew 8:8-9). To the Valentinian Gnostics, the centurion, as an authority figure, symbolized the ignorant demiurge (Irenaeus: 1:7:4). In this passage, he is seen declaring himself unworthy to have Jesus enter his home, allegorically, the phenomenal world. This was interpreted as an act of

deference to Jesus' authority over him as Christ, an *aeon* whose true abode is in the Pleroma – *viz.* Christ is a "son" of the true God (Irenaeus 1:7:4). Christ himself is held to be bodiless,[13] but took human form to "save" humanity, symbolized by the servant, since its master – the centurion or demiurge – is impotent to do so. This salvation takes the form of imparting the wisdom of compassion, self-sacrifice, humility, and other virtues that evince denial of will.

Whether any interaction between a Roman centurion and the historical Jesus ever actually took place is entirely irrelevant to the inner truth of what the Valentinians believed the passage to convey. The Gnostic, unlike the Church Father, sees the real, inner truth of the nature of the world as independent of any temporally-bound narrative. Rather than declaring (as Schopenhauer takes the Church Fathers to do, in spirit), "[t]he demiurge has made this world; from this it is a priori certain that it is excellent, no matter what it looks like" (*WWR II* 622), the Gnostic, like any adherent of a thoroughly pessimistic religion, does not need to search for reasons extraneous to his experience as an embodied subject to justify his beliefs. For, as mentioned above, orthodox Christian theology is *logos*-centric, while Gnostic "theology" is *mythos*-centric. Thus, Gnostic writers do not, as Maurice Blanchot accused Thomas Aquinas of doing, engage in a "rigorous form of a determinate logic and a mode of questioning that is actually a mode of answering" (*The Infinite Conversation* 3).

This aligns Gnostic phenomenology with that of polytheism, which Paul Tillich notes in *Systematic Theology*, "is a qualitative and not a quantitative concept." (222). In other words, the difference between polytheism and monotheism is not reducible to a mere dispute about the number deities that exist. Rather, polytheists interpret (and represent) their experience of the world, and its inner nature and the relationship between that inner nature and phenomenal appearances,

---

[13] This lack of embodiment is why the demiurge (will) has no authority over him, and so symbolizes the state of nirvana or gnosis.

in a fundamentally different way than monotheists. "Polytheism, as qualitative," Tillich contends, "is characterized by a lack of belief in a transcending, unifying, ultimate" (*Systematic Theology* 222). For Schopenhauer, the belief that Tillich claims polytheism lacks is clearly an optimistic one; it promises that the subjective embodied experience of suffering serves some higher – "transcending, unifying, ultimate" – purpose.

Tillich seems to be on firm ground in asserting that paganism lacks this optimistic belief. Moreover, because of this lack, it should be unsurprising that pagan "theology" does not attempt to identify, by way of rationalization and abstraction, universal laws or patterns that demonstrate that existence has some transcendent, unified, ultimate purpose. Consider the Germanic creation story preserved in *The Elder Edda:* "From Ymir's flesh the earth was formed, and from his blood the sea; rocks from bones, trees from hair, and from his skull the sky" ("Grimnismal" 40).[14] This is not intended as an historical, literal account that ascribes purpose to creation by locating its origin with a unifying, transcendent, ultimate divinity by and through which all existential contradictions are rationally resolved. On the contrary, it aims to express that the world, and its inner nature, "does not derive its status of existence from something that is not part of it" (de Benoist, *On Being a Pagan* 67). The "sacred is connected to visible, tangible reality, even and especially when it *idealizes* the latter" – unlike the abstract, deductive, determinate logic employed by monotheistic theologians, the *mythos* of paganism proceeds by way of "*induction* based on *lived experience*" (*On Being a Pagan* 109, 111). Reinforcing this interpretation and the allegorical understanding of such mythic accounts, Tacitus writes of Germanic pagans that, "Their holy places are woods and groves, and they apply the names of deities to that hidden presence which is seen only by the eye of reverence" (*Germania* 9).

---

[14]Strikingly similar accounts can be found in the *Rigveda* and most all other Indo-European belief systems. See Benveniste, *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society* (1969/2016).

Schopenhauer likewise understood the Gnostics to represent what they took to be the inner nature of the world – the "hidden presence" of Tacitus' Germans, which is not essentially separate from the phenomenal world as it is experienced by embodied subjects – in an allegorical, *mythos*-centered way, as opposed to a rationalistic, *logos*-centered one (as theologians like Aquinas do). The Gnostic is as unconcerned with rationally *proving* the existence of their demiurge or aeons as Germanic pagans were with proving the accuracy of the creation story preserved in *The Elder Edda*. For neither Gnostics nor Germanic pagans believed that the legitimacy of the "truth" about the nature of the world expressed by way of allegory depended upon the literal, historical accuracy or logical cogency of such allegorical representations.[15] Schopenhauer extends this characterization to other religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, that he classifies as pessimistic.

With regards to Gnosticism in particular, contemporary historians and philosophers of religion largely concur with that characterization.[16] Such scholars argue that, unlike the books of the Evangelists, which are taken by orthodox Christian theologians to be in at least some sense historically accurate (they are taken describe phenomenal events that occurred in a specific time and place), the Gnostic gospels were in no way understood by Gnostics to be expressing literal, historical, or logical claims about phenomenal events. This is why they often appear to be, superficially, entirely inconsistent with each other. But the genuine philosopher, according to Schopenhauer, can see beyond this superficiality at the level of *logos* to identify the shared beliefs

---

[15]Further, Gnosticism as well as Germanic (and likely all forms of Indo-European) paganism rejects a transcending, unifying, ultimate divine creator or ordering principle. The Gnostic demiurge is cast *outside* the transcendent pleroma, is divisive and chaotic, and is not ultimately perfect or good. Both Gnosticism and paganism, on the basis of subjective embodied experience, allegorically portray the "truth" of the inner nature of the world (understood by those with *gnosis* or "the eye of reverence") as inseparable from its phenomenal objectivity. The Gnostics merely go a step further than pagans, as do Buddhists and Hindus, on Schopenhauer's reading, by a more radical denouncement of the desire for things of the world.
[16]See: Jeffery Kripal, *The Serpent's Gift: Gnostic Reflections on the Study of Religion* (2006); April DeConnick, *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels of John, Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature* (2001); Iaon Couliano, *The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism* (1992); and Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God & the Beginning of Christianity* (2001).

about the inner nature of the world that they allegorically express, which cannot be communicated rationally.[17] And the genuine philosopher can identify similar beliefs expressed in all allegorical religious texts, not only those of the religious tradition into which he was born, because he does not attempt to impose a "mode of answering" questions about such texts that derives from his own belief system in advance of encountering those of other traditions.

---

[17]See, e.g., *WWR II* (611-12): "Philosophy has its value and virtue in its rejection of all assumptions that cannot be substantiated … Its theme must restrict itself to the world; to express from every aspect *what* this world is, what it *may be* in its innermost nature, is all that it can honestly achieve … Now it is precisely here that the mystic proceeds positively, and therefore, from this point, nothing is left but mysticism."

3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOPENHAUER'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND HIS CRITICISM OF SCHELLING AND HEGEL

While Schopenhauer takes the genuine philosopher's ground of knowledge to be subjective embodied experience, he takes those associated with German Idealism to identify that ground with one or another notion of the absolute. The reasons for Schopenhauer's suspicion regarding the absolute are very similar to those advanced a century later by Heidegger as part of his criticism of "ontotheology." As we have already seen to be the case with Schopenhauer, Heidegger finds the notion that one can be both a philosopher and religious a "pernicious opinion" because the nature of the questions that philosophy asks "is, for faith, foolishness" (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 8). He contends that philosophy itself, due to the strength of this pernicious opinion, "has deteriorated to a tradition in which it gets reduced to something self-evident [and provides] merely material for reworking, as it was in Hegel" (*Being and Time* 43). This deterioration began when Ancient Greek philosophy was "uprooted" and its original unencumbered nature "forgotten" after being stamped "with the peculiar character which the Scholastics gave it" and subsequently "traveled the path that leads through the *Disputationes meta physicae* of Suarez to the 'metaphysics' and transcendental philosophy of modern times, determining even the foundations and aims of Hegel's 'logic'" (43-44). Three contentions relevant to the present discussion are encapsulated by the neologism "ontotheology" alluded to above.[18] First, since it was merged with Christian theology via Scholasticism, philosophers have "forgotten" the unencumbered nature of philosophy qua philosophy. Second, commensurate with this forgetting, philosophers took the truth and superiority of Christian doctrine to be self-evident, unable to consider as problematic the way this belief affected their projects. Finally, German Idealism is not an exception to the first two charges.

---

[18]This is by no means intended as comprehensive account of the various facets or implications of Heidegger's criticism of ontotheology, which would call for far greater explication than I can or need to give here.

Schopenhauer anticipated Heidegger's criticisms of German Idealism, for similar reasons.[19] As discussed above, Schopenhauer identified the problematic nature of Christian theology's endeavor to use logic and reason to support positive assertations about the inner nature of the world. And he further charged philosophers such as Hegel with doing much the same, and to similar ends, without acknowledgment. In this way, Schopenhauer's critique of German Idealism does not depend on a thorough and unimpeachable technical mastery of, for example, Hegelian dialectic. Like much of Heidegger's criticism, Schopenhauer's critique is metaphilosophical and methodological: he takes thinkers such as Hegel and Schelling to build their philosophical systems upon a foundation of unexamined and unwarranted optimistic, crypto-theological assumptions. And as a result, he contends that those philosophical systems, whatever their technicalities, cannot possibly identify the truth of the inner nature of the world, as they claim, and necessarily have pernicious consequences.

As early as 1811, Schopenhauer's manuscript notes reveal that he was highly critical of the tendency of his professors, namely Schelling and Fichte, to blur the distinctions among philosophy, mysticism, and theology. Schelling describes the absolute as "the ideal [that] is also immediately real, [and it] cannot be known through explanations, only through intuition"[20] (*Philosophy and Religion* 24-25). He further declares that God is "the form – through which the essentiality of the Absolute depicts itself" and that the "absolute is the only actual; the finite world, by contrast, is not real" (*Philosophy and Religion* 26-27). When Schelling argues that the absolute can be known by intuition alone, he means that the absolute cannot be known by experience. In his system,

---

[19]I position Schopenhauer alongside Heidegger merely to demonstrate the salience, and frame the discussion, of Schopenhauer's criticisms of the methods and assumptions employed by philosophers associated with German Idealism, which resonate with a (still) very influential later critique of the same. Insofar as my concern is simply the not insignificant, perhaps even somewhat uncanny, resonance between their *criticisms of German Idealism in particular*, it is not necessary for the purposes of this essay to elaborate on whether or not Heidegger considered Schopenhauer an ontotheologian or was justified or unjustified in doing so.

[20]Also called "reason-intuition" or "intellectual intuition" (Schelling 1804: 23).

intuition is a faculty that allows us to grasp supersensible, *a priori* truths. Thus, Schopenhauer concludes that for Schelling, the absolute is "not thinkable, but is merely intellectually intuitable" (*WWR I* 25). However, he doesn't take Schelling to have adequately demonstrated that such a faculty exists, and even if it does, that it's universally accessible. Hence the caustic claim that he is unable to present a technical, detailed critique of the absolute, as he "wholly lack[s] reason-intuition, [so] all these expositions which presuppose it must be to me like a book with seven seals" (*WWR I* 25).

Schopenhauer's reading of Schelling is neither superficial nor uncharitable. Schelling explicitly asserts in *Philosophy and Religion* that "those who arrive at the idea of the Absolute through the description that philosophy provides … never achieve more than a conditional knowledge of it; but it is not possible to gain unconditional knowledge from a conditional one" (11). Given Schelling's claim that philosophy cannot adequately describe the absolute, Schopenhauer's assertion that works expounding on its nature are like "a book with seven seals" is apt – it suggests that such works have an inappropriate quasi-religious or pseudo-mystical character. Schopenhauer first noted as much in unpublished commentary on Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations* from the winter of 1811/12. He chastises that work as "almost entirely a recasting of Jacob Boehme's *Mysterium Magnum*, in which practically every sentence and expression can be identified" (*HN2*: 316-7, trans. App: 2014, 66).[21] The problem is that Schelling appropriated Boehme's concepts, originally used in a mystical context, in the development of a purportedly philosophical – not theological – system. Schopenhauer protests that he borrows Boehme's "similes, forms, and expressions" but didn't undergo the same experience of

---

[21]Boehme was Christian mystic born at the close of the German Renaissance. A shoemaker by trade with no formal education, he attempted to syncretize his visionary experiences with Lutheran theology and the teachings of the influential alchemist Paracelsus.

"realization of eternal truth" that they allegorically attempt to describe (*HN2*: 314, trans. App: 2014, 66-67). Therefore, Schelling is led to "take the peel for the fruit or at least [he] cannot distinguish one from the other" (*HN2*: 314, trans. App: 2014, 66-67). That is, Schelling does not identify a universal ground of knowledge that he then uses to evaluate mystical or religious claims; he instead incorporates mystical terms, without full comprehension of the truth they seek to allegorically convey, into his metaphysical system as he is building it.

Schelling is not unique in this regard. Hegel also expounded on Boehme's work, and even deemed him "the first German philosopher" (Muratori 2016: 1). This epithet shows how Hegel implicitly rejects the distinction Schopenhauer makes between philosophy and religion. We can glimpse the significance of this rejection for Hegel's thought by turning to a remark in the *Science of Logic*, where he writes,

> The idealism of philosophy consists in nothing else than in the recognition that the finite is not truly existent. Every philosophy is essentially idealism or at least has idealism as its principle, and the question then is only how far this principle is carried out. This applies to philosophy just as much as to religion, for religion also, no less than philosophy, will not admit finitude as a true being, an ultimate, an absolute, or as something non-posited, uncreated, eternal. (*SL* 124).

Thus, Hegel agrees with Schelling's earlier claim that the finite is not real, and that the absolute alone has true being. This is a different claim from Schopenhauer's, which is that the finite (representation) is as real as the infinite (will), but both are real only insofar as they are known, that is, experienced, by embodied subjects. An embodied subject can only experience the will, which is truly infinite, metonymically, *as* finite, *as* "his" individual will through the medium of his embodiment as an object, a representation, existing in time and space. The will itself cannot be known or experienced *as infinite* by anything, because every "thing" is by definition finite.[22] The

---

[22]Thus, Schopenhauer concludes the first volume of *WWR* with the claim that "to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world of ours, with all its suns and galaxies, is – nothing" which is how he interprets the notion

world is will *and* representation: this duality is perceptible only by embodied subjects; one cannot exist without the other, just as a subject cannot exist without an object. That finite objects are real only to the extent that they are experienced in space and time does not necessitate the conclusion that they are "not truly existent" – indeed, they are existent by virtue of the fact that they *can* be experienced in time and space. As mentioned earlier, Schopenhauer takes this position to be consistent with Vedanta and Buddhist metaphysics. Therefore, he would have realized the inaccurate, ontotheological nature of Hegel's categorical assertion that religion does not admit finitude as uncreated and eternal. Hinduism and Buddhism do not conceive of the division between the finite and infinite in the same way as Hegel, and either *do* take what he calls finitude to be eternal and uncreated or else dismiss the concern entirely.[23]

Schopenhauer, on the other hand, understands disparate religions traditions, regardless of where they are practiced or when they were founded, or whether they bear any superficial similarity to each other, to convey identical inner truth that, due to the nature of language, is expressed in many ways in different times and places. The allegories these traditions produce develop independently, influenced by vastly different conceptual frameworks. He does not grant ontological legitimacy in a literal sense to any specific concepts from any of these traditions, but reads the primary texts from all of them allegorically. Hence, he was able to understand the Gnostic demiurge as a concept originating within a late Hellenistic, syncretic framework that expresses a metaphysical principle allegorically portrayed in other religions as well. Once such a principle is identified, it can be confirmed as congruent or incongruent with a metaphysics based on reflection

---

of "Prajana-Paramita of the Buddhists, the 'beyond all knowledge,' in other words, *the point where subject and object no longer exist*" (412, my emphasis).

[23]And, as discussed earlier, so do Indo-European pagan traditions.

upon subjective embodied experience. The same cannot be said of the "unthinkable" absolute of German Idealism.

As a further result of his approach to religious texts and traditions, Schopenhauer is able to recognize how in "the life of the Christian penitent or saint and that of an Indian [guru] … in spite of such fundamentally different dogmas, customs, and circumstances, the endeavor and the inner life of both are absolutely the same" (*WWR I* 339). Given the extent to which they extolled the superiority of Christianity, it would not occur to Hegel or Schelling that practitioners of other faiths could have an inner ethical life as rich as that of a Christian. Schopenhauer manages to avoid this kind of provincialism in part because he is unconcerned with the rationalistic *theological* exposition of primary religious texts. He reads all religious texts allegorically, and his understanding of what those allegories seek to convey is not foregrounded by a set of hermeneutical principles established by the theological tradition of any given religion.

In many ways, Schopenhauer's treatment of the gospels in this regard is an act of the highest charity and respect. He does not dismiss the canonical works of Christianity based on his disagreement with the claims made about them by theologians. Instead, he takes pains to read the gospels in such a way that they *can* appeal to the authority of what he takes to be the ground of genuine philosophy, charitably assuming that they *are* attempting to convey something profound and true about the world "as if through a veil and mist" (*WWR I* 387). He takes his approach to such texts to be epistemically well-grounded in a way that theological approaches are not. As a result, his exegesis of orthodox Christian scripture is conducted with the same care and respect as his study of *The Upanishads* and Sufi poetry. He neither dismisses orthodox Christian scripture, nor simply leans on religious texts that support his system. What he rejects are theological

abstractions and rationalizations that obscure allegorical readings of scripture that readily conform to subjective embodied experience.

Schopenhauer's approach stands in stark contrast to the one demonstrated in *Philosophy and Religion*. There, Schelling attempts to account for how religions that embraced metaphysical monism throughout history explained how the finite came to be sundered from the infinite. He presents a taxonomy of such religions, classifying them as either advancing a "fall" model of reality, an "emanation" model, or a "dualist" model. The fall model (exemplified by Christianity) posits that "the origin of the phenomenal world is conceivable only as a complete falling away from absoluteness by means of a leap" (*Philosophy and Religion* 26). The emanation model (exemplified by Neo-Platonism) posits that "the outflowings from the godhood, in gradual increments and detachment from the originary source, lose their divine perfection, until, in the end, they pass into the opposite (matter, privation)" (*Philosophy and Religion* 24). The dualist model (exemplified by Zoroastrianism) "explains the mixture of the finite and infinite principles in the phenomenal world by assuming an incessant state of conflict between two primeval beings" (*Philosophy and Religion* 25).

Schelling argues for the ontological superiority of the fall model, because the dualist model makes God "the originator of evil" and the emanation model, while not as egregious as the dualist model, nonetheless implies that God can be corrupted, and, ergo, be less than perfect (*Philosophy and Religion* 26). Because he asserts that only the absolute is actual and the finite world not real, Schelling claims that the reason for finitude can be explained only by way of "a *remove*, a *falling-away*, from the Absolute" and "*no finite thing can directly originate from the Absolute or be traced back to it*" (*Philosophy and Religion* 26 and 29, original emphasis). These assertions are an example of the ontological privilege that Schelling affords to the absolute. But for Schopenhauer,

as we have seen, there is no sound philosophical reason to presuppose this privilege. There is, however, a clear theological one. Schelling manages to preserve the goodness of God in the face of the fact that everything we have recourse to that *would* form the basis of a sound methodological inquiry – one based on our subjective embodied experience – indicates that the world and its creator are *not* good. Schelling attempts to foreclose any such inquiry. He begins with the assumption that God is good, and the absolute actual. Only then does he turn to the finite, which, subject to change, decay, and corruption, is by definition not good (in the sense of perfect, immutable, and eternal). Therefore, he concludes that the finite must be devoid of absoluteness and thus reality.

However, this argument only holds if one adheres to the sort of metaphysical optimism that Schopenhauer associates with Clement, in contrast to the pessimism of the Gnostics; if one holds, like Tillich, that there must be some "transcending, unifying, ultimate" that defines the meaning and purpose of life, in contrast to simply the immanent chaos of becoming embraced by paganism. That is, the validity of Schelling's argument hinges on whether the absolute is actual, God exists, and is good. These are the very optimistic assumptions that set the parameters for his investigation and conclusion, but a philosophical methodology that "assumes in advance what it professes to deduce" (*WWR* I 34) is an epistemic dead end. Solely with reference to subjective embodied experience, we have no reason to accept Schelling's optimistic assumptions. Indeed, we have every reason to reject them. Yet to the extent that he, like Schopenhauer, takes note of the suffering attendant upon finitude, Schelling manages, deftly but abstrusely, to make it support the exact opposite conclusion (which aligns with his presupposed religious commitments). Rather than acknowledge the problem that suffering poses for the Christian God, he denies that suffering *actually* exists; rather than deny the goodness of God, he denies the reality of the finite world.

Schopenhauer's contestation of these conclusions does not just rely on a reiteration of the problem of evil. God's existence or non-existence and culpability or exoneration are tangential issues. What's at stake for him is whether existence is desirable at all. He is convinced that any real philosopher, who, with recourse only to explanations congruent with subjective embodied experience, reflects upon the acutely experienced injustice and hardship that all living things encounter undeservingly each day, will issue the verdict that, "unless suffering is the direct and immediate object of life, our existence must entirely fail of its aim" (*On the Sufferings of the World* 1). He takes this verdict to be incontrovertible as well as the basis of morality – and precisely what German Idealism, as befits its apologetical character, will not admit.

If non-existence is indeed preferable to existence, we can see why questions about God are tangential to what's truly at stake. The knowledge that hell has an architect will not transform it into heaven, and that those condemned by their birth to live in this hell can hold such an architect culpable for their torment does nothing to lessen it. The classic rendition of the problem of evil contends that if God could have prevented suffering, he would have. But if it is not possible for existence to be free of suffering, as Schopenhauer holds, the next question we must ask is whether it is better to exist and suffer than not exist at all. Schopenhauer sees no reason to think that it is.

With this point in mind, we return to Schelling's and Hegel's degradation of finitude. We have seen that unlike those philosophers, Schopenhauer takes the infinite and finite to be ontologically equivalent. For to deny of the reality of finitude, as they do, is to deny of the reality of the experience of embodied subjects, which in turn functions as a denial of the reality of their sufferings. Thus, they completely sidestep the question of the value of our existence: we need not be concerned with whether non-existence is preferable to existence, because finite beings and the sufferings attendant to finitude aren't *actually* real in the first place. Only the absolute is real, and

there is no "conduit or bridge between the infinite and the finite" (*Philosophy and Religion* 26). Because of this lack of a bridge between the infinite and finite, they can justify dismissal of the epistemic value of subjective embodied experiences (the most fundamental and obvious of which is that of suffering). And thus is the reality and goodness of God preserved at the cost of making "a bitter mockery of the unspeakable sufferings of humanity" (*WWR I* 352).

4   CONCLUSION: WHY IT MATTERS

I have argued that Schopenhauer saw German Idealism as a project committed to defending Christian metaphysics. I've provided evidence showing that the unique, cosmopolitan nature of his study of religion enabled him to identify the problematic nature of this endeavor. But if religion is merely popular metaphysics that fails to satisfy the real philosopher's metaphysical need, and German Idealism is fundamentally a religious project, then the real philosopher would surely recognize this and move on. The deeper problem lies with the common people who, unlike the philosopher, acquire ethical principles from their religion.

Recall that for Schopenhauer, to the extent they can satisfy the average person's metaphysical need, religious teachings have the capacity to be "an inestimable benefit … [but] with reference to the mental capacity of the great mass of people, they can only have an indirect, not a direct truth" (*WWR II* 168). Recall further that allegory is the most successful way of conveying this truth, which is fundamentally pessimistic. Finally, recall that theology grows progressively abstract and convoluted the more it attempts to reconcile pessimistic truths that conform to embodied subjective experience with optimistic claims that do not.

In support for these contentions, I would with confidence posit that most members of the Christian faithful do not spend, and have never spent, much time pondering the arguments made in the writings of the Church Fathers, Martin Luther, or encyclicals published by the Vatican. If this is an accurate observation, at least two explanations, which are not mutually exclusive, seem likely: the faithful do not need to be convinced of their faith by theologians or philosophers, and they find theological and philosophical works uninteresting, pedantic, or incomprehensible. Once theologians or philosophers find it necessary to construct complex intellectual defenses of their religion, we can infer that the faithful are wavering in their faith and *do* need to be convinced of

the truth of its principles. Ergo, abstract arguments are made to discredit the ways in which their subjective embodied experience contradicts the religion's metaphysical principles.

Any such argument, however, merely delays the inevitable unless the root cause of the contradiction – the religion's promotion of optimistic metaphysical principles – is addressed. So, just "as the oldest languages are the most perfect, so too are the oldest religions" (*WWR II* 169), because the oldest extant religions (Hinduism and Buddhism) are the least optimistic.[24] They have survived for so long because their pessimistic principles are consistent with the lived experience of their adherents – and so, those religions do not face the existential vulnerability caused by the inconsistency between their principles and subjective embodied experience that more optimistic religions confront.[25] As mentioned earlier, the metaphysical need of the common people is satisfied if the principles presented by their religion are apparently true such that they can be accepted as a matter of course. This is a low but not vacuous standard. Should the common people come to see their religion's principles as blatantly incompatible with subjective embodied experience, they will no longer be able to adopt it as a matter of course. The more abstract and technical the defense of the religion becomes, the harder it will be for most to comprehend. Such a defense will therefore ultimately fail to convince the common people of the apparent truth of their religion's principles.

The religion will then have failed in its fundamental function and head towards demise. The common people, lacking both an apparently true metaphysical system that can be adopted as a matter of course and the real philosopher's intellectual curiosity and power of comprehension,

---

[24]Relatedly, we can infer that the reason Schopenhauer finds the oldest languages to be the most perfect is because they retain descriptions of the immediate objects of perception that are as direct and unencumbered as possible, with the least amount of abstraction. See *WWR §9* for his discussion of the origin and development of language, and the relationship between immediate perception, reflection, concrete and abstract concepts, and the necessary progression of a linguistic concept over time to become a "representation of a representation … not a representation of perception" (41-42).
[25]Though, pessimistic religions are not invulnerable to more direct, external threats (for instance, physical violence and political repression at the hands of adherents to more optimistic – *willful* – religions) as the history of Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, and Sufism shows.

will then have no clear way to answer the existential questions that give rise to their need for metaphysics. So, there will be no regulative or inoculative force to prevent them from believing that the highest good consists in attempting to satiate, rather than deny, the will by seeking to acquire the objects of their willing. Yet it is this attitude towards one's willing and the objects at which it is directed that is the root of all suffering. When religion, as popular metaphysics, performs its function successfully, such attitudes and the vicious propensities they engender are kept in check.

Schopenhauer's strident criticisms of Christianity indicate that he believed it was on the precipice of being unable to perform its function successfully. We should therefore understand the scenario described above as what he took to be the near-condition of contemporary Europe,[26] for which the advent of German Idealism was proof. The abstract and oblique nature of the claims made by those associated with German Idealism – including their rejection of an in principle universally accessible ground of knowledge in favor of a universally *inaccessible* ground, and subsequent denial of the reality of suffering – is entirely consistent with what Schopenhauer's philosophy of religion suggests the intellectual defenders of a religious tradition that it is no longer capable of fulfilling its function would produce.

We can now see why Schopenhauer would conclude that German Idealism evinces the worst of religion and the worst of philosophy. It perniciously intermixes the two but abandons the core function of both. Those whose metaphysical need is satisfied by what their religion teaches have no need for Hegel's and Schelling's discussions of the nature of the absolute. And those of wavering faith who take solace in the notion of the absolute seek not the freedom of philosophy, but the leading-strings of religion. Yet those leading-strings would not be of much support for

---

[26]It follows that Schopenhauer would not have been surprised that his most prodigious reader from the next generation would find himself declaring that "God is dead ... And we have killed him" (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125).

long. It would be only a matter of time before they, no longer the well-woven cables of allegory but rather the frayed twine of ontotheology, snap, unable to support the weight of the myriad conceptual contradictions developed in the course of Christianity's attempts to reconcile its pessimistic truths with its optimistic delusions. For Schopenhauer, the solution to the impending crisis of meaning facing Europe was not to be found in the notions of God or the Absolute, but instead precisely in what German Idealism failed to provide (indeed, did its best to avoid providing), and his system, as well as those of all thoroughly pessimistic religious traditions, does: affirmation of the lived experience of embodied subjects as *the* constituent component of reality, and recognition of what that affirmation entails for the meaning of one's life and how it ought to be lived.

REFERENCES

Anonymous (1270). Grimnismal. In: *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore.* Edited and
translated by A. Orchard (2011). Penguin Classics: London.

App, U. (2014). *Schopenhauer's Compass*. Wil, Switzerland: University Media.

Benveniste, E. (1969). *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society.* Translated by E.
Palmer (2016). Chicago: HAU Books.

Blanchot, M. (1969). *The Infinite Conversation.* Translated by S. Hanson (1992). Minneapolis:
The University of Minnesota Press.

Couliano, I. (1992). *The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern
Nihilism.* New York: HarperCollins.

de Benoist, A. (2018). *On Being a Pagan.* 2nd ed. Edited by M. Moynihan. Translated by J.
Graham. North Augusta, SC: Arcana Europa Media.

Deconnick, A. (2001). *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels of John
and Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic
Press.

Hegel, G. (1816). *The Science of Logic*. Translated by G. di Giovanni (2010). Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1927). *Being and Time.* Translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (1962).
New York: Harper & Row.

Heidegger, M. (1952). *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Translated by G. Fried and R. Polt (2014).
New Haven: Yale University Press.

Irenaeus. (180). *Against Heresies*. 2nd ed. Edited and Translated by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson
(2015). Ex Fontibus Co.

Jonas, H. (2001). *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*. 3rd Ed. Boston: Beacon Press.

Kripal, J. (2006). *The Serpent's Gift: Gnostic Reflections on the Study of Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Minns, Dennis (2010). *Irenaeus: An Introduction*. London: Bloomsbury.

Muratori, C. (2016). *The First German Philosopher*. New York: Springer.

Nietzsche, F. (1882). *The Gay Science*. Edited by B. Williams (2001). Translated by J. Nauckhoff and A. Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pagels, E. (1979). *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Vintage Books.

Ryan, C. (2010). *Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Religion*. Leuven, Belgium: Peeter's.

Schelling, F. (1804). *Philosophy and Religion*. 2nd ed. Translated by K. Ottoman (2010). Putnam, CT: Spring Publications.

Schopenhauer, A. (1841). On the Basis of Morality. In: *Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*. Translated by D. Cartwright and E. Erdmann (2010). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schopenhauer, A. (1851). Religion. In: *Complete Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer*. Translated by T. Saunders (1942). New York: Willey Book Company.

Schopenhauer, A. (1851). On the Sufferings of the World. In: *Complete Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer*. Translated by T. Saunders (1942). New York: Willey Book Company.

Schopenhauer, A. (1819). *The World as Will and Representation, Vol. 1*. Translated by E. Payne (1969). New York: Dover Publications.

Schopenhauer, A. (1844). *The World as Will and Representation, Vol. 2*. Translated by E. Payne (1969). New York: Dover Publications.

Shapshay, S. (2008). Poetic Intuition and the Bounds of Sense: Metaphor and Metonym in

     Schopenhauer's Philosophy. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 16(2), pp. 211-229.

Tacitus. (98). Germania. In: *Agricola and Germania*. Edited by J. Rives (2010). Translated by H.

     Mattingly. Penguin Classics: London.

The Bible: King James Version. Available at: https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/King-

     James-Version-KJV-Bible/ [accessed 16 Sep. 2018].

Tillich, P. (1951). *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.