

The Ambiguity of the Sacred in the Philosophy of Schopenhauer

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I would like to propose in this article that the question of the Sacred is by no means closed in Schopenhauer's philosophy. A careful analysis of his *Weltanschauung* and anthropological claims illustrates that a "back door" to this question is left ajar for the student of Schopenhauer's thought. Raising the question about a so-called "back door" to the Sacred in his philosophy, of course, brings into focus whether a "front door" approach to the aforementioned issue has any relevance. One would justifiably presume that the question of a "back door" to the problematic at hand would not even be raised if it could be clearly ascertained that a direct approach to the Holy were a possibility for Schopenhauer. But were this truly to be the case, the entire tenor of his philosophy would change. For a "front door" to the Sacred, from a philosophical point of view, means that it is possible to speak meaningfully about God. Schopenhauer, however, maintains that any philosophical discourse about a personal, creator God is beyond the exigence of reason in light of his acceptance of the Kantian critique which discredits the ontological, cosmological, and physico-theological proofs for God's existence.¹

An indication of what exactly is meant by the word God in Schopenhauer's *Weltanschauung* is given in *Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde* (*On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*) where the following is stated: "The word God, honestly used, denotes such a cause of the world with the addition of personality."² Another passage from the same work is even more specific in that the above notion is expanded. Here Schopenhauer contends that 'the doctrine of God' entails that the Supreme Being be understood as "creator and ruler of the world, a personal and therefore an individual being endowed with understanding and will, who has brought it forth out of nothing and guides

¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* I, "Kritik des Kantischen Philosophie," *Zürcher Ausgabe in zehn Bänden*, Band II, S.623-624. Henceforth cited as *Vorstellung*. English translation: *The World as Will and Representation*, "Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy," vol. 1, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), p. 511. Henceforth cited as *Representation*.

² Arthur Schopenhauer, *Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde*, in *Zürcher Ausgabe in zehn Bänden*, Band V (Zürich: Diogenes Verlag, 1977), 8, S.25. Henceforth cited as *Grunde*. English translation: Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (La Salle: Open Court, 1974), § 8, p. 18. Henceforth cited as *Reason*.

it with highest wisdom, power and goodness."³ In *Parerga und Paralipomena* the same claims are once again clearly underscored. Schopenhauer states that theism "demands a world-cause that is not only different from the world, but is intelligent, that is to say, knows and wills, and so is personal and consequently individual; it is only such a cause that is indicated by the word God."⁴

From a strictly philosophical point of view that prescind from the data of revelation, Schopenhauer argues that the existence of a personal God with the above attributes cannot be proven from experience. Thus, he is not in agreement with supporters of the *ontological* proof for the existence of God, who contend that the notion of *existence* is already contained in the concept of a supremely perfect being.⁵ Calling the proof a "delightful farce," Schopenhauer maintains that the attributes the proof ascribes to God are in no way grounded in empirical reality and that, in effect, the ontological proof is but a 'phantom' in one's brain.⁶

With regard to the *cosmological* proof, Schopenhauer admits at the outset that if the exigence of reason could "attain to the concept of God, even without revelation, this obviously happens only under the guidance of causality."⁷ But given his analysis of causality as pertaining only to an endless series of changes in states of matter, "a First Cause is as unthinkable as a beginning of time or a limit for space."⁸ This means in effect, therefore, that there is but one correct formulation for the law of causality in Schopenhauer's *Weltanschauung*; "every change has its cause in another change immediately preceding it."⁹ Schopenhauer states: "...show me an unmoved cause; it is simply impossible."¹⁰ The law of causality, in short, is immanent to the world and can have no transcendent application. It applies to things

³ *Ibid.*, § 34, S.140; *Ibid.*, § 34, p.182.

⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena I*, in *Zürcher Ausgabe Werke in zehn Bänden*, Band VII (Zürich: Diogenes Verlag, 1977), § 13, S.131. Henceforth cited as *Parerga I*. English translation: *Parerga and Paralipomena*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), vol. I, § 13, p. 115. Henceforth cited as *Parerga*.

⁵ Cf. *Grunde*, V, § 7, S.22-24; *Reason*, § 7, p. 14-16 for a detailed critique of the ontological proof as outlined by Descartes, for example.

⁶ *Ibid.*, S.23-24; *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷ *Vorstellung I*, "Kritik des Kantischen Philosophie," II, S.621; *Representation I*, "Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy," p. 509.

⁸ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Über die Freiheit des menschlichen Willens*, in *Zürcher Ausgabe Werke in zehn Bänden*, Band VI, III, S.66. Henceforth cited as *Freiheit*. English translation: *Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, trans. Konstantin Kolenda (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), III, p. 28. Henceforth cited as *Freedom*.

⁹ *Vorstellung II*, III, Kap.4, S.54; *Representation II*, ch. 4, p. 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*

in the world, but not to the world itself.¹¹ Hence, discourse about a *First Cause* is meaningless in this respect as the following passage from *Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde* indicates:

The law of causality is . . . not so obliging as to allow itself to be used like a cab which we dismiss after we arrive at our destination. On the contrary, it is like the broom that is brought to life by Goethe's apprentice magician which, once set in motion, neither stops running nor fetching water, so that only the old wizard himself can bring it to rest.¹²

As far as the physico-theological argument is concerned, Schopenhauer in *Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde* admits that it "has much more plausibility (*viel mehr Scheinbarkeit*)."¹³ Teleological factors in the cosmos seemingly suggest that the universe in some way or another is the product of a mind other than our own. Thus, he states in *Über den Willen in der Natur* (*On the Will in Nature*):

The evident suitability of each animal to its manner of life and outward means of subsistence, even down to the smallest detail, and the exceeding perfection of its organization, is the richest material of teleological contemplation to which the human mind from time immemorial has readily applied itself . . . The universal fitness for their ends, the obvious intentionality in all parts of the animal organism clearly announce that here forces of nature are not working accidentally and without a plan, but rather that a will has been active.¹⁴

As the above indicates, the physico-theological proof for God's existence is grounded on the apparent finality in the cosmos as especially evidenced in animal organisms. This would imply that the world in some way or another is the product of an intellect or mind. Schopenhauer, however, rejects this possibility at the very outset. He states succinctly

¹¹ *Ibid.*, S.56; *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹² *Grunde*, V, § 20, S.133; *Reason*, § 20, pp. 58-59.

¹³ *Grunde*, V, § 20, S.56; *Reason*, § 20, p. 62.

¹⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Über den Willen in der Natur*, in *Zürcher Ausgabe Werke in zehn Bänden* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1977), Band V, S.235. Henceforth cited as *Natur*. English translation: *On the Will in Nature*, trans. Mme. K. Hillebrand (London: George Bell & Sons, 1889), p. 255. Henceforth cited as *Nature*.

The world is not made with the help of knowledge and therefore not from without, but from within . . . The physico-theological idea that an intellect must have ordered and modeled nature, which is suitable to the unrefined mind, is superficial and nevertheless fundamentally wrong.¹⁵

Schopenhauer goes on to argue that the intellect, as secondary, can never have been the condition for the world's existence since it is a subordinate principle to the noumenal will, and consequently of a latter origin. He maintains the following:

. . . the intellect is recognized by us solely from animal nature and consequently as an absolutely secondary and subordinate principle in the world, a product of the latest origin. It can never, for this reason, have been the condition for the existence of that world. Nor can a *mundus intelligibilis* precede a *mundus sensibilis*; since it receives its material from the latter alone. It is not an intellect that has brought forth nature; it is, rather, nature which has brought forth the intellect.¹⁶

Given the above claims, teleological facticity is ascribed to the will as principle of being--not to God. As a case in point, aseity is categorically ascribed to the noumenal will. "That which the scholastics called the *aseity of God* is fundamentally what I attribute to the will and have called its groundlessness."¹⁷ So as to remove any doubt whatsoever as to what he means, the following claim is made: "My *teaching* explains the existence of the world (which they maintain to be a *work of God*) from the omnipotence (*Allmacht*) of the Will."¹⁸ Accordingly, whatever finality the beholder sees in the cosmos is ultimately explicable by the noumenal will. The following passage speaks for itself:

. . . the will, as that which fills everything and manifests itself immediately in each, thus characterizing everything as its phenomenon, appears everywhere as that which is primary. It is just for this reason, that all teleological facts

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, S.237; *Ibid.*, pp. 257-258.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, S.237-238; *Ibid.*, p. 258.

¹⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß*, herausgegeben von Arthur Hubscher (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), Band IV.1, S.102. Henceforth cited as *Nachlaß*. English translation: *Manuscript Remains*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Berg, 1988), vol. 4, p. 124.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, S.170; *Ibid.*, p. 196.

are to be explained from the will of the being itself in which they are observed.¹⁹

Notwithstanding the veneer of the teleological facticity of nature, Schopenhauer denies that works produced by animal instinct, such as the spider's web, the bee's honeycomb and its cells, the white ant's constructions, and so forth, are the result of "a concept of purpose, of a far-reaching providence, and of rational deliberation." They are, rather, "evidently the work of a blind impulse, i.e., of a will which is not guided by knowledge."²⁰

Moreover, beneath the veneer of the teleological facticity of nature, there lies the will's diseased essence which alone explains reality's scarredness.²¹ Schopenhauer is not swayed by the call to behold the world's external beauty given the reality of pain and suffering. He states categorically: "But is the world then a peep show (*Guckkasten*)? These things are beautiful to *behold*, but to *be* them is something altogether different."²² In short, the suffering and pain that come to the foreground with the appearance of sensibility and intelligence in the animal and human sphere of phenomenal being prohibit the honest person from "break[ing] out into hallelujahs."²³ It goes without saying, therefore, that the physico-theological argument is not acceptable for Schopenhauer.

In light of the above, there is no God in Schopenhauer's world as will and representation. Accordingly, reality does not serve as a bridge that leads to a Transcendent and Supreme Being. This notwithstanding, three passages from the corpus of his thought imply, at the very least, that God's existence does not hinge upon the aforementioned proofs. As a case in point, the claim is made in *Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde* that the impossibility to prove the existence of God does not call into question that existence, inasmuch as it stands on the firmer ground of revelation.²⁴ So as to remove any doubt about what he means, Schopenhauer repeats himself later in the same section (* 35) of the aforementioned work: ". . . the existence of God is a matter of revelation (*Sache der Offenbarung*) and is unshakably established thereby."²⁵ Another passage from *Parerga und Paralipomena* highlights once again the futility of attempting to prove God's existence otherwise than from the scriptures.

¹⁹ *Natur*, V, S.238; *Nature*, p. 258.

²⁰ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*

²¹ *Vorstellung II*, IV, Kap.46, S.678. ". . . nur ein blinder, kein sehender Wille konnte sich selbst in die Lage versetzen, in der wir uns erblicken."; *Representation*, II, ch. 46, p. 579.

²² *Ibid.*, S.680; *Ibid.*, p. 581.

²³ *Ibid.*, S. 681; *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Grunde*, V, § 34, S.141; *Reason*, § 34, p. 183.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, S.145; *Ibid.*, p. 188.

In the Christian religion the existence of God is an established fact and beyond all investigation. This is as it should be; for it belongs here and is itself established by revelation. I therefore regard it as a mistake of the rationalists, when they attempt in their dogmas to prove the existence of God otherwise than from the Scriptures.²⁶

But this interesting claim is weakened by his insistence that revelation is nothing more than the thoughts of sages who, as human beings, are subject to error.²⁷ Given this unfortunate demythologization of revelation, it is difficult to see how Schopenhauer can still maintain that God's existence rests on unshakable ground. For in a Feuerbachian sense theism and its claims spring solely from the agitated heart of the human person and have no rational foundation.²⁸ God is nothing but a fabrication hypostatized by "the intense desire of tormented man."²⁹ Schopenhauer in effect states that prayer to a divine being is at bottom a form of idolatry.

Whether we make an idol out of wood, stone, or metal, or construct it from abstract concepts, it is all the same. It remains *idolatry*, as soon we have before us a personal being to whom we offer sacrifices and whom we invoke and thank. At bottom it is not so different whether we offer our sheep, or our inclinations. Each rite or prayer undeniably is evidence of *idolatry*.³⁰

The above notwithstanding, Schopenhauer underscores that it is part and parcel of the nature of the "animal metaphysicum" to seek for meaning. As such, the German pessimist juxtaposes two systems of metaphysics, one reserved for philosophers, the other, religion, constituting a "metaphysics of the people" (*Volksmetaphysik*).³¹ Unlike philosophy which deals with pristine truth, religion can, at best, express truth *sensu allegorico*.³² Schopenhauer, however, demythologizes religion to such an extent that, while being expressive of the metaphysical need for meaning, it no longer is an encounter with the Holy.³³ Introspection does not usher one into the very threshold to the Holy. On the contrary! It is the diseased will, as known via

²⁶ *Parerga I*, VII, § 13, S.121; *Parerga I*, § 13, pp. 105-106.

²⁷ *Parerga II*, X, § 176, S.399; *Parerga II*, § 176, p. 361.

²⁸ *Parerga I*, VII, § 13, S.133-134; *Parerga I*, § 13, p. 117.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, S.134; *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

³⁰ *Parerga II*, X, § 178, S.416-417; *Parerga II*, § 178, pp. 377-378.

³¹ *Vorstellung II*, III, Kap.17, S.191-192; *Representation II*, ch.17, pp. 164-165.

³² *Ibid.*, S. 194; *Ibid.*

³³ Cf. Jörg Salaquarda, "Schopenhauer und die Religion," *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch*, 69 (1989), S.324-325.

the path of introspection, that properly speaking is the *ens realissimum*. As he states in *Über den Willen in der Natur*:

If I therefore say 'will, will-to-live' this is no *ens rationis*, no hypostasis created by me, nor is it a word of uncertain, vague meaning; on the contrary, I refer him who asks me what it may be, to his own inner self, where he will find it entire, indeed, in colossal dimension, as a true *ens realissimum*.³⁴

Schopenhauer contends, moreover, that there is no power that can straighten the crooked wood that the human person is. The will-filled condition of the human being, in a word, is hopeless given the inalterability of the character. As is stated in *Über der Grundlage der Moral (On the Basis of Morality)*, the wicked are as little able to change their character as the serpent is able to rid itself of its fangs.³⁵ Accordingly, it is sheer folly for the tortured person (*der Gequälte*) to expect Heaven to provide an answer to the enigmas of life. As is stated in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (The World as Will and Representation)*, "an external power can little change or suppress this will, and any strange power is just as little able to free it from the miseries which result from the life that is the phenomenon of that will."³⁶ In this respect, it is understandable why Schopenhauer maintains that a resounding silence is the only greeting that frightened human beings can hope to expect as an answer to the troublesome riddle of existence.

The ephemeral generations of human beings arise and pass away in quick succession, while the individuals with anxiety, want, and pain, dance into the arms of death. They thereby unremittently ask what is the matter with them and what meaning the whole tragi-comic farce has. They cry to heaven for an answer. But heaven remains silent.³⁷

³⁴ *Natur*, V, S.340; *Nature*, p. 376.

³⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Über der Grundlage der Moral*, in *Zürcher Ausgabe Werke in zehn Bänden* (Zürich: Diogenes Verlag, 1977), Band VI, § 20, S.290. Henceforth cited as *Grundlage*. English translation: *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), § 20, p. 187.. Henceforth cited as *Basis*. The German passage reads as follows:

... der Unterschied der Charaktere is angeboren und unvertilgbar.
Dem Boshaften ist seine Bosheit so angeboren, wie der Schlange ihre Giftzähne und Giftblase; und so wenig wie sie kann er es ändern.

³⁶ *Vorstellung I*, II, § 59, S.407; *Representation*, I, § 59, pp. 325-326.

³⁷ *Parerga II*, X, 176, S.378; *Parerga*, II, § 176, p. 361.

As the above indicates, the chief stumbling block for the reasonableness of belief in God is the stubborn and continued existence of evil in reality, but particularly in the agitated heart of the human being. For Schopenhauer the ultimate reason for this, of course, is the very essence or nature of the noumenal will which strives aimlessly without ultimate satisfaction. The following claim is made in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*:

Willing and striving is the will's whole essence, [which can be] fully compared to an unquenchable thirst. The basis of all willing is need (*Bedürftigkeit*), lack (*Mangel*), therefore pain (*Schmerz*), which is already original to it and falls to it (*anheimfällt*) by its nature.³⁸

It makes little sense to speak about a *Summum Bonum* in this respect. For "good" is a relative concept related only to the desiring will. A *Summum Bonum*, whatever that might be, would be that which ultimately halts the frustrated striving of the will. Given Schopenhauer's presuppositions, such a reality is an impossibility, as the following passage indicates:

. . . every good is essentially *relative*; for it has its essence only in relation to a desiring will. Accordingly, *absolute good* is a contradiction; highest good, *Summum Bonum*, signifies the same thing, that is, in reality a final satisfaction of the will, after which no fresh willing would take place; a last motive, the attainment of which would yield an imperishable satisfaction of the will. According to our discussion up to now . . . , such a thing is unthinkable. The will can just as little through some satisfaction cease to will always again and anew, as time can end or begin; for the will there is no lasting fulfillment which completely and forever satisfies its striving.³⁹

The above notwithstanding, even if one is taken in by the "the size, the order, and the completeness of the world," nevertheless it is indeed valid to imagine that "what had the power to produce such a world must also have been able to avoid the evil and wickedness."⁴⁰ In a word, it makes no sense for such a power to be impotent before the reality of ontological, physical, and moral evil in what supposedly is His creation. As early as 1807 there is evidence that Schopenhauer's young mind, still very much in formation, was struggling with the mystery of evil in reality. In an early fragment dating from that year we see him even postulating a dualism between two wills. Two alternatives are proposed: If there were a Good Will in reality, there

³⁸ *Vorstellung I*, II, § 57, S.390; *Representation*, I, § 57, p. 312.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, § 65, S.450; *Ibid.*, I, § 65, p. 362.

⁴⁰ *Vorstellung II*, III, Kap. 17, S.201; *Representation*, II, p. 172.

then exists alongside it an evil power that throws it off-stride and compels it into detours. The other alternative is just as unattractive. For the dark side of reality is then ascribed to chance, which thereby entails that the guiding will is flawed.⁴¹

Subsequently, with the passage of the years, Schopenhauer rejected the aforementioned postulate. With the maturing of his philosophy, he contended that belief in a personal Creator God is unacceptable because it compromises moral responsibility for one's actions. He states in *Parerga und Paralipomena*: ". . . theism and man's moral responsibility are irreconcilable because the responsibility quite certainly falls back upon the creator of the nature where it has its center of gravity."⁴² The doctrine of moral responsibility for actions is salvageable only to the extent that human nature is its "own work"--and not that of another. The following passage from *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* makes this clear:

My philosophy . . . is the only one that grants to morality its complete and entire rights; for only if the essence of man is his own *will*, consequently only if he is in the strictest sense, his own work, are his deeds actually completely his and attributable to him. On the other hand, as soon as he has another origin, or is the work of a being different from himself, all his guilt falls back on to this origin or originator. For *operari sequitur esse*.⁴³

What all this suggests is that Schopenhauer's thought is atheistic in its main thrust. Moreover, it is evident that Schopenhauer had by his late teens forsaken belief in a personal God as his *Nachlaß* and *Gespräche* indicate. A good illustration was already cited above in an entry from *Nachlaß* dating from 1807 (cf. endnote 41). Inasmuch as the young Schopenhauer situates God in a struggle against evil or chance, Safranski aptly describes it as a "dethronement of God by a dualistic construction."⁴⁴ In another passage from *Nachlaß* (1832) Schopenhauer states:

In my 17th year, without any academic formation, I was as moved by the *wretchedness of life* as Buddha was in his youth, when he saw sickness, old age, pain, and death. The truth which the world spoke loudly and clearly, soon

⁴¹ *Nachlaß I, I, S.9; Remains, I, p. 9.*

⁴² *Parerga II, IX, § 118, S.257; Parerga, II, § 118, p. 236.*

⁴³ *Vorstellung II, IV, Kap. 47, S.690-691; Representation, II, ch. 47, pp. 589-590.*

⁴⁴ Rüdiger Safranski, *Schopenhauer und die wilden Jahre der Philosophie* (München: Carl Hauser Verlag, 1987), S.97; English translation: *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy*, trans. by Ewald Osers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 60.

prevailed over the Jewish dogmas which had been impressed in me, and my conclusion was that this world could not be the work of an infinitely-good Being, but rather that of a devil who had brought creatures into existence in order to delight at the sight of their affliction.⁴⁵

A conversation recorded in *Gespräche* likewise alludes to the difficulties Schopenhauer had, even as a teenager, with the theistic claim that the world was made by an infinitely-good God. The passage reads as follows:

As a young man I was always melancholic and on one occasion, I was perhaps eighteen years old then, I reflected, even at this early age: This world is supposed to have been made by God? No, much rather by a devil!⁴⁶

Two more fragments from *Nachlaß* are worth citing to buttress the aforementioned passages. Their biting sarcasm best highlights his rejection of faith in God as a reasonable alternative for himself at least. The first passage is taken from the "Quartant" section of his manuscript notes written at Dresden in 1824. The second passage is taken from the last volume of *Nachlaß* from the collection of fragments entitled "Senilia" which dates from 1852 until his death in 1860.

Prayer of a Skeptic: God,--if you exist,--rescue my soul from the grave,--if I have one.⁴⁷

Conversation (Gespräch) from the year 33: A. Have you heard the latest? / B. No, what's happening? / A. The world is redeemed! / B. What are you saying! / A. Yes, the loving God has assumed human form and allowed himself to be put to death in Jerusalem. For this reason, the world is now redeemed and the Devil beaten (*geprellt*). / B. Why, that's truly charming.⁴⁸

As the above indicates, a "front door" approach to the issue of the Sacred is clearly closed in Schopenhauer's thought. In the first place, his analysis of religion as the metaphysics of the people mentions nothing about religion as an encounter with the Holy. Secondly, he clearly rejects proofs for God's existence. Thirdly, while he does say that God's existence rests on the "sure

⁴⁵ *Nachlaß* IV.1, S.96; *Remains*, IV, p. 119.

⁴⁶ *Arthur Schopenhauers Gespräche*, herausgegeben von Arthur Hübscher (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1971), S.131.

⁴⁷ *Nachlaß* III, S.190; *Manuscript Remains*, III, p. 210.

⁴⁸ *Nachlaß* IV.2, S.21; *Manuscript Remains*, IV, p. 380.

foundation" of Revelation, his demythologization of revealed scripture makes of God a mere human fabrication. Fourthly, belief in God cannot be reconciled with the existence of evil and moral responsibility. Hence, the tentative conclusion that there is no God in the philosophical system espoused and outlined in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* indeed seems viable.⁴⁹

In short, as noted above, reality as comprised of will and representation cannot be considered the product of a divine creative act.⁵⁰ At first glance, Schopenhauer's system as totally immanent and self-contained leaves no room for the question of a Transcendent Being, as a scholar like Icilio Vecchiotti contends.⁵¹ Alluding to the Schopenhauerian doctrine of "the total compenetration of mind and being in the Will," Cornelio Fabro likewise asserts that "the conscious and professed destination of this radical immanentism is atheism."⁵² This certainly is in keeping with what Schopenhauer wrote in an August 21, 1852 letter to an overly eager follower of his (Frauenstädt), about transfiguring his doctrine of will so as to make it attractive to theologians:

My dear friend, I must remind myself of all your many and great merits for the sake of the proclamation of my philosophy in order not to lose my patience and composure . . . In vain, for example, have I written to you not to seek the thing-in-itself in cloud cuckoo land

⁴⁹ Cf. R. J. Hollingdale, *Arthur Schopenhauer: Essays and Aphorisms* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 34; V. J. McGill, *Schopenhauer Pessimist and Pagan* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1971), pp. 251-252.

⁵⁰ Cf. Schmidt, *Die Wahrheit im Gewande der Lüge* (München: Serie Piper, 1986), S.33. "Hat kein Intellekt die *Natur* hervorgebracht, sondern diese im Stufengang ihrer Objektivationen den Intellekt, ist das Wesen der Natur >>ein blinder Drang, ein völlig grundloser, unmotivirter Trieb<<, so folgt hieraus eine radicale Absage an den Schöpfungsgedanken des christlichen Theismus. Schopenhauer hat denn auch redlicherweise auf den atheistischen Grundzug seiner Philosophie hingewiesen."

⁵¹ Cf. Icilio Vecchiotti, "Osservazioni preliminari sulla possibilita di una nozione di <<sacro>> in Schopenhauer," in Giorgio Penzo, ed. *Schopenhauer e il sacro* (Trento: Istituto Trentino di Cultura Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto di Scienze Religiose in Trento, 1987), p. 145: "Cominciamo col dire che e gia per definizione fuori causa e fuori tema il sacro delle religioni positive, il sacro delle religioni della trascendenza, ossia dell'ebraismo e dell'islamismo, esplicitamente e duramente a avversati dallo Schopenhauer. Il filosofo ha detto chiaramente che la sua visione del mondo è immanente, non trascendente."

⁵² Cornelio Fabro, *God in Exile: Modern Atheism*, trans. Arthur Gibbon (Westminster: Newman Press, 1968), p. 873.

(*Wolkenkuckuksheim*) [that is, there where the God of the Jews resides], but in the things of this world--thus in the table on which you write, in the chair under your arse . . . My philosophy never concerns itself with cloud cuckoo land, but with *this* world; which is to say, that it is *immanent*, not transcendent.⁵³

Along these lines, one will not find in the Schopenhauerian corpus a philosophy of religion that assimilates belief in the personal Creator God of Judeo-Christian tradition. Philosophy and religion cannot be wedded together.⁵⁴ Accordingly, one would be looking in vain for a philosophy of religion in Schopenhauer's thought that would entail adjusting of one's philosophical presuppositions to the premises of one's faith.⁵⁵ Perhaps it is for this reason that Nietzsche states: "As a philosopher, Schopenhauer was the first admitted and inexorable atheist among us Germans."⁵⁶ Notwithstanding the above, Schopenhauer did reflect intensely about the nature of religion and Christianity in particular.⁵⁷ Even though

⁵³ Cf. "An Julius Frauenstädt," Frankfurt a.M., den 21. August 1852, Brief 280, as found in *Arthur Schopenhauer Gesammelte Briefe*. Herausgegeben von Arthur Hübscher (Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1971), S.290-291.

⁵⁴ Cf. Heinrich Hasse, *Schopenhauer* (München: Verlag Ernst Reinhardt, 1926), S.371. "Dem äußeren Anschein nach steht Schopenhauer einer Religionsphilosophie als selbstständiger Disziplin völlig ablehnend gegenüber. Hat er doch eine Lehre, welche diesen Namen führt, als >>Zwitter<< und >>Kentauren<< nachdrücklich verworfen und dieser Verwerfung triftige Gründe beigesellt. Religionsphilosophie gilt ihm als unsachliche Verschmelzung wesensfremder Bestrebungen, deren Ergebnis nichts anderes als eine geistige Mißgeburt darstellen kann. Denn die Ziele der *Philosophie* fallen mit denen der *Religion* keineswegs zusammen."

⁵⁵ Cf. Schmidt, S.23. "Schopenhauer versteht unter Religionsphilosophie --sich kritisch schon von dem Begriff distanzierend -- jedes philosophische System, dessen Urheber darauf bedacht ist, seine Resultate in Einklang zu bringen mit der Glaubenslehre einer positiven Religion. Wenn im folgenden dargetan werden soll, daß religionsphilosophische Erwägungen einen wichtigen (obgleich kaum gebührend beachteten) Aspekt des Denkgebäudes von Schopenhauer bilden, so kann damit, folgen wir seinem Selbstverständnis, keine eifertige Adaptation des Philosophierens an vorgegebene Dogmen gemeint sein. Jede Vermengung, gar Fusion, des unabhängigen, begründenden Denkens mit Autorität und übernatürlicher Offenbarung ist Schopenhauer verhaßt."

⁵⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), Book V (No. 357), p. 307.

⁵⁷ Cf. Jörg Salaquarda, "Schopenhauer und die Religion," *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch*, 69 (1989), S.321; also cf. Bernard Bykhovsky, *Schopenhauer and the*

Schopenhauer evidently rejected belief in a personal God once he directed his efforts to a serious study of philosophy, Hübscher contends that up until his twenty-fourth year "he stood under the confines of his Church."⁵⁸ It goes without saying that one ought not forget that his early educational formation (1799-1803) was in the private school of Johann Christian Runge, whose enlightened Pietism left a positive and life-long impression on Schopenhauer.⁵⁹ In this respect, notwithstanding his metaphysical presuppositions which exclude the possibility for a "front door" approach to the question of God, Schopenhauer was not categorically opposed to religion as Bridgewater contends, but rather to the bigotry and excesses often associated with it.⁶⁰ Certainly the following poem entitled "*Auf die Sistinische Madonna*," written in Dresden during the year 1815, is but one indication (among many) of his fascination with religious themes:

She bears him to the world, and startled
 He beholds the chaos of its abominations.
 The frenzy and fury of its turmoil,
 The never-cured folly of its striving,
 The never-stilled pain of its distress,--
 Startled: yet calm and confident hope and
 Triumphant glory radiate from his eye, already
 Heraldng the abiding certainty of salvation.⁶¹

The essays "*Über das metaphysische Bedürfnis des Menschen*" in Chapter 17 of the second volume of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, and "*Über Religion*" in Chapter 15 of the second volume of *Parerga und Paralipomena*, are further indications of the aforementioned fact--not to mention passages that can be

Ground of Existence, trans. by Philip Moran (Amsterdam: B. R. Gruner Publishing Co., 1984), pp. 155-175.

⁵⁸ Hübscher, *Denker gegen den Strom* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag 1988), S.13.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, S.10-13.

⁶⁰ Patrick Bridgewater, *Arthur Schopenhauer's English Schooling* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 306.

⁶¹ "*Auf die Sistinische Madonna*," *Parerga II*, X. "Einige Verse," S.713; "To the Sistine Madonna," *Parerga, II*, "Some Verses," p. 655. The translation is that of E. F. J. Payne. The original German reads as follows:

Sie trägt zur Welt ihn: und er schaut entsetzt
 In ihrer Gräu'l chaotische Verwirrung,
 In ihres Tobens wilde Raserei,
 In ihres Treibens nie geheilte Thorheit,
 In ihrer Quaalen nie gestillten Schmerz, -
 Entsetzt: doch strahlet Ruh' und Zuversicht
 Und Siegesglanz sein Aug', verkündigend
 Schon der Erlösung ewige Gewißheit.

found in his other works. Accordingly, it is not incorrect to say with Hasse that much of Schopenhauer's philosophy is a "philosophical consideration whose object is religion."⁶² Along these lines, it is even held by Horkheimer that Schopenhauer's system, emphasizing as it does the relationship between denial of the will-to-live and the ethical tendency of Christian asceticism, comprises "the last great philosophical attempt to preserve the kernel of Christianity."⁶³

The claims made by these scholars indicate that the question of the Sacred in the philosophy of Schopenhauer needs to be approached more cautiously and in a less biased manner. Can it be argued that there is a "back door" to the question of the Sacred in Schopenhauer's thought? If the question of the Sacred or Holy has any relevance whatsoever in the philosophical system of Schopenhauer, another avenue obviously needs to be pursued. *Perhaps* a viable approach might be found in Schopenhauer's contention that insight into the noumenon is by no means absolute or exhaustive. On the one hand, he contends that the noumenal will is estranged in its phenomenal manifestation. But on the other hand, artistic genius and holiness of lifestyle suggest that the will has another dimension that from time to time manifests itself in the phenomenal sphere. It is perhaps here that the question of the Sacred has some relevance in an otherwise atheistic *Weltanschauung*, hence my rationale for asking whether this might constitute a "back door" since the "front door" is obviously barred shut. In the paragraphs that follow I would like to investigate this angle by concentrating on this seeming ambiguity characteristic to the will, and relate it to the "relative nothingness" that is the final result of ascetical holiness. An approach to the question of the Sacred in Schopenhauer's philosophy might indeed be possible in this respect.

Knowledge of the noumenality of our being is not possible via normal representational cognition, linked as it is to space, time and causality. In this respect, Schopenhauer is in agreement with Kant in that he holds that representational cognition, the so-called knowledge "from without" can never take one beyond the phenomenon.⁶⁴ But while Schopenhauer admits with Kant that phenomenal knowing can take us only so far, he parts with him in contending that the hitherto unknowable noumenon is in fact the *will*. As is stated in *Über den Willen in der Natur*:

. . . that which Kant opposed as *thing-in-itself* to mere phenomenon--called more decidedly by me *representation*--and that which he held to be absolutely unknowable, I say that this *thing-in-itself*, this substratum of all phenomena, and therefore of the whole of Nature, is

⁶² Hasse, S.370.

⁶³ Max Horkheimer, "Religion und Philosophie," *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch*, 48 (1967), S.5.

⁶⁴ *Vorstellung II*, Kap.18, III, S.229; *Representation*, II, ch. 18, p. 196.

nothing other than that which is directly known and very intimate to us, what we find within ourselves as the *will*.⁶⁵

As the above indicates, Schopenhauer is making an important claim about the metaphysical capacity of the human being to know reality. At the very outset of the second book of the first volume of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* he informs the reader that his intention with regard to "the perceptual representation (*anschauliche Vorstellung*)" is to see whether "knowledge of its content, its more precise determinations, and the forms it presents to us" is indeed possible.⁶⁶ The clue to this question is linked to the corporeality of the human being: ". . . the meaning of the world . . . that stands before me simply as my representation . . . could never be found if the investigator himself were nothing more than the purely knowing subject (a winged cherub without a body)."⁶⁷ In a word, the human being as flesh and bone "finds himself rooted in this world as *individual*."⁶⁸ This corporealized existence in effect means that human beings have a direct awareness of the inner states of their bodies, as opposed to a merely indirect awareness of anything else. To quote Schopenhauer:

. . . the individual is the bearer of the knowing subject and the bearer of the world; which is to say, that the whole of nature outside him, therefore also all remaining individuals, exist only in his representation. He himself is always conscious of them only as his representation, hence merely indirectly, and as something dependent on his own inner being and existence.⁶⁹

Now, an introspective glance at ourselves yields knowledge that differs from cognitional perception of objects in space. According to Schopenhauer, willing is the object of our self-consciousness. "When we look into our inner self (*in unser Inneres blicken*), we always find ourselves as *willing* (*wollend*)."⁷⁰ Willing, the object of the inner sense, "has many degrees from the mildest wish to passion."⁷¹ The essential element of willing is difficult to discern, but among all manifestations of willing are "all desiring, striving, wishing, demanding, longing, hoping, loving, rejoicing, exalting, and the like, no less than not willing, or resisting, abhorring, fleeing, fearing, being angry, hating, lamenting, suffering pains—in short, all emotional states and passions."⁷²

⁶⁵ *Natur*, V, S.202; *Nature*, p. 216.

⁶⁶ *Vorstellung* I, I, § 17, S.137; *Representation*, I, § 17, p. 95.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, S.142; *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, II, § 61, S.414; *Ibid.*, § 61, p. 332.

⁷⁰ *Grunde*, V, § 42, S.160; *Reason*, § 42, p. 211.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*

⁷² *Freiheit*, VI, I., S.51; *Freedom*, I., p. 11.

Willing, in a word, includes not only all emotional states (*Affekte*), but even movements of our inner nature (*Bewegungen unsers Innern*) subsumed under the wide concept of feeling (*Gefühl*).⁷³ Feelings of pleasure and displeasure in their various degrees are likewise subsumed under the aforementioned concept. Pleasure and displeasure can be traced back to the affections of desiring or abhorring, thus "to the will itself becoming conscious of itself as satisfied or unsatisfied, restrained or unleashed."⁷⁴ Pleasant and unpleasant sensations enter directly into the self-consciousness as "something which is in conformity to the will or as something disagreeable to it."⁷⁵

This inner knowledge to which each human being is privy, rooted as it is in the individual corporeality of the person, comprises the inner essence of the phenomenality of one's phenomenal corporeal being. What Schopenhauer does in effect is collapse any real distinction between an act of the will and movement of the body: "Every true act of [man's] will is also at once and inevitably a movement of his body; he cannot actually will the act without at the same time perceiving that it appears as a movement of the body."⁷⁶ The aforementioned identity is such that an action of the body is "nothing but the will objectified, i.e. which has become visible in perception."⁷⁷

In light of the above, all impressions on the body are impressions on the will. An impression that is contrary to the will is called pain (*Schmerz*); one that is in accord with the will is called gratification (*Wohlbehagen*) or pleasure (*Wollust*).⁷⁸ Pain and pleasure are not representations. Rather, they are referred to as "immediate affections of the will in its appearance" and as "a forced momentary willing or non-willing of the impression which the body undergoes (*erleidet*)."⁷⁹ The aforementioned identity between an act of willing and an action of the body is also evident via an analysis of the will itself inasmuch as agitations of the will have ramifications on the states of the body. For "every vehement and excessive movement of the will, that is, every emotion, agitates the body and its inner workings directly and immediately, and disturbs the body and its vital functions."⁸⁰ Some examples of this identity are listed in *Über den Willen in der Natur*: ". . . the acceleration of the heart in joy and fear, blushing in shame, turning pale in terror and in concealed anger, weeping in affliction, erection with voluptuous representations, difficult breathing and accelerated intestinal activity in great fear, saliva in the mouth at excessive sumptuousity, nausea

⁷³ *Grunde*, V, § 42, S.160; *Reason*, § 42, p. 211.

⁷⁴ *Freiheit*, VI, I., S.51; *Freedom*, I., pp. 11-12.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, S.51-52; *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷⁶ *Vorstellung I*, I, § 17, S.143; *Representation*, 17, p. 101.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, S.144; *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, S. 144-145; *Ibid.*

at the sight of disgusting things" are all indicative of a certain "sympathy" (*Mitleidenschaft*) between the will and body."⁸¹

It goes without saying that the knowledge one has of one's willing via the path of introspection presupposes rootedness in corporeality. The body is the very condition for the representation of the will known to the inner sense. But it is important to underscore that the will, as noumenon, is known only via particular acts in time to which states of the body's affections are linked. Schopenhauer states:

I know my will not as a whole (*im Ganzen*), not as a unity, not perfectly according to its essence, but rather, I know it only in particular acts, thus in time, which is the form of the appearance (*Erscheinung*) of my body, as [it is] of each body. For this reason, the body is the condition of the knowledge of my will. Accordingly, without my body, I cannot in reality, represent (*vorstellen*) my will.⁸²

What the above entails is that the will is the being-in-itself (*Wesen an sich*) of the corporeal phenomenon of each human being. In other words, the will is that which the body may be in addition to being an object of perception, or a representation. "My body and my will are one; or, that which as perceptual representation I call my body, I call my will insofar as I am conscious of it in an entirely different way comparable to no other; or my body is the *objectivity* of my will; or irrespective of the fact that my body is my representation, it is still only my will; and so on."⁸³ In light of the above discussion, for Schopenhauer the inner content of the phenomenality of one's own corporeal reality can be known. The noumenon, hitherto unknowable by the Kantian critique, is the *will*, the object of the inner sense.

Though our willing is known to us "immediately," even this claim needs to be qualified. As was stated, willing is manifested *a posteriori* via successive states of time. This means, therefore, that the noumenon which is object of the inner sense can never appear in its pristine form. It is as if human corporeality and temporality, while paradoxically revealing what the noumenon is, at the same time irremediably conceal it.

The inner knowledge in question is free from two of the forms belonging to the outer knowledge (space and causality which are involved in sense perception), but is shackled, as it were, by time as well as "that of being known (*Erkanntwerdens*) and knowing in general (*Erkennens überhaupt*)." This entails that the will can never be known "as a whole" (*im Ganzen*) or "in and for itself" (*an und für sich*).⁸⁴ Accordingly, notwithstanding all that can

⁸¹ *Natur*, V, S.227-228; *Nature*, pp. 246-247.

⁸² *Vorstellung I*, I, § 18, S.145; *Representation*, I, § 18, pp. 101-102.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, S. 146; *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

⁸⁴ *Vorstellung II*, III, Kap.18, p. 230; *Representation*, II, ch. 18, p. 197.

actually be attained by inner knowledge, it too is limited. Not even the inner eye can behold the noumenon in its quintessential and pure form.

The above notwithstanding, in every act of willing there ensues an immediate transition of the extra-temporal thing-in-itself in the phenomenal sphere, such that acts of willing constitute the clearest expression of the thing-in-itself.⁸⁵ Schopenhauer clarifies this insight in the following passage from his *Philosophische Vorlesungen*:

The will, as we find and perceive it in ourselves, is not really the *thing-in-itself*. For this will appears in our consciousness merely in individual and successive acts of will; these therefore already have time for a form, and are for that reason, already phenomenon (*Erscheinung*). This phenomenon, however, is the *clearest* revelation, the clearest becoming-visible (*Sichtbarwerdung*) of the *thing-in-itself*, because it is altogether and immediately illumined by knowledge, object and subject here completely coincide, and here the essence itself which appears, has no other form except that of time.⁸⁶

Yet what acts of willing initially reveal is the aspect of the noumenon that is scarred and diseased--what evidently most interested Schopenhauer. Succinctly stated: "at all grades of its phenomenon from the lowest to the highest, the will dispenses entirely without an ultimate aim and object. It always strives, because striving is its sole nature (*Streben sein alleiniges Wesen ist*), to which no attained goal can put an end."⁸⁷ Knowledge of the Platonic Ideas, which constitutes a so-called "immediate" or "adequate" objectification of the thing-in-itself,⁸⁸ can never usher one into the in-itselfness of things, but rather what comprises their so-called "most objective character."⁸⁹

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*: Denn bei jedem Hervortreten eines Willensaktes aus der dunklen Tiefe unsers Innern in das erkennende Buswußtseyen geschieht ein unmittelbarer Uebergang des außer der Zeit liegenden Dinges an sich in die Erscheinung. Demnach ist zwar der Willensakt nur der nächste und deutlichste *Erscheinung* des Dinges an sich.

⁸⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Philosophische Vorlesungen aus dem handschriftlichen Nachlaß*, Band 2, *Metaphysik der Natur*, herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Volker Spierling (München: Pieper, 1987), S.101-102. Cf. *Nachlaß* III, S.36; *Manuscript Remains*, III, p. 40.

⁸⁷ *Vorstellung I*, II, § 56, S.386; *Representation*, I, § 56, p. 308.

⁸⁸ *Vorstellung I*, I, § 32, S. 227; *Representation*, I, § 32, p. 174.

⁸⁹ *Vorstellung II*, IV, Kap.29, S.433; *Representation*, II, ch. 29, p. 364. "...die Ideen offenbaren noch nicht das Wesen an sich, sondern nur den objektiven Charakter der Dinge, also immer noch die Erscheinung; und selbst diesen Charakter würden wir nicht verstehn, wenn uns nicht das innere Wesen der Dinge, wenigstens undeutlich und im Gefühl, anderweitig bekannt wäre."

Early fragments from *Nachlaß* sometimes identify the thing-in-itself with the Idea. As a case in point is the following passage written in Dresden in 1814:

... now the Platonic Idea is Kant's thing-in-itself, in other words is free from time and space, and thus from plurality, change, beginning and end. It alone is the *οντως* or *thing-in-itself*.⁹⁰

But by 1815 Schopenhauer had identified the will, perceived in internal experience and felt in the body, with the thing-in-itself—a will devoid of rationality. "The world as thing-in-itself is a great will which knows not what it wills; for it does not *know* but merely *wills* just because it is a will and nothing else."⁹¹ With the publication of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* in 1818 there is a complete bifurcation between the thing-in-itself as will and the Idea. "Idea and thing-in-itself are not absolutely one and the same."⁹² This implicitly suggests that what primarily interests Schopenhauer is the chaotic element in reality, and not what is ordered. "A philosophy, in which one does not hear in between the pages, the tears, the weeping, and gnashing of teeth and the terrible din of mutual universal murder, is no philosophy."⁹³

Is there more to the thing-in-itself, to the will, than what the act of willing initially suggests? Schopenhauer contends that the thing-in-itself can have "determinations and modes of existence" that are beyond the exigence of philosophical grasp; and which remain as the essence of the thing-in-itself, once the act of the complete denial of the will-to-live in ascetical praxis takes place. He clearly states in the second volume of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*:

... the question may still be asked what that will, which manifests itself in the world and as the world, is ultimately and absolutely in itself; in other words, what is it apart from the fact that it manifests itself as *will*, or in general *appears*, that is to say, *is known* in general. This question can *never* be answered, because . . . being-known itself already contradicts being-in-itself, and everything that is known is, as such, only phenomenon (*Erscheinung*). But the possibility of this question shows that the thing-in-itself, which we know most immediately in the will, may have, entirely outside of all possible phenomenon,

⁹⁰ *Nachlaß* I, S. 150; *Manuscript Remains*, I, p. 163.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, S.169; *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

⁹² *Vorstellung* I, I, § 32, S.227; *Representation* I, S 32, p. 174.

⁹³ *Gespräche*, S. 337.

determinations, qualities, and modes of existence which for us are absolutely unknowable and incomprehensible, and which then remain as the essence of the thing-in-itself, when this . . . has freely abolished itself (*aufgehoben hat*) as *will*, therefore stepped out of the phenomenon altogether, and with regard to our knowledge, that is to say, as regards the world of phenomena, has passed over into empty nothingness. If the will were simply and absolutely the thing-in-itself, then this nothing would be *absolute*, instead of which it expressly appears to us there as a *relative* nothing.⁹⁴

What this implies is that the thing-in-itself cannot be exhaustively and categorically identified with the scarred willing that introspection into one's corporeality reveals. For the "nothingness" which is the final goal of ascetical praxis is by no means to be understood in an absolute sense. Were it to be understood as such, then radical denial of the will-to-live in asceticism would result in "nothingness" in the *proper sense of the term*. But "nothingness" as the final end, or term, of Schopenhauer's demythologized asceticism appears to be a *something* that eludes the philosopher's conceptual tools to describe and fathom. The following passage from *Philosophische Vorlesungen* drives home this point:

. . . the question can always still be asked *what in the final analysis the will-in-itself may be?* That is to say, what it may be, apart from the fact that it presents itself as Will, that is to say, apart from the fact that it appears in general, hence is *known* in general and is *represented*. This question is obviously *never* to be answered. For to-be-known (*das Erkenntwerden*) contradicts the thing-in-itself; and everything which is represented, is already phenomenon (*Erscheinung*). Solely from the possibility of this question, it arises that even the thing-in-itself. . . can have and may have, outside of all possible experience, determinations, qualities and modes of existence, which for us are absolutely ungraspable and unknowable. These qualities may now even constitute the existence of the thing-in-itself, which . . . presents itself as a passage into *nothingness*, after it has freely abolished itself as will, by means of which the entire world of phenomena is also abolished . . . Were the will absolutely the thing-in-itself, then such a nothingness would be an absolute

⁹⁴ *Vorstellung II, III, Kap.18, S.231; Representation, II, ch. 18, p. 198.*

nothingness. But there we will find that it is only a relative nothingness.⁹⁵

It is clear that Schopenhauer underscores that the will--as purely noumenal--*can* and *may* have qualities other than those experienced on the phenomenal realm, via will-oriented cognition blind to the essential unity of reality. Paradoxically, it is aesthetic experience and the denial of the will-to-live, as respectively lived-out by the genius and saint, that clearly illustrate this. For creations of genius in the arts, as well as holiness in lifestyle, show that whatever the thing-in-itself might ultimately be, it has another potentiality that makes its appearance from time-to-time in the phenomenal sphere, normally scarred by estranged willing:

... man is the most complete phenomenon of the will . . . Thus, in man the will can reach full self-consciousness, clear and exhaustive knowledge of its essence, as reflected in the whole world. As we saw...art results from the actual presence of this degree of knowledge. At the end of our whole consideration it will also follow that, through the same knowledge, an elimination and self-denial of the will in its most perfect phenomenon is possible, by the will's relating such knowledge to itself. Thus, the freedom which otherwise, as belonging to the thing-in-itself, can never show itself in the phenomenon, in such a case, appears in the phenomenon; and by abolishing the essence which lies at the root of the phenomenon, while the phenomenon itself continues to exist in time, it brings about a contradiction of the phenomenon with itself. Directly through this, it exhibits the phenomena (*Phänomene*) of holiness and self-denial . . . By this it is only generally indicated how man is distinguished from all the other phenomena of the will by the fact that freedom, i.e., independence of the principle of sufficient reason, which only belongs to the will as thing-in-itself and contradicts the phenomenon, nevertheless with him can possibly appear even in the phenomenon, where it then presents itself, however, as a contradiction of the phenomenon with itself. In this sense not only the will in itself, but even man can certainly be called free, and in that way be distinguished from all other beings.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ *Philosophische Vorlesungen*, II, S.102-103. Cf. *Nachlaß III*, S.36-37; *Manuscript Remains*, III, p. 41.

⁹⁶ *Vorstellung I*, II, § 55, S.362-363; *Representation*, I, S 55, pp. 287-288.

It is important to recall that the noumenon reveals itself inasmuch as it emerges from the depth of our inner self in acts of willing. But if the arts and the very phenomenon of self-denial and holiness are indicative that the will as "free" has appeared on the phenomenal plane, their reality is connected with that aspect of the noumenon that is extra-temporal--the relative nothingness which is also beyond linguistic grasp or explanation. The ramifications of this are important insofar as they serve to highlight the presence of mystery in Schopenhauer's thought, giving some indication as to why darkness and light are intertwined in his system.

The question of the Sacred, accordingly, once again emerges inasmuch as by underscoring the relative nature of nothingness, there is a tacit admission that the pristine noumenon has an ulterior reality other than the one that appears in time.⁹⁷ Specifically with regard to the phenomenon of denial of the will-to-live, Schopenhauer states that "virtue and holiness do not proceed from reflexion, but from the depth of the will and its relation to knowledge."⁹⁸ As such, they are not explainable by a causality introduced by reason alone. Since pain, anguish and wickedness have their origin in the self-estrangement essential to the will in the phenomenon,⁹⁹ virtue and holiness are somehow rooted in the extra-temporal dimension of the will described as the "infinitely preferable peace of blessed nothingness."¹⁰⁰ The mind, however, is not satisfied with that explanation and wonders about what those qualities and modes of existence, characteristic to the noumenal will as independent of the temporal order, might in fact be; and why they are connected with, and in some way are, the source of virtue, for example.

Besides, given the presuppositions of Schopenhauer's *Weltanschauung*, the ascetical praxis of the authentic saint in effect represents the only knowledge we can have of the noumenon as "non temporal." The Thomistic scholar Leo C. Elders has this in mind when he contends that holiness of lifestyle in-itself testifies to a transcendent realm.¹⁰¹ Martin Hielscher echoes these sentiments by noting that the artist, but most especially the saint, incarnate the very goal or purpose of Schopenhauer's philosophy as something that is no longer immanent to the system, but beyond it. In this

⁹⁷ Cf. Guiseppe Invernizzi, "Il problema della cosa in sé e la concezione della metafisica nella filosofia di Schopenhauer," *Acme*, 37 (1984), p. 103: "... viene tacitamente ammesso che (la volontà) abbia una realtà ulteriore a quella che appare nel fenomeno, una realtà che tuttavia si trova completamente al di fuori della portata della nostra facoltà conoscitiva."

⁹⁸ *Vorstellung I*, I, § 12, S.95; *Representation*, I, § 12, p. 58.

⁹⁹ Cf. *Nachlaß I*, S. 146; *Manuscript Remains*, I, p. 158.

¹⁰⁰ *Vorstellung II*, IV, Kap.50, S.751; *Representation*, II, § 50, p. 640.

¹⁰¹ Leo C. Elders, *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), p. 139. The passage in question states:

Not unlike truth and beauty goodness and love, encountered in our contact with our fellowmen, also refer to a transcendent goodness and love. Saintliness in particular witnesses to God's existence.

respect, human self-transcendence as represented by the saint represents a "passing-over" (*Überschreitung*) into the realm of the noumenal which is beyond the capacity of human cognition to describe validly.¹⁰² Because of this fact, Wolfgang Schirmacher contends that for Schopenhauer it is precisely "only through the phenomenon of the saint [that] we know about the Sacred."¹⁰³ Philosophically speaking the door is barred when it comes to describing meaningfully what that "non temporal" element might in fact be. Nevertheless, the saint does not hesitate to identify that noumenal, non-temporal reality for the philosopher, for whom such a state, while indeed existing, does not pertain to "knowledge" since it transcends the phenomenal realm as known by will-guided cognition.¹⁰⁴ So notwithstanding Schopenhauer's philosophical presuppositions which appear to seal shut the "front" door to God, the saint and ascetic by their lifestyles point to the very potentiality which the "relative" nothingness of the noumenal will has to effect the mysterious "new birth" (*Wiedergeburt*) and hasten the appearance of the "kingdom of grace" (*das Reich der Gnade*) as represented by *Christ*, who is the quintessential expression of the denial of the will-to live. In juxtaposition to this is the affirmation of the will, as characteristic of the "natural man" (*der natürliche Mensch*) whose will-oriented cognition is rooted in the temporality of the "kingdom of nature" (*das Reich der Natur*). Here *Adam* represents an archetypal Platonic Idea (that of affirming the will-to-live) which is extended to all human beings in time through the bond of generation.¹⁰⁵

In light of the above, the task falls to Schopenhauer's readers to determine whether the explanation of the non-temporal dimension of the noumenon considered as relative nothingness is satisfactory enough not only to describe that reality which the ascetic deems so real, but to exhaust its significance. In like fashion, it is not so much the origin of evil (with which willing is linked) that is a problem, but rather the existence of its anti-thesis which is connected with genius and virtue. Schopenhauer clearly associates this denial with a "passing over into nothing" as the following passage from *Parerga und Paralipomena* indicates:

... I observe that the *denial of the will-to-live* does not in anyway assert the annihilation of a substance, but the

¹⁰² Martin Hielscher, "Der Heilige und die Überschreitung," in *Schopenhauers Aktualität*, hrsg. von Wolfgang Schirmacher (Wien: Passagen Verlag, 1988), S.207.

¹⁰³ Wolfgang Schirmacher, "Der Heilige als Lebensform Überlegungen zu Schopenhauers ungeschriebener Lehre," as found in *Schopenhauers Aktualität*, S. 189.

¹⁰⁴ *Vorstellung I*, II, § 71, S.506; *Representation*, I, § 71, p. 410.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, § 70, S.499-501; *Ibid.*, § 70, pp. 404-406; *Vorstellung II*, IV, Kap.48, S.736; *Representation*, II, ch. 48, p. 628. Cf. also *Nachlaß I*, S.85-86 and S.468; *Manuscript Remains*, I, pp. 93-94 and pp. 518-519.

mere act of not-willing. That which hitherto *willed* no longer *wills*. As we know the being, the essence, the *will* as thing-in-itself merely in and through the act of *willing*, we are incapable of saying or grasping what it still is or does after it has given up this act. Therefore, *for us* who are the phenomenon of willing, the denial is a passing over into nothing (*ein Uebergang in's Nichts*).¹⁰⁶

As the above illustrates, Schopenhauer is struggling for adequate terminology to describe what non-willing entails given his metaphysical presuppositions. Moreover, with regard to virtue, holiness, and genius the so-called "temporal" or "empirical" human being does not seem to be "his own work" in the strict sense of the term, if it is the case that these phenomena have as their source the non-temporal *noumenon* which is antecedent even to the will's adequate objectification in the Ideas. Accordingly, the question of the Sacred remains an issue and serves as a springboard for further reflection in light of the "unanswerables" in Schopenhauer's system of thought.

¹⁰⁶ *Parerga II*, IX, Kap.14, § 161, S.339;" *Parerga*, II, ch. 14, 161, p. 31.